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Strange Bedfellows: Cooperation between Hollywood and the Pentagon

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Strange Bedfellows: Cooperation between Hollywood and the Pentagon

by

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A Thesis

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in

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Strange Bedfellows: Cooperation between Hollywood and the Pentagon
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ABSTRACT

For almost a century the U.S. military has been assisting Hollywood in making war films. The Department of Defense offers filmmakers military equipment and personnel for cheap, but in return the DoD gets the right to change the script. By studying extensive correspondence between the DoD and Hollywood filmmakers on several films (*A Few Good Men*, *Apollo 13*, *Clear and Present Danger*, *Deep Impact*, *Flight of the Intruder*, *Forrest Gump*, *Hair*, and *The Hunt for Red October*), this thesis examines what kind of changes are usually made to scripts by the DoD. A study of the internal correspondence shows that the script changes the DoD requests fall into three categories: accuracy (historical and technical), behavior of individual serviceman, and overall image of the military. While changes from the first two categories are usually easy to incorporate, it is the unsatisfactory overall image of the military that leads to DoD rejection.

INTRODUCTION

Hollywood is the biggest film industry in the United States and the world. The ideas and products created by Hollywood are seen throughout the world. Hollywood films contribute to people's perception of the world, their stereotypes and beliefs. Biases reflected in Hollywood films are spread throughout the world. The content of the movies is influenced by many factors. Many different political interest groups often feel that Hollywood has a political agenda. Some people accuse Hollywood of having a liberal agenda, and others accuse it of representing the elites. However, there is one rarely known influencing factor influencing Hollywood military films. The long-lasting cooperation between the U.S. military and the film industry has affected a vast number of films. For almost a century the military has been helping Hollywood create spectacular war films by providing filmmakers with the expensive military equipment and personnel for little money. In return, filmmakers have been giving the Department of Defense the right to change their scripts. Such cooperation allows the Pentagon to alter unsatisfactory scenes and characters and create a positive and dignified image of the U.S. armed forces on the screen. This cooperation is based on a DoD provision: DODINST 5410.16. According to this provision the Department of Defense can provide support to a feature film if it benefits the military or is in the national interest. One of the four requirements to receiving DoD support is the film's potential to enhance recruiting. While there is no law prohibiting the DoD from having a public relations operation, such public relations activity can be harmful to the public as it might distort and manipulate their perception of the world. As Senator J. W. Fulbright said in the introduction to his book on the DoD's public relations activity, "[i]t would take an additional volume, and someone more

schooled than I in the communications/public opinion field to study the impact these Defense Department activities have had on our thinking as a nation” (vii). Needless to say, Hollywood movies are the most efficient medium to reach the widest audience and shape the mindset of the American youth. Studying the mechanisms of the DoD public relations activity and bringing awareness of these mechanisms to the public can be the first and most important step in liberating the thinking of not only the nation, but a world fascinated with the Hollywood films.

By analyzing changes made to numerous films released between 1966 and 1999, this thesis will examine the history of the Pentagon-Hollywood cooperation and what criteria the DoD uses in its decision to support or reject a film. By recognizing these criteria and applying them to new films, viewers can analyze what might have been changed from the original script and which scenes or messages of a film were dictated by the DoD’s public relations activity.

This study concentrates on the analysis of the changes made to specific films. These films include: *A Few Good Men*, *Apollo 13*, *Deep Impact*, *Flight of the Intruder*, *Forrest Gump*, *Hair*, and *The Hunt for Red October*. The entire third chapter is devoted to the analysis of the changes made to the film *Clear and Present Danger*. The extensive internal correspondence between DoD officials and the *Clear and Present Danger* film producers allowed full examination of the changes made to specific scenes and characters and the overall image of the military in the film.

While the relationship between the U.S. military and Hollywood has a long history almost a century long, the literature on this topic is limited. In 1970 Senator J. W. Fulbright published *The Pentagon Propaganda Machine* that includes one chapter on the

relationship between the DoD and the film industry. Senator Fulbright warns the American public of the dangerous nature of this relationship he believes resembles censorship. The main book written on the issue is *Guts and Glory* (2002) by historian Lawrence Suid – an extensive and detailed history of the two industries' relationship. This relationship is viewed by Dr. Suid as mutually beneficial. Another book is written by journalist David Robb and called *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movie* (2004.) The author sees the relationship between the DoD and Hollywood filmmakers as dangerous for American democracy and considers it to be a form of censorship. After the publication of *Operation Hollywood* the topic of cooperation between the two industries has only been covered in few news reports and some articles on specific films.

Thus, this study of the cooperation between Hollywood and the Pentagon and the analysis of the support criteria based on the study of internal correspondence on several films and detailed analysis of the negotiations on *Clear and Present Danger* represents a valuable contribution to this unexplored topic. Although no law prohibits the Department of Defense from using film as a tool for its public relations activity, there should be a general understanding of this process by the public who watches these films altered by the Pentagon. Unfortunately, the majority of the movie-going audience remains unaware of being influenced by the biases of the Department of Defense.

CHAPTER ONE

The symbiotic relationship of mutual exploitation between the Department of Defense (DoD) and the film industry has a long history. Almost from the very beginning of the existence of film, the two industries have tried to find a way to use each other. The DoD could give to the filmmakers something they could not resist: a cheaper way to make spectacular films. And filmmakers, in turn, could give the Pentagon excellent public relations. Since Congress has “legislated that the armed services should have a public relations operation,”¹ movies with a huge audience are a great way to achieve good PR. Additionally, by giving the filmmakers what they wanted, the DoD could completely control its image on the screen.

The first film to win the Oscar, *Wings* (1927), was supported by the Pentagon. From that point on, the relationship between the DoD and the film industry was firm. During World War II the cooperation reached its peak when Hollywood became a governmental instrument for the war effort. An entertainment liaison office was created in 1948 as a part of the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs. Since then it has productively cooperated with the film industry on a large number of movies.

The relationship between the United States military and Hollywood changed profoundly after the Vietnam War. From the very start of their relationship to the mid-1970s, the DoD was mostly negotiating slight changes in the motion pictures, approving most of the requests. The U.S. military services were perceived by the public as a glorious invincible force capable of protecting American citizens under any circumstances and protecting national security interests all around the globe. The end of

¹ Lawrence Suid. *Guts and Glory: the Making of the American Military Image*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002. P. xi.

World War II, however, was the climax of the military's glory and success. Until then, the public's positive perception of the United States armed forces and military films telling good stories about the Army complemented each other. The Pentagon was mainly dealing with requests to provide assistance to films depicting the military in a positive light.

