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Eastwood starts shooting 'American Sniper' at Santa Clarita ranch

By Richard Verrier

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Clint Eastwood's latest movie, "American Sniper," kicked off with a bang in Los Angeles County this week.

The Warner Bros. film, which stars Bradley Cooper as a Navy SEAL who recounts his military exploits, began 10 days of filming Monday in an Afghan village set at the Blue Cloud Movie Ranch in the Santa Clarita area.

The scenes involved "simulated warfare sequences with full load automatic gunfire, explosions, squibs, bullet hits, smoke, burning debris," according to a county film permit.

The movie is the latest in a flurry of feature films with small to mid-size budgets shooting in L.A. with the benefit of state film tax credits.

Other state-qualified projects that filmed in L.A. this year have included the Warner Bros. films "Entourage" and "Horrible Bosses 2," helping to fuel a 24% increase in location film shoots in the first quarter of the year, according to a recent report from FilmL.A. Inc., which handles film permits for the city and the county.

"American Sniper" marks the latest L.A.-based project for Eastwood, who shot "Jersey Boys," a film adaptation of the popular Broadway musical, throughout L.A. last year.

As with "Jersey Boys," "American Sniper" received approval for a California tax credit for \$6.8 million to offset \$34 million in production costs that qualified for incentives, according to records from the California Film Commission. Under the state program, producers can offset their production costs such as salaries paid to crew members by as much 25% if they shoot their project in state.

Warner Bros. and Village Roadshow are producing "American Sniper," which has already filmed 12 days in Morocco. The project, produced by Eastwood, Cooper, Andrew Lazar, Robert Lorenz and Peter Morgan, is set to film about a month in L.A., with much of the action unfolding at Blue Cloud.

Acquired in 2000 by former stuntman and actor Rene Veluzat, Blue Cloud is among the busiest film ranches in Los Angeles County.

The 100-acre property off Bouquet Canyon Road in the Santa Clarita Valley specializes in military settings, with a Middle East Town and Baghdad Square set that appears so authentic that the U.S. military uses it for training.

The ranch also has a full-scale army camp, aircraft hangar and 50 military vehicles, including tanks, Humvees and helicopters. Blue Cloud has a long list of credits, including such movies as "Zero Dark Thirty," "Iron Man" and television series "NCIS: Los Angeles" and "Jag."

Blue Cloud gained some unwelcome publicity in 2012 when it was revealed that the controversial video "Innocence of Muslims," which was blamed for sparking riots in Egypt, Libya and Yemen, filmed on the site in August 2011.

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