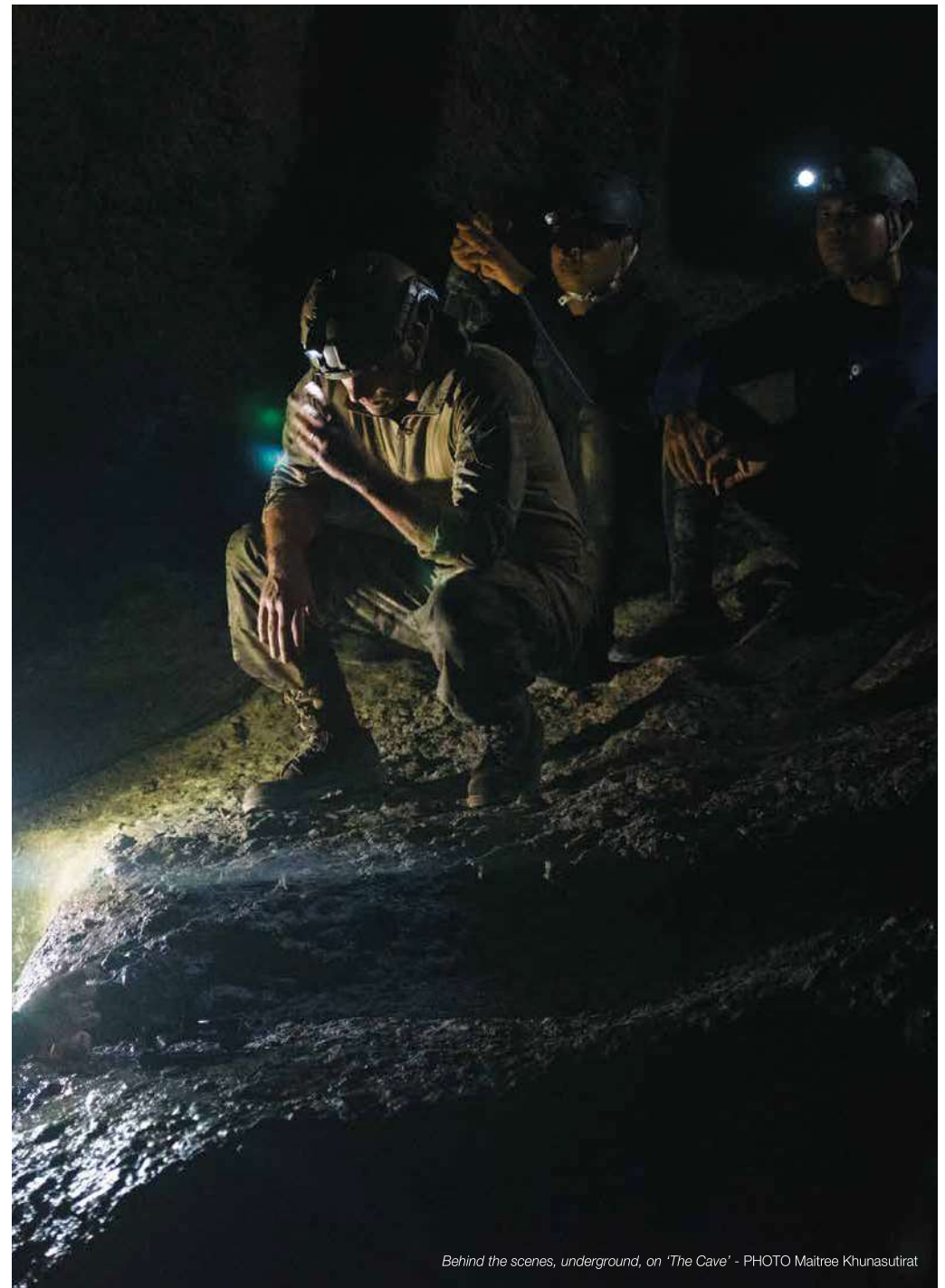