Almost every military film created before the mid-1960s received the DoD approval; that is what is usually called the period of the "traditional relationship" between the DoD and American film industry. Thus, the study of the symbiotic relationship between the military and film industries during this period would focus on the process of gaining approval and assistance and discussion on how mutually beneficial this process was. This kind of relationship was prevalent until the mid-1960s when the negative image of the Vietnam War and the military services started to appear first in the scripts and then on the screen. Historian Dr. Lawrence Suid unfolds the detailed history of the Hollywood Pentagon relationship in his book *Guts and Glory* (2002). Suid argues that in spite of the Korean War, which was perceived as a politicians' failure, "the military retained its aura of invincibility, spearheaded by its growing fleet of aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines, and SAC bombers" during the 1950s.² The 1960s, however, were completely different. The powerful antiwar movement and escalation of the Vietnam War initiated, if not strengthened, the negative image of the armed services.

By the end of the 1960s the anti-war and anti-military movement was strong not only on the streets but in the academic circles. In 1970 Senator J.W. Fulbright wrote *The Pentagon Propaganda Machine* on DoD public relations activity. The book was an

² Ibid.

expansion of the Senator's December 1969 speeches that he gave on the Senate floor to warn the public of the "multi-faceted" and "pervasive" nature of the DoD PR activity. It was a time when the glorified and invincible image of the U.S. military turned into a killing machine, and the Department of Defense was perceived as a manipulative and ruthless engine.

That is the time when the unclouded cooperation between the Pentagon and Hollywood ended. The DoD office for Public Affairs was now flooded with scripts that were far from portraying the U.S. armed forces as glorious and invincible – something that rarely happened before. A new era of the two industries' relationship began: the era of the Pentagon's selectivity in approving scripts and massive rejections of the scripts that were presenting the armed forces in a negative light.

It was during the 1960s that the DoD film liaison office's activity peaked: the main assistance criteria were elaborated, the Pentagon's policy towards cooperation with filmmakers was outlined, and the "rules of the game" were established. The office's representatives even moved to Los Angeles to be closer to Hollywood. The more films negatively portraying the military appeared on the screen, the more the Pentagon needed the film liaison office close by to ensure the positive image of the armed forces. The mid-1970s became the lowest point of the relationship between the DoD and Hollywood. Except for *The Green Berets* (1968), none of the famous films about the Vietnam War were supported by the Pentagon. The DoD was trying to make the filmmakers make changes to ameliorate the military's image; however, the filmmakers were not willing to compromise. During the 80s, however, more and more films were getting DoD assistance. With the new, more positive interpretation of the armed services during the

Vietnam War filmmakers were able to cooperate with the Pentagon. As for the last two decades the amount of the assistance requests has been increasing. War film has stayed a popular genre with the Vietnam War replaced by the subsequent wars.

Throughout the long history of the relationship between Hollywood and the Pentagon an institutionalized process for acquiring DoD assistance has been elaborated: filmmakers must take certain steps and follow certain rules established during the second half of the twentieth century. While Department of Defense Instruction (DODINST) Number 5410.15 (March 28, 1989) and Department of Defense Instruction Number 5410.16 (January 26, 1989) provide filmmakers with the general description of the process, the official website of the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs also has instructions on how and in what form to submit a request for the DoD support.

Generally, producers seeking the Pentagon's support address the main Pentagon's film liaison office in Washington, known as the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs (OSD/PA), providing five copies of the script and writing an official letter asking for the Department of Defense assistance in their film production. According to DoD instructions, the letter should also contain information on any potential benefit to the DoD for providing assistance to the project. For example, the producers of the film *Flight of the Intruder* (1991) in their official letter asked for DoD support stating the following: "A very strong key element of the story depicting Grafton's frustration and desire to make war on his own design and the Navy's reaction will contribute positive understanding of the basic tenets of military service. The entire film

should provide substantial benefits in the National interest as well as bringing gripping entertainment to the motion picture audiences worldwide.”³

Upon receiving a script, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense forwards it to one of the military services’ offices depending on which service the filmmaker is interested in. The script is then reviewed by one of the offices to find out if DoD assistance to the project is to its benefit or not. Both positive and negative responses are explained with the office’s comments. While the positive responses are generally provided with detailed comments on what should be changed in the script, the negative responses often contain only a general explanation. For example, when declining *Forrest Gump* (1994), Phil Strub, the head of the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, wrote to the producers: “For us to provide assistance, the military depictions must be historically accurate or feasible, of information value to the public, and of benefit to recruiting and retention. Unfortunately, ‘Forrest Gump’ doesn’t meet these criteria.”⁴

The four main offices dealing with the majority of requests are Department of the Army, Department of the Navy, Department of the Marine Corps, and Department of the Air Force. However, sometimes the opinion of additional offices is needed. For example, to make a decision on *Clear and Present Danger* (1994), the DoD contacted several additional offices to find out if DoD support to the film could be appropriate and beneficial. Since the film tells the story of a CIA analyst getting involved in an illegal war fought by the U.S. government against a Colombian drug cartel, offices such as the Department of Defense Coordinator for Drug Enforcement Policy and Support and the United States Special Operations Command were requested to review the script and

³ Horton, John E. Letter to Donald Baruch. 10 Apr. 1989. Print.

⁴ Strub, Philip M. Letter to Charles Newirth. 7 Jul. 1993. Print.

provide their comments, in addition to the Department of the Air Force and Department of the Navy.

Quite often war film scripts require commentaries from military historians. These commentaries are crucial to the DoD decision on cooperation with film producers because accuracy is one of the main criteria for deciding DoD support to the motion pictures. For example, *The Deer Hunter* (1978) was rejected by the Department of Defense because the script was highly inaccurate in terms of the history of the Vietnam War. It was so inaccurate that the internal memorandum from Army Public Affairs to the DoD Public Affairs contained the following: “Recommend the producer employ a researcher who either knows or is willing to learn something about the VN war. If this is not practical, our LA Branch could recommend names.”⁵

Once the commentaries and recommendations from corresponding departments and military historians are made, they are passed to the main office in Washington (OSD/PA). The Washington Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense then provides the filmmakers with an official response indicating whether the DoD is willing to cooperate or not and why. The letter will contain the DoD concerns about the script and recommended alternatives to the unsatisfying parts of the script. These recommended changes might range from specific dialogues or lines, to entire scenes, characters, even storylines. If the filmmakers are not willing to work on the recommended changes, assistance is not provided.

The final decision on providing assistance to a project belongs to the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, Director of Entertainment Media.

⁵ Smith, Raymond G. Memo for Donald E. Baruch. 24 May 1997. Print.

After the script is finally approved, an agreement is signed, and a special military project officer is assigned to the film production. The special military project officer usually acts at the same time as a technical advisor and his/her major function is to be present on the set and to make sure everything is filmed strictly according to the approved script. If the filmmakers try to change approved script or shoot scenes that are not in the script, the assistance can be withdrawn at any time. For example, the script for *Hurt Locker* (2008), the Oscar winner for best motion picture of 2010, about an elite Army bomb squad unit during the Iraq war, was initially approved by the Pentagon. However, after the filmmakers started to film scenes that were not in the script and that were unfavorable for the DoD, the latter withdrew its support.