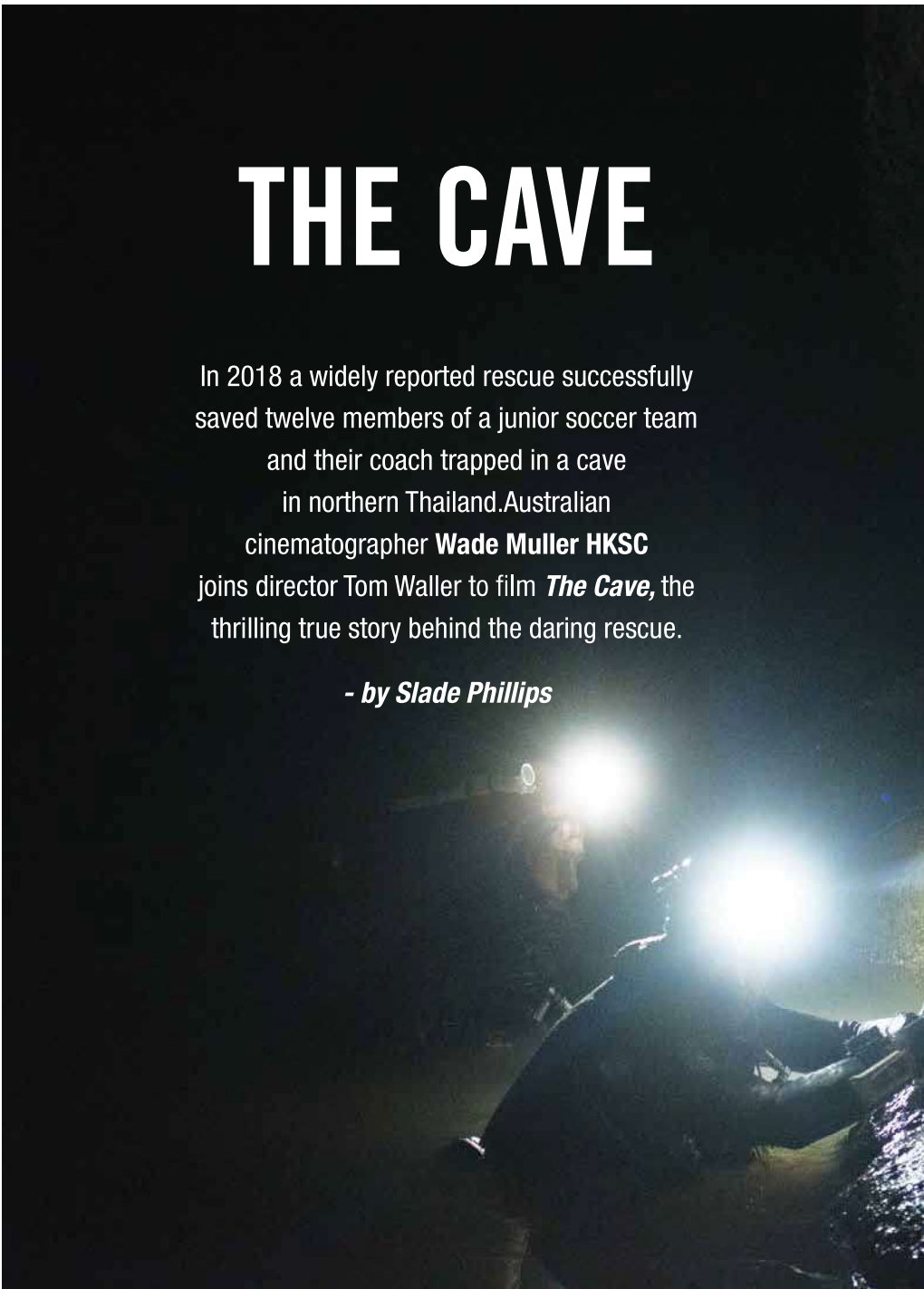


# THE CAVE

In 2018 a widely reported rescue successfully saved twelve members of a junior soccer team and their coach trapped in a cave in northern Thailand. Australian cinematographer **Wade Muller HKSC** joins director Tom Waller to film *The Cave*, the thrilling true story behind the daring rescue.

*- by Slade Phillips*



*Behind the scenes, underground, on 'The Cave' - PHOTO Maitree Khunasutirat*



Director Tom Waller (left) and Cinematographer Wade Muller HKSC checking a shot on a location in Thailand - PHOTO Fredrik Divall

Several of the real-life heroes whose actions in rescuing a soccer team from a flooded cave in Thailand made world headlines last year will play themselves in Tom Waller's upcoming film *The Cave*.

*The Cave* will tell the harrowing true story of twelve young boys between the ages of 11-16 and their soccer coach who entered the Tham Luang cave in Thailand and became trapped after heavy rains flooded the cave. The world watched with bated breath for eighteen days as efforts to save the team proved extremely difficult. One rescuer, a former Thai Navy SEAL, died of asphyxiation. Thanks, however, to a rescue team of thirteen international cave divers and five Thai Navy SEALs, the boys and their coach were finally rescued.

Australian cinematographer Wade Muller HKSC had worked with Thai-Irish director Tom Waller previously on several other feature films; some of which Waller had directed, others he had produced. Waller called Muller during the wall-to-wall international coverage of the events and clearly stated with enthusiasm, **"I have to make this film."** Waller asked the cinematographer if he was in.

Muller had been following closely the events on television and was just as keen to make this film. By chance, Waller was in Ireland at the time when hero cave diver Jim Warray returned home to Ireland. Once the director had met with Warray and the diver had shared his story all the elements of *The Cave* came together extremely fast.

**"We wanted this film to feature a highly realistic look,"** explains Muller. **"Something a viewer can watch and second guess themselves when deciding if it's real, or not."** The film features some of the real cave diving heroes, while art direction and costumes were matched meticulously with iconic photos from the event. The creative team behind

The Cave were going for a quite Barry Ackroyd BSC 'feel'; something along the lines of *Captain Phillips* (2013) says Muller.

**"I wanted the film to be an honest portrayal of the events that took place at Tham Luang cave, and decided to go for a more authentic approach, taking the story from the point of view of some of the unsung heroes who took part in the rescue,"** says director Waller. **"Like the rescue itself, I wanted the cast to be made up of both local and international characters, speaking in their own tongue."**

**"Something a viewer can watch and second guess themselves when deciding if it's real, or not."**

**"We wanted a camera that was great in low light and paired with fast zooms,"** says Muller. They went with a pair of ARRI Alexas with Sigma high-speed cine zooms. **"18-35mm, 50-100mm T2 and an Optimo 24-290mm for the occasional telephoto shot. In fact, the entire film was shot with zooms."**

Prior to filming Waller and Muller agreed on a set of 'cinematography style notes'. **"Not only useful for us, but also great to better inform our producers, as well as B-Camera operator Ross Clarkson, so they would know what to expect on the first day shooting,"** says Muller.

**"We wanted most scenes to look like they were covered with three or four cameras, but we only had two cameras,"** says Muller. **"So we would play out a scene from two angles then**



A scene recreating when the football coach tried to find an escape route by free-diving into the murky water - DOP Wade Muller HKSC, PHOTO Fredrik Divall

#### CINEMATOGRAPHY STYLE NOTES:

- No dolly, crane or Steadicam. Shoot everything hand-held.
- Follow the actors and dialogue with the camera. Never lead them, even after several takes when you know who is about to speak.
- No marks for actors and no camera rehearsals. Let actors walk freely. Don't worry if an actor blocks another actor who is delivering lines, simply get the shots by moving around.
- If it's a slow scene, the camera should float around with subtle zooming. If the scene has lots of activity the camera energy should be more frantic with faster zooms.
- Zoom into actors at crucial moments. These can be long and fast zooms, not just subtle creeping in if the scene has a lot of intensity.
- If we have two cameras running, the A and B camera will sometimes swap position to help give it that 'shooting the scene for the first time look'.
- Use a follow-focus on the zoom for better control.
- No car-rigs for car shots. The camera is either always in the vehicle or outside on the ground shooting the vehicle driving past, if we do vehicle to vehicle shots we don't use any stabilisers.