As a requirement, the film must be shown to the DoD before the public screening and “preferably before the print is locked.”⁶ Thus, if the DoD makes a decision to support a movie, all measures are taken to ensure that the final product will be what the Pentagon wants it to be. Although there is no official policy on whether listing DoD support in the film credits is required or not, only a few of the films throughout the entire history of the two industries’ cooperation were supported by the Pentagon without mention of the DoD in the final credits. Usually the DoD recommends to the filmmakers to acknowledge the DoD in the final screen credits.

According to the DODINST 5410.16, military assets “shall not be employed in such a manner as to compete directly with commercial and private enterprises. DoD assets may be provided when similar civilian assets are not reasonably available.”⁷ This means that the DoD can assist the film producers only if the DoD is the only source of the

⁶ The Official Homepage of the United States Army. Web. 12 Oct. 2010.

⁷ Department of Defense Instruction Number 5410.16. 26 Jan. 1988. Print. Paragraph 3.6.

military equipment necessary for the film. This provision of the DODINST 5410.16 is taken into consideration when the DoD is identifying what kind of assistance it can provide to the filmmakers. For example, for the film *Apollo 13* (1995) producers wanted to get H-3 helicopters from the Navy; however, the Department of the Navy was reluctant to provide this type of helicopter, as “civilian H-3 helicopters are known to exist and be available for rental.”⁸

Another important provision of DODINST 5410.16 is that “[t]he production company shall reimburse the Government for any additional expenses incurred as a result of assistance rendered.”⁹ This means that DoD assistance to motion pictures should not impact the nation’s taxpayers. This is one of the most controversial issues about the DoD involvement in moviemaking. Throughout the history of the relationship, the public has questioned the costs of the DoD public relations activity for the taxpayers. Thus, in the Q&A session with the Navy representative for *The Hunt for Red October* (1990), a film about a nuclear submarine, a question about the cost of the DoD support was asked. The Navy representative answered that according to DoD policy film production companies are charged “the actual costs of consumables (primarily fuel and lubricants but includes some incremental maintenance costs for components that are replaced on a hours-in-service basis) used to directly support filming.” The filmmakers do not pay for personnel because they are in service at the time of filming.

The same issue was raised during the making of *The Green Berets* (1968). One of the U.S. Senators was wondering how much the filmmakers actually paid for the film. The answer was the same: filmmakers pay for consumables and for the dislocation of the

⁸ Shrout, G. E. Memo to Philip M. Strub. 22 Sep. 1994. Print.

⁹ Department of Defense Instruction Number 5410.16. 26 Jan. 1988. Print. Paragraph 3.3.

equipment. However the Senator was not satisfied, and he wanted to know if the life cycle costs for equipment are charged. This question was answered later, in the Q&A session for *The Hunt for Red October*: “Life cycle costs for equipment are not charged, per DoD policy, in recognition of the recruiting and informational benefits accrued from our support of these projects.”¹⁰ Another controversial fact is that films such as *The Hunt for Red October* and *Flight of the Intruder*, which received full Navy cooperation, cost more than \$1 million for the Department of the Navy. Thus, although it is stated in the DODINST 5410.16 that supporting the films comes at no cost to the taxpayers, this provision is often violated.

Although the relationship between the two industries has never been a secret, there are just a few books written on the subject. In 1970 Senator J. W. Fulbright published *The Pentagon Propaganda Machine*¹¹ dedicating one chapter to the influence of the DoD on Hollywood motion pictures. Senator Fulbright considered such influence to be dangerous for the American public and to resemble censorship.

The main scholar in the field the history of relationship between Hollywood and the Pentagon is Lawrence Suid, a military historian, film biographer, professor, and television consultant. Suid has written several books on the history of the Pentagon’s assistance to the Hollywood movies. The most comprehensive one is *Guts and Glory: The Making of the American Military Image in Film* (2002) about the history of the Pentagon and Hollywood cooperation. The main thesis of the author is that these relationships have always been mutually valuable. The book tracks the history of the

¹⁰ Finkelstein, J. B. Memo for Philip M. Strub. 3 Nov. 1989. Print.

¹¹ Fulbright, James W. *The Pentagon Propaganda Machine*. New York, New York: Liveright, 1970. Print. Pp. 103-126.

cooperation between the motion picture industry and the DoD starting with *Wings* in 1927, going through Vietnam War and Cold War movies, and ending in 2002. The relationships between the two institutions are characterized as a mutually beneficial process in which the Pentagon gets a good PR and the moviemakers obtain an opportunity to make stunning films at a low cost.

In 2004 a book representing a different view on the same issue was published. It was written by David L. Robb and called *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies*. David Robb, an independent journalist from Los Angeles and former reporter for Daily Variety and the Hollywood Reporter, states that the process of favoring one movie over another and changing the content of the films is unconstitutional and represents direct taxpayer-funded censorship. Robb also indicates the dangerous process of self-censorship by the scriptwriters who work on their scripts keeping in mind the Pentagon's approval process. Robb's book is often criticized for being "closer to tabloid journalism than to scholarship" (Wetta 1324). Such an opinion is supported by the fact that there are no citations, bibliography, or filmography in the book. On the other end of the spectrum is the opinion of law professor and NBC and CBS analyst Jonathan Turley, who says that Robb gives "an unprecedented insight into the dark world of the military's shaping of public opinion and popular culture" (Robb 5). The most valuable part of Robb's book is the photocopies of the internal correspondence letters between the Pentagon representatives and filmmakers uncovering the DoD policy in the approval process.

Since the publication of *Operation Hollywood* in 2004, the issue of cooperation between the film industry and the DoD has been covered only in brief news media reports

or mentioned in articles devoted to the specific films. There also have been several interviews with the Pentagon film advisors, but, all in all, the problem has never had any wide coverage in the media or academic world. The general public is largely unaware that such a connection between the military and Hollywood exists. It is the purpose of this thesis to research the subject and bring a new perspective to the field.

CHAPTER TWO

There are two provisions guiding the DoD decision-making process to approve or reject a script: Department of Defense Instruction Number 5410.15 (March 28, 1989) and Department of Defense Instruction Number 5410.16 (January 26, 1989). While the DODINST 5410.15 covers the “DoD Public Affairs assistance to non-government, non-entertainment-oriented print and electronic media,” the DODINST 5410.16 guides the “DoD assistance to non-government, entertainment-oriented motion picture, television, and video production.” Although both instructions are mentioned throughout the internal DoD correspondence on the subject, the DODINST 5410.16 is the main document regulating activities of the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs (OSD/PA).

It is in the Department of Defense Instruction (DODINST) 5410.16 where the DoD policy on the assistance to non-government, entertainment-oriented motion picture, television, and video productions is outlined. The main requirement for the DoD assistance is that the cooperation of the producers with the Government must “result in benefiting the Department of Defense” or be “in the best national interest.” These two conditions are based on consideration of four requirements.¹²

Decisions on supporting/rejecting film scripts are usually explained referring to the DODINST 5410.16, both in the internal Pentagon memos and in the official DoD responses to the filmmakers. Thus, in the official letters to the producers, the Department of the Army consistently explains its decisions to support or reject the film based on DODINST 5410.16. For example, in the official response to the support request made by

¹² Department of Defense Instruction Number 5410.16. 26 Jan. 1988. Print. Paragraph 3.1.

the producers of *Deep Impact* (1998), the following was stated: “In accordance with DOD Instruction 5410.16, 26 January 1988, ‘DOD Assistance to Non-Government, Entertainment-Oriented Motion Picture, Television, and Video Productions,’ and AR 360-5, 31 May 1989, ‘Public Information,’ OCPA-LA has determined that supporting this project will benefit the Army and DOD. This production depicts a feasible interpretation of military operations and policies, and additionally will enhance U.S. Army recruiting and retention programs.”¹³

The two conditions for support, benefit to the DoD or whether the film is in the best national interest, are based on the consideration of four criteria. The first criterion is accuracy and feasibility in portrayal of the armed forces in the motion pictures. The DODINST 5410.16 states in paragraph 3.1.1 that “[t]he production must be authentic in its portrayal of actual persons, places, military operations, and historical events. Fictional portrayals must depict feasible interpretation of military life, operations, and policies.” This criterion is the leading factor in the DoD decision making on supporting/rejecting the script. The second criterion is about the film’s role in providing information for public education on the military armed forces. The following condition should be observed: “The production is of informational value and considered to be in the best interest of public understanding of the U.S. Armed Forces and the Department of Defense.” Thus, through feature films the DoD is informing the public about its nature and activities. The third criterion is usually considered to be the most controversial one as it directly and overtly deals with the military recruiting. This criterion runs as follows: “The production may provide services to the general public relating to, or enhancing, the

¹³ Frazier, Benjamin C. Memo to the DoD Public Affairs Office. Washington, D.C. 17 Sep. 1996. Print.

U.S. Armed Forces recruiting and retention programs.” The fourth criterion is rarely mentioned in the internal correspondence but still appears to be an important one: “The production should not appear to condone or endorse activities by private citizens or organizations when such activities are contrary to U.S. Government policy.”

Interpreting and observing the first three criteria, the DoD has elaborated three factors that any film should meet in order to get support. These three factors are accuracy, proper behavior of individual serviceman, and overall image of the military. The aspect of accuracy is divided into historical and technical accuracy, both being the subject of the majority of the commentaries made by the DoD and its components. Technical accuracy, in turn, consists of proper use of ranks relationship, jargon, military operations, and proper use of weapons and equipment. The aspect of behavior of individual serviceman consists of profanity, drug use, killing civilians, high morality, behavior of specific characters, and so on. The overall image of the military is how a film depicts the military in general, what role it is given, and how it fulfills this role.

While the aspect of historical and technical accuracy is very important to the DoD, it is rarely an issue in rejecting projects. First of all, these changes are quite easy to make and incorporate in the script. Second of all, usually filmmakers applying for DoD assistance are willing to make necessary changes to achieve the best possible accuracy for their films. Quite often even filmmakers who do not need military equipment request DoD’s commentaries on the script to ensure the technical and historical accuracy of the film. While it is sometimes enough to make just technical or historical changes in order to get support, it is never just an aspect of accuracy in rejecting the film. While it is sometimes stated in official DoD responses that the film is not accurate in its depiction of

the military or does not benefit the DoD, it is the overall image of the military portrayed in the film that leads to the rejection of the project.

The overall message, whether pro-war or anti-war, does not make a big difference for the DoD. What makes a difference is an overall image of the military, its role, and actions depicted in the film. The selection process is based on this factor. A film with a positive overall image of the military will get support after incorporating changes that enhance technical and historical accuracy of the film. A film with a negative overall image of the military will be offered a choice to make substantial changes in the image of the military in order to get assistance from the DoD. If filmmakers are not ready to make the required changes, the film will never get support. A positive overall message means that the military in its actions follow military guidelines, that military characters are of high moral and professional standards, and that the military is doing its job right.

In other words, a positive overall image of the military is an image that follows the guideline. It does not mean that negative military characters cannot be present in the film. However, if the negative characters are present in the film, they must be outbalanced by the positive characters. Bad officers should always be outbalanced by good officers. Bad actions should always be punished within the system. Thus, an image of a self-correcting system is created in which problems are taken care of by the members of the system.

Cases that deviate from the guideline cannot be supported. The DoD logic behind its decision is that if the film shows some negative aspect or incident, even if it actually took place, the audience will generalize it and perceive it as a common practice. As a result, a

negative stereotype will be formed that, in turn, will affect recruiting potential and the informational value of the film.

Thus, even if the film is historically and technically accurate, it can be rejected by the DoD if the overall image of the military is negative.

Quite often, films with an initially positive overall image of the military get the DoD assistance quite easily by just incorporating technical changes. For example, such films as *The Hunt for Red October* and *Flight of the Intruder*, both based on Tom Clancy novels and produced by Mace Neufeld, enjoyed a smooth approval process from the DoD. *Flight of the Intruder* (1991) is a film about the Navy tasked with bombing runs on minor Vietcong military targets. Some Navy pilots in the movie are unhappy about routinely conducting dangerous missions that do not result in any major advantage for the war effort. They decide to disobey the order and bomb a target in North Vietnam close to Hanoi – an action that could lead to a court-martial. After successfully bombing their target, the pilots are informed of their court-martial. However, the charges are soon dropped when the President authorizes bombing targets in North Vietnam, including Hanoi.

Producers of the film applied to the Washington Public Affairs Office for DoD support. In their official letter the producers indicated the benefits of the film, saying that “[a] very strong and key element of the story depicting Grafton’s frustration and desire to make war on his own design and the Navy’s reaction will contribute a positive understanding of the basic tenets of military service.” This specific explanation was followed by a more general phrase: “The entire film should provide substantial benefits

in the national interest as well as bringing gripping entertainment to the motion picture audiences worldwide.”¹⁴

The Washington Office forwarded the script to the Navy. Since the producers were “agreeable to incorporating the necessary script changes,”¹⁵ the Department of the Navy granted the approval. They added in their letter to the main office that they expect “the completed film to portray the Navy people and operations in a manner consistent with the best interests of the armed forces.”¹⁶

Along with the approval letter, two memorandums were enclosed with comments on the script. The filmmakers made the changes to the script based on objections posed in these two memorandums: Memorandum, 26 May 1989, of the Assistant Chief of Naval Operations (Air Warfare,) and NAVINFO West Memorandum, 16 May, 1989, to CHINFO.¹⁷ NAVINFO West Memorandum was a compilation of Navy comments from all of those who read the script (includes Naval Air Force Commander, and Naval Aviation and History Branch.) Both memorandums consist of about thirty specific comments that reveal a “number of errors, major and minor, all of which can be corrected without major story-line revision.”¹⁸ Some of the historical inaccuracies were also easy to incorporate into the script. Technical inaccuracies included some procedural errors and Naval Aviation-specific dialogues. For example, among comments on technical inaccuracies were observations like: “Commercial phone calls cannot be made from Navy ships at sea”; “You cannot smoke on the flight deck”; and “JP5 vice gas is what we

¹⁴ Horton, John E. Letter to Donald E. Baruch. 10 Apr. 1989. Print.

¹⁵ Strub, Philip M. Memo for Chief of Information. Washington, D.C. 13 June 1989. Print.

¹⁶ Finkelstein, J. B. Memo for the Assistant Secretary of Defense. Washington, D.C. 22 June 1989. Print.

¹⁷ Horton, John E. Letter to Philip M. Strub. Washington, D.C. 5 July 1989. Print.

¹⁸ Sherman, Michael T. Memo to CHINFO. 16 May 1989. Print.

fuel our jets with.” The majority of the comments were on technical jargon. For example, one of the comments was: “Use ‘Work it down’ or ‘Fly it down’ instead of ‘you’re too high.’” Another comment was: “Change ‘restart button’ to ‘airstart button.’” Some comments were on the specific nature of aviation, something that only professional pilots would know. For example, that “[f]lak only rocks planes in the movies . . . if it’s that close, it’s all over.” Sometimes comments were so detailed and rooted in the specifics of aviation that scriptwriters would never even know about it since they are not aviation professionals: “If the computer failed, riveting his eyes won’t help since the radar is down.”¹⁹ Thus, about ninety-five percent of all changes were technical, and the filmmakers were eager to incorporate them in the script.

Besides specific historical and technical inaccuracies, there were two general comments on the script. The first one was “the strongest possible objection” to the use of marijuana by the hero,²⁰ and the filmmakers must “omit all reference to use of drugs by Navy personnel and those close to them.”²¹ The essence of objection was that, although some did use drugs at that time, the use of marijuana by the hero would not add anything to the story and moreover would lead to the stereotype formation and generalization. The second general comment was made on the vulgarity of the language throughout the story, which the DoD found to be “a bit overdone.” These changes were necessary in order to observe the proper behavior of individual serviceman, the second factor in the decision-making process. The filmmakers were ready to make all the changes, and the film got full support by the DoD. The DoD did not make any comments about the storyline in

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Dunleavy, Richard M. Memo for CHINFO. 26 May 1989. Print.

²¹ Sherman, Michael T. Memo to CHINFO. 16 May 1989. Print.

general, although the film showed officers disobeying the orders. The reason for that was that the film also showed that such action would lead to a court-martial. Thus, the film was showing the military as a self-sufficient justice system in which military guidelines are strictly followed.

Thus, the film got the DoD support in spite of the fact that there was a number of objections to the initial script. The changes were made by the filmmakers in order to observe accuracy and proper behavior of individual serviceman. Full support was possible because the third and most important factor of a positive overall image of the military in the film was observed. In *Flight of the Intruder*, the military performs its mission in Vietnam professionally. When two Navy pilots disobey orders, they are disciplined, and threatened with court-martial. The film does not show a lawless or disordered military but rather a well-run institution following rules and obeying Congressional mandates. The Navy pilots who disobeyed orders are exonerated in the end of the movie after undergoing the proper disciplinary process. The image of the military as a law-abiding and well organized institution is preserved. Moreover, the officers are shown as dedicated to the mission and loyal to their fellow pilots, adding to the overall positive image of the military.

Another film based on the best selling novel by Tom Clancy and produced by Paramount Pictures Corporation under the production supervision of Mace Neufeld was *The Hunt for Red October*. This film was about the USSR's best submarine captain defecting and escaping to the United States. Filmmakers needed to film the exterior and interior of a Kennedy-class carrier and the exterior of a 688-class submarine.²² After

²² Horton, John E. Letter to Donald E. Baruch. 19 Feb. 1987. Print.

reviewing the script for *The Hunt for Red October*, the Department of the Navy recommended thirty-two changes, all of them about technical inaccuracies. The commentaries made by the Navy could be divided into five categories: jargon, ranks, look, procedures, and rank relationship. One of the most frequent commentaries was on the jargon both the USSR and USA navies use. For example, the DoD wrote to the filmmakers that they “[n]eed to check out Soviet manner of rudder/diving orders. We would say ‘steady on course...’”²³ Another commentary was on the right way of saying time in the Navy – a common mistake filmmakers make as each service says time in a different way: “Drop the term ‘hours’ after times. We don’t use ‘hours’ in the Navy.” Technical procedure inaccuracies would contain comments like: “Need to re-check rescue procedures through the trunk.” Another technical inaccuracy was on ranks: “The Executive Officer aboard a 688 Class SSN would be at least a Lieutenant Commander.” One of the comments on dialogue between the officer and his crew was the following: “Commanding Officer of RED OCTOBER would know his crew . . . would not address them, ‘Hey you!’” The uniform commentaries were made to make sure the proper uniform was used in each scene: “Ryan would have khakis on.” The DoD representatives even allow some humor in their commentaries: “I doubt that you would have to ‘grab your nuts’ on the DSRV at 2.5 knots. But . . .”²⁴ All of these specific changes were technical and easy to incorporate into the script. In addition to these specific changes, there were five more general comments. They concerned insufficient explanation of the defection of the Soviet captain. The director of the film agreed to make all necessary

²³ Sherman, Michael T. Memo to Chief of Information. 12 Dec. 1988. Print.

²⁴ Ibid.

changes to the script, and then the film got full DoD support.²⁵ The reason the filmmakers enjoyed such a smooth approval process was that the DoD initially was satisfied with the overall image of the military.

Another movie that enjoyed the DoD support was the disaster drama *Deep Impact*. DreamWorks SKG requested Department of the Army support for the film, which tells the story of a comet approaching the Earth and shows both individual and national reaction to the disaster. “Several scenes include depictions of the Army, especially the Army National Guard, engaged in disaster relief activities, supplementing law enforcement agencies, and assisting in the construction and staffing of a massive shelter.”²⁶ The DoD assistance to the film consisted of “filming a missile launch at Vandenberg Air Force Base, California, and also filming for a few days with Army (National Guard) trucks, helicopters, tactical and armored vehicles.”²⁷

As said in the internal correspondence, *Deep Impact* offered the Army “several opportunities to demonstrate its role in disaster preparedness and disaster assistance.”²⁸ The DoD was ready to provide assistance if the filmmakers made the required changes. Army and Department of Defense comments consisted of twenty-one specific recommendations and three general observations. General observations were about inconsistency errors in the script or in the specific scenes in which no military was involved. For example, one of the general recommendations was on inaccuracy in the timeline of the story. The majority of the twenty-one specific comments were about the

²⁵ Baruch, Donald E. Memo for Director, Audiovisual Entertainment, Chief of Information, Department of the Navy. 27 Dec. 1988. Print.

²⁶ Frazier, Benjamin C. Memo to the DoD Public Affairs Office. Washington, D.C. 17 Sep. 1996. Print.

²⁷ Strub, Philip M. Letter to Richard D. Zanuck. 6 Oct. 1997. Print.

²⁸ Ross, Kathleen C. Memo to Philip M. Strub. 22 July 1997. Print.

technical processes in case of emergency that the DoD follows. Other changes that the DoD required were aimed at enhancing the role of the Army in a true national emergency. The DoD wanted filmmakers to show the Army “heavily involved” in disaster preparedness: “The depiction of the Army could and should be more multifaceted and less a depiction of heavy-handed, heavily armed dragoons.”²⁹ The DoD was suggesting showing the Army manning a first-aid booth, serving food to people who are hungry, manning information booths, assisting with the set up of the camp, distributing goods, being involved in traffic control, and in rendering roadside assistance. These changes were technically accurate as these functions were something the Army routinely performed in support of disaster assistance. They were crucial to the DoD also because they were enhancing the overall image of the Army as an important self-guiding force in national disaster preparedness.

Besides these changes there were two scenes in the script that “must be changed” according to the Army report. The first scene takes place when the President says that looters will be shot. The DoD objection to the scene was that this statement of the President meant violating the Constitution by abrogating individuals of their right to a trial. Since the President has not declared martial law, constitutional rights cannot be nullified. In their comment on the scene, the DoD said that the military would detain looters and “turn them over to the appropriate law enforcement agency.” The DoD offered a different line for the President: “Looters will be dealt with quickly and harshly.”³⁰ The second scene that required change was the one involving the Lieutenant. Comments on this scene started with the objection to the depiction of the entire character

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

of the Lieutenant. It was said that this depiction must be changed, with “must” capitalized in bold type. According to the original script, the Lieutenant was behaving inappropriately, being impolite and hard to be empathetic with. The DoD insisted that the Lieutenant could be “polite and sympathetic and still get the job done.” Besides, inappropriate behavior was a sign of panic for the DoD that was totally inappropriate for an officer in command who did not want to look panicked in front of his men.

Thus, a significant change was requested to ameliorate the image and behavior of an individual serviceman. Producer Richard Zanuck wrote a letter promising to work on all the changes in spite of the film being in the post-production stage.³¹ As for the first scene that required change, the filmmakers agreed to change the President’s speech in post-production edit. As for the second scene, Mimi Leder, the director of the film, agreed to make the Lieutenant’s character “more sympathetic but still stern enough to get the job done.”³² After viewing the final version of *Deep Impact*, Master Sergeant of the U.S. Army Thomas Field, who was the coordinator for all military assistance to the movie, confirmed that the scenes involving the US Army conformed to the approved version of the script. He also added that “the Army’s portrayal in the film is accurate and reflects positively on the role it plays in disaster relief operations.”³³ The Army was shown as a self-guiding force that provides full and multifaceted support in the national disasters. The changes were made on all levels. Thus, technical inaccuracies were eliminated, behavior of an individual serviceman was ameliorated, and the overall image of the military improved by enhancing its role in a true national emergency.

³¹ Zanuck, Richard D. Letter to Kathleen C. Ross. 9 Sep. 1997. Print.

³² Ibid.

³³ Field, Thomas J. Letter to Joan Bradshaw. 15 Apr. 1998. Print.

It is important here to note that significant changes to the film were made after the shooting was completed and it was during the post-production stage. One might not realize how difficult it is for filmmakers to make changes in the post-production stage. The producer's consent to incorporate changes after the film was shot shows how dependent the filmmakers are on DoD assistance and how they are willing to make any changes to satisfy the Pentagon. From the very first step of applying for DoD assistance and subsequent changes to the special screening for the DoD representatives of the completed film filmmakers remain in the power of the Department of Defense. The DoD can require filmmakers to make changes at any time during the filmmaking process, and the filmmakers must comply even if the film is in the post-production stage. It is difficult to call such a relationship balanced.

While the aspect of historical accuracy in the films discussed above did not seem to be significant for the DoD and did not mean rejection of the projects, in films like *The Deer Hunter* (1978) and *Forrest Gump* (1994) it turned out to be an adequate reason for the DoD for rejecting both scripts. Producers of *The Deer Hunter*, one of the first films dealing with the Vietnam War, were trying to get the Pentagon's assistance. The film tells the story of three young men from a small town in the USA who leave their families to fight in the Vietnam War. After reviewing the script, the Department of the Army came up with an overall negative response and a list of inaccuracies.

The Army Public Affairs memo lists four technical errors it found in *The Deer Hunter*. The first technical error seems to have no impact on the image of the military and is purely a technical issue. The memo states, "There were no American Rangers in the VN war. In fact, there were no Rangers in the American Army between the Korean

War and about 1974.”³⁴ In the second technical inaccuracy, the army is seemingly protecting the image of the Vietnamese enemy. The memo states, “It is understood the whole story is based on the Russian roulette ploy but that kind of torture, in the experience of the combat officers consulted, is rather unlikely for the VC (scene 79 and fol).” In the next technical inaccuracy, there is clearly an element of protecting the army’s image: “It’s also rather unlikely that the VC could successfully ambush two successive US units in the same place. This makes the Army look pretty stupid. So does the napalming of the village right after ambush.” The final technical inaccuracy listed in this memo for *The Deer Hunter* also questions the historical accuracy. There is a scene with a retreating tank loaded with US soldiers. The memo states, “If this refers to the US withdrawal, it is pretty unrealistic. There was no US pullout which incorporated a military retreat. A tank would hardly be retreating all alone, but would be part of a unit.” The rest of the paragraph is more historical: “The tank loaded with infantry suggests a Dunkirk-type bug-out, which was not the type of pullout the US Army experienced in VN. The context also suggests that the US Army pullout was associated with the fall of the South VN government to the North. The US troop pullout was about two years before the fall of Saigon.” This historical inaccuracy may also be an issue of image, since the U.S. withdrawal and the subsequent outcome of the Vietnam War had become such an unsettling subject in U.S. history. Although historical inaccuracies and technical errors were quite profound, the disapproval recommendation was based on “the absence of any benefit to the Army in the script.”³⁵ Although the DoD rejected the script, they were still willing to provide some assistance in the form of military personnel. Baruch wrote to the

³⁴ Ridding, John F. Memo to Donald E. Baruch. 24 May 1979. Print.

³⁵ Ibid.

producers that “[u]nder the circumstances, we do not see how the script could be changed at this stage of the production to justify assistance. However, Service personnel can participate in film productions as extras on their own time on a voluntary basis regardless of our official position.”³⁶ While the historical inaccuracies and technical errors were quite numerous in the script, it was not these errors that prevented the DoD from assisting the project. It was the third factor, the absence of the positive overall image of the military that did not allow the Pentagon’s assistance on the film. While the historical inaccuracies were important, they could have been overcome if the DoD was interested in its overall image in the film.

The issue of historical inaccuracy was also widely used in explaining the rejection of another film – *Forrest Gump*. However, in case of *Forrest Gump*, the DoD’s assessment of historical inaccuracy is quite arguable. The film tells the story of a not very intelligent Forrest Gump who lived an extraordinary life and witnessed and participated in numerous historical events. The Army Public Affairs Office rejected the script indicating five reasons: harsh language, stereotypical and implausible depiction of the military in the 1960s, excessive sexual content, and “improbable behavior of uniformed personnel.” The fifth and major dissatisfaction of the Army with the film was the following: “The generalized impression that the Army of the 1960’s was staffed by the guileless, or soldiers of minimal intelligence, is neither accurate nor beneficial to the Army. Cannot substantiate the notion that the Army ever attempted “an experiment to put together a group of dumbos and halfwits who wouldn’t question orders (pg 40).”³⁷ The phrasing in

³⁶ Baruch, Donald E. Letter to Michele Kuhar. 27 May 1977. Print.

³⁷ Marovitz, Mitchell E. Memo for Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense. 29 June 1993. Print.

the film script might be too harsh; however, the essence of the sentence is not that absurd. What the scriptwriter is referring to is that Forrest Gump was a part of the “McNamara’s 100,000 Project,” an actual project that took place in the United States military under Defense Secretary (1961-1968) Robert McNamara. It was a program in the 1960s implemented by the DoD to recruit men, both volunteers and conscripts, who were previously below military mental standards. The DoD was fully aware of both the reference and historical fact. As the Marine Corps Office wrote to the Washington Office, “[a]lthough not explicitly stated in the story, he [Forrest Gump] is portrayed as being one of the ‘McNamara’s 100,000 Project.’ ”³⁸

Thus the main historical inaccuracy to which the Pentagon was referring was actually a historical fact. One might assume that the true reason of rejection was that emphasizing this historical fact was not beneficial for the DoD. In the letter to the film producers, Philip Strub, the head of the Washington Public Affairs Office, explains the rejection saying that *Forrest Gump* does not meet the DoD criteria for film support: “[t]he military depictions must be historically accurate or feasible, of information value to the public, and of benefit to recruiting and retention.” In specifying the reasons, he mentions just one out of five objections: “The principle problem is one of inaccuracy, in that Forrest Gump appears to have been recruited and trained to serve in a special unit comprised solely of others like him, then led into combat in Vietnam by an inexperienced officer as a kind of inhumanely senseless, doomed experiment.”³⁹ Phil Strub still refers to this inaccuracy despite the fact that the internal memo explaining the McNamara project existed. The reason for rejecting the film was that by showing this one case, even

³⁸ Broeckert, Jerry E. Memo for the Commanding General. 5 Aug. 1993. Print.

³⁹ Strub, Philip M. Letter to Charles Newirth. 7 Jul 1993. Print.

if it was historically accurate, the DoD did not want to create a generalization or stereotype. This typical logic behind rejection of the negative elements in portraying the military is one of the main reasons rejecting the majority of films denied. It is important to notice that in explaining their decision to the filmmakers, the DoD gives a general explanation referring to the criteria written down in the DODINST 5014.16.

Another film that was not approved by the DoD was an adaptation of the Broadway musical *Hair* (1979). This film is about a young man who is drafted in the Vietnam War. He has to go to basic training, after which he will be sent to Vietnam. Before leaving for the training camp, he goes to Central Park and becomes friends with hippies. Being introduced to the culture, he is now involved in doing drugs and participating in discussions that put down “various aspects of the establishment, the police, family, the office of the Presidency, and the Vietnam War.”⁴⁰ When he leaves for basic training, his new friends want to come visit him before he goes to Vietnam. To get inside the camp one of the friends puts on a military uniform and changes places with the hero. Right after that the draftees are sent to Vietnam, so the wrong person ends up participating in the Vietnam War.

Producers of the film wanted the military’s support in filming a few scenes in the basic training camp closer to the end of the film. The Army’s Public Affairs Office replied to the Washington Office with the following: “DA declines to assist in subject production. No benefit to the Army is apparent in the script fragment attached and the Army is not presented realistically. Recommend no assistance be rendered.”⁴¹ Unlike with other films, this response was quite harsh. Usually the Army Office for Public

⁴⁰ Hatch, Norman T. Memo to Thomas Ross. 19 Oct. 1977. Print.

⁴¹ Smith, Raymond G. Memo for Assistant Secretary of Defense. 26 Apr. 1977. Print.

Affairs tries to list the reasons why they decline the script and indicates that it only refers to the current form of the script. Also, usually the DoD provides comments on inaccuracies even if the script is rejected. The Washington Office wrote an official letter declining the project. The explanation was very general: “Assistance could not be justified under the criteria outlined in the enclosed policy [DODINST 5410.16].”⁴² Clearly, it was not technical or historical inaccuracies that prevented the film from getting support, as these errors could easily be changed. It was not the second factor (positive behavior of individual serviceman) either, as the scenes in the training camp were satisfactory. The problem with the script was expressed in one of the internal memorandums: “Though the military portion of the story is minor to the total script, it is the story of ‘Hair’ that so heavily influences this collective negative position.”⁴³ So it was an overall story of the film that caused the problem. Dr. Larry Suid discussing the film in his book *Guts & Glory* comes to a conclusion that it was an antiwar message that was the main factor in rejecting the film: “In refusing to even discuss cooperation, however, the Army and later the Air Force were clearly not responding to the inaccurate portrayal of their procedures or even to the script itself, but rather to the antiwar images and themes that the original stage version had generated.”⁴⁴ However, it seems like this film could get support if the same issues were handled differently without changing the main theme, atmosphere, and message of the film. In the internal memorandum Norman Hatch, Chief of Audiovisual Division, said that “the effect on the audience of the establishment put downs will depend a great deal on how well they are acted out.” He

⁴² Baruch, Donald E. Letter to Robert Greenhut. 10 May 1977. Print.

⁴³ Hatch, Norman T. Memo to Thomas Ross. 2 Nov. 1977. Print.

⁴⁴ Suid, Lawrence H. *Guts and Glory: the Making of the American Military Image*. Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002. Print. P. 361.

continued saying that “the story line that comes through is love and peace and even in the ending, one man willing to give up his life for another exemplifies the best of religious doctrine.”⁴⁵ Thus, an anti-war message of the film (love and peace) was not interfering with the DoD assistance. Besides, OASD/PA saw the film as potentially beneficial for the military. They wrote a letter to the Air Force Public Affairs Office trying to persuade them to change their opinion on the movie and give it support. In the letter it was stated that: “It is the considered opinion of OASD/PA that such assistance would be in the best interest of DoD.”⁴⁶ So even within the DoD opinions on the film differed greatly. The subjective nature of the approval process prevented this project from support. In spite of a strong movement in support of the project, it was declined by the Air Force and Marines and therefore DoD. On the surface the explanation was that “there was insufficient benefit to the Department to assist in accordance with regulations (accurate portrayal of military activities.)”⁴⁷ This general phrase in reality meant that some of the issues in the film handled by the filmmakers were not creating a positive overall image of the military. If the filmmakers found a way to deal with the issue of criticism of the establishment, the police, the President, and the Vietnam War in a way that would portray the military in a positive light, they would get support even if the overall message and storyline stayed the same.

Another film that was never made because the DoD rejected the script was called *Fields of Fire*. The script was based on a book by former Secretary of the Navy James Webb about several Marines serving in the Vietnam War. The main themes of the book

⁴⁵ Hatch, Norman T. Memo to Thomas Ross. 19 Oct. 1977. Print.

⁴⁶ Baruch, Donald E. Memo for Audio Visual Branch. 26 Oct. 1977. Print.

⁴⁷ Hatch, Norman T. Memo to Thomas Ross. 2 Nov. 1977. Print.

and the script were leadership, loyalty, and “brutalizing effects on people in wartime.” The book itself has been taught in numerous college literature and political science classes, as well as being on the Commandant of the Marine Corps’ required reading list for young NCO’s and officers. Everybody was sure that the project would get support. After receiving an official request for support, Phil Strub sent the script to the Marine Corps Public Affairs Office. They answered back recommending approval of DoD support. It was stated in their response that “although the prevalence of illegal and immoral activity by Marines throughout the scenario (fragging, drug use, violence against civilians) could adversely impact the impression of today’s Marines by the viewing public, we feel that the screenplay is a vivid and historically accurate portrayal of the extraordinarily adverse circumstances under which infantry Marines fought in Vietnam.”⁴⁸ Among documents on this film there is an unsigned letter to Mr. Webb from the Marines office saying the following: “This is the first time the Marine Corps has supported a Vietnam project that is as vivid and historically accurate as you portray the extraordinary circumstances under which Marines fought.” However, the Washington office was not so enthusiastic about the script. Although they admitted that the script was “historically correct” and realistically captured the essential character of the combat Marine, it also perpetuated “a number of common stereotypes conveyed by media reports at the time and in other films about the Vietnam War.”⁴⁹ The main objection were: incidents of fragging (an act of attacking a superior officer in order to kill him, usually with the fragmentation grenade), Marines taking pictures with dead enemies, burning of a

⁴⁸ Shotwell, John M. Memo for the Office of the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs. 18 Oct. 1993. Print.

⁴⁹ Shotwell, John M. Memo for the Commandant of the Marine Corps. 17 Sep. 1991. Print.

village hootch (typical Vietnamese dwelling where peasants live), killing of civilians, profanity, and sexual scenes. The main problem with these issues was that the DoD was afraid that such behavior of the unit would be perceived as common practice of a typical Marine Corps unit in Vietnam. As one Lieutenant Colonel Broeckert wrote to Colonel Shotwell, "I'd much rather see Mr. Webb and the Marine Corps put the effort into a movie about those of us that served that didn't do drugs, didn't torch hootches, and didn't frag fellow Marines but rather knew of those activities, had to deal with it on a daily basis, and opted not to be part of it (sometimes at risk to our own well-being)." In his letter Lt. Col. Broeckert is very passionate about the issue, for he continues: "Where's that story! Maybe we should tell Mr. Webb to change his script . . . that we are more interested in portraying those types of Marines -- those that were the majority."⁵⁰ Thus the depiction of Marines inside the DoD was perceived as something atypical, something that cast a shadow on the entire Marine Corps.

As a result, on Dec. 15, 1993, Phil Strub wrote an official response to Mr. Webb rejecting the current version of the script. Strub points out that he understands that the story depicts Marines fighting under horrific conditions during the Vietnam War and in order to portray it one has to "dramatize both the good and the bad in human nature that the war brought out among the combatants."⁵¹ However, the film shows that under extreme pressure the Marines react "by committing egregious acts such as fragging, using illegal drugs, executing suspected Viet Cong, and burning a villager's 'hootch.'" He continues expressing the main reason for rejection: "Our concern is that these kinds of frequent, seemingly commonplace acts will obscure the acts of bravery and dedication

⁵⁰ Broeckert, Jerry N. Memo to Shotwell, John M. 18 Oct. 1993. Print.

⁵¹ Strub, Philip M. Letter to James H. Webb. 15 Dec. 1993. Print.

that the Marines displayed throughout the war in Vietnam.” Strub admits that it is a matter of record “that these kinds of criminal activities actually took place.” However, “by providing official support to the film, the Marines and the Department of Defense would be tacitly accepting them as everyday, yet regrettable, aspects of combat.” Strub concluded that “the script would have to be changed to reflect that the vast majority of military personnel actively and effectively support the Uniform Code of Military Justice.” Thus, although the circumstances under which the Marines fought were undoubtedly considered to be accurate, it was the Marines’ behavior under these circumstances that was found to be inaccurate. Showing such “inaccurate” behavior would harm the overall image of the military – the most important factor in considering the DoD support.

After learning about the DoD official rejection of the film (guided by the Special Assistant, Audiovisual), the acting Commandant of the Marine Corps wrote a letter asking the DoD to reconsider their position. They were sure that Webb would produce a fair and authentic, if unvarnished, portrayal of Marines who served in Vietnam.

“Because the Vietnam war is a dark chapter in our nation’s history that many Americans would just as soon forget, the valor and sacrifice of those who fought there have been obscured by popular culture. The Department of Defense, by supporting the film, would aid Mr. Webb in producing the most faithful cinematic portrayal to date of those heroic veterans. It is not a pretty story, but it is one that needs to be told.”⁵² The response followed, indicating that the request cannot be fulfilled. It stated that in considering the script the DoD had to follow the criteria for support: “Our decision whether or not to authorize military assistance is based partly on the accuracy and authenticity of the

⁵² Boomer, William E. Memo to the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense. 12 Jan. 1994. Print.

people and events depicted. But the principle requirement of the script is that it benefit recruiting, retention, and the public's understanding of the military. In the script 'Field of Fire,' Marines commit grievous wrongdoings: fragging, substance abuse, executing Viet Cong, and burning a villager's home. These acts are depicted as commonplace and nearly all go unreported. None result in judicial action."⁵³ Thus, it was the unpunished wrongdoings that affected the overall image of the military. Such wrongdoings could only be accepted if they were prosecuted and those who were guilty would be tried by court-martial. Since the prosecution was not shown in the film, the military system was portrayed negatively as incapable of following the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Thus, it was the overall image of the military rather than accuracy or