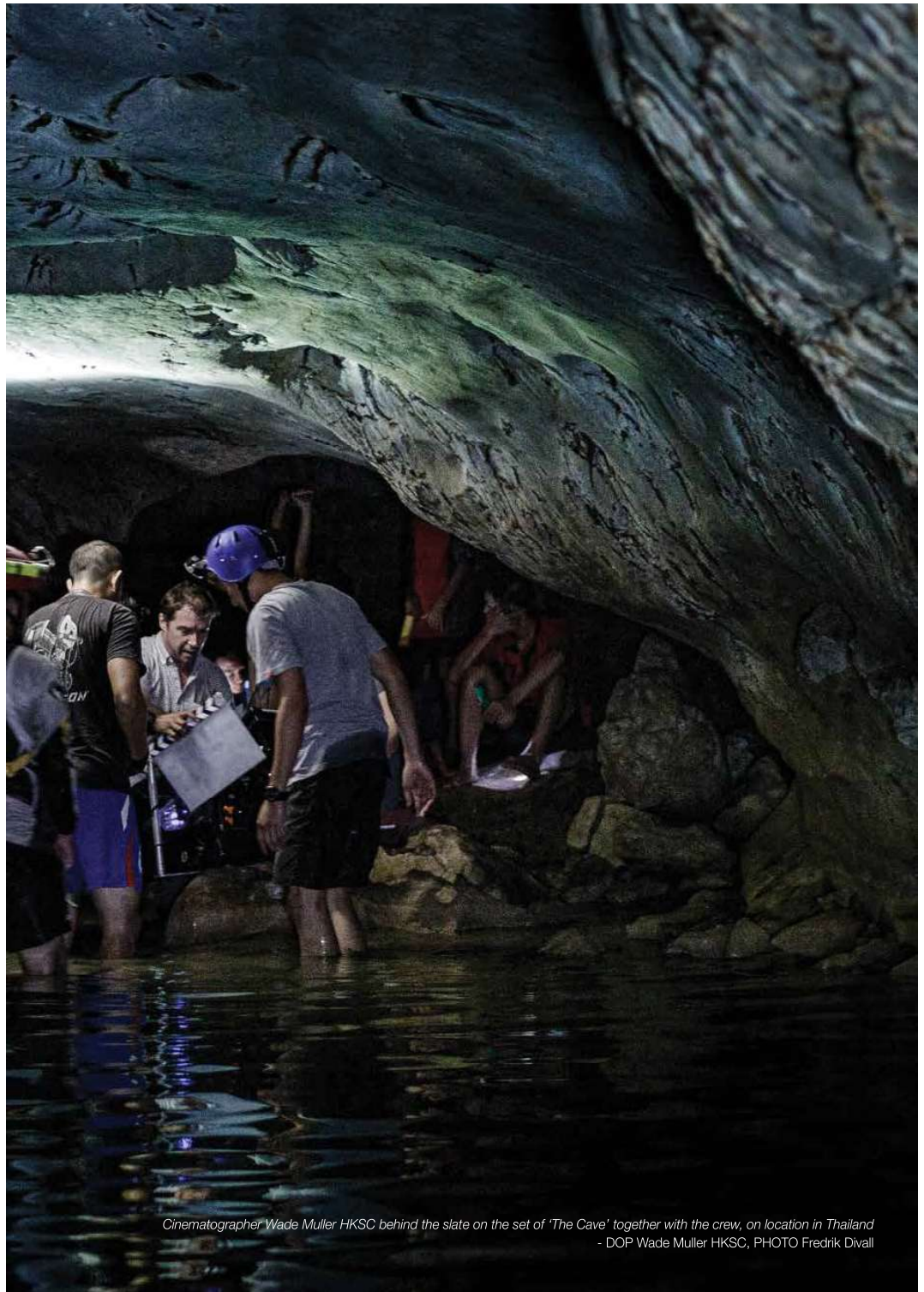
**simply pick another two angles and film it again."** Muller and Clarkson would often swap camera positions after a few takes and without any camera rehearsal they would leap right in for another take, this really helped to keep the raw edgey look throughout the film. **"It also helped that Clarkson is a well-established cinematographer in his own right, too."**

Because he was shooting the entire film hand-held, Muller needed a good B-Camera operator. Muller had worked as Clarkson's operator when he was shooting a film called *Ninja: Shadow of a Tear* in 2013. **"I knew his style,"** says Muller. **"He even had a small role in the film! Veerachat Vonguiyomkaset stepped in to do our deep underwater work and he did a brilliant job shooting through the murky confined underwater passages."**

**"We wanted most scenes to look like they were covered with three or four cameras, but we only had two cameras."**

The real rescue divers involved in the film include Belgian Jim Warray, Finn Mikko Paasi, Canadian Erik Brown and Tan Xiaolong from China. **"They were obviously highly-experienced divers themselves, and the actors playing the other divers had diving experience,"** says Muller.

Much of *The Cave* was shot in dark caves, illuminated only by divers' headlamps. **"The Sigma Lenses were perfect with their T2 stops,"** says Muller. The film was partly shot at the real Tham Luang cave location where the kids and coach



*Cinematographer Wade Muller HKSC behind the slate on the set of 'The Cave' together with the crew, on location in Thailand  
- DOP Wade Muller HKSC, PHOTO Fredrik Divall*

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Filming a rescue scene in 'The Cave' - PHOTO Maitree Khunasutirat

were trapped, as well as a lot of shooting in the surrounding Chiang Rai province in Thailand.

*"The caves themselves were very claustrophobic in parts, where other areas opened right up. While location scouting we went quite far into these water-filled cave complexes. It was a bit unnerving at first for me but pretty soon I started to feel comfortable. The water was cold and wetsuits were needed."*

**"We actually started filming just two months after the event. That's how fast the scripts and schedule came together, it was an amazing effort!"**

*"We had location issues in the first few weeks of shooting at the real cave, but in the end the Thai government finally gave us access," says Muller. "In the meantime we were able to switch locations around, so did not lose any valuable days."*

*"We also had a huge water-filled cave set built by production designer Pongnarin Jonghachklang inside an Olympic size swimming pool," explains Muller. "The set had a labyrinth of underwater passages that we shot in for the*

*more demanding underwater scenes."* The crew also shot scenes in Ireland, Wales, China, Japan and Hawaii.

*"It was mostly location work for four weeks with another week of set work," says Muller. "We actually started filming just two months after the event. That's how fast the scripts and schedule came together, it was an amazing effort!"*

Muller oversaw the colour-grade for *The Cave* at White Light Post in Bangkok. The film is edited by Lee Chatametkool and graded by colorist by Chaitawat Thrisarnsi. *"Because the film is going for a realistic look we didn't need to do anything fancy with the grade," says Muller. "We did a bit of work keeping some of the brighter days looking more overcast and cool to keep it consistent with the rainy days during the actual event. Other than that it was just making small contrast adjustments and adding a tint of colour in the blacks."*

*"I really enjoyed shooting a feature film with a documentary feel," says Muller. "Traditional films you shoot wide, mid, tight and reverse shots; this was not like that at all. We would just shoot it as it happened in front of us as it was happening for the first time."*

Looking back, Muller feels he achieved the desired looks and feel of *The Cave*. In fact, the cinematographer is hoping to shoot another film featuring this style of filmmaking.

Wade Muller HKSC is an award-winning cinematographer based in Bangkok, Thailand, and Hong Kong.

Slade Phillips is a writer based in Sydney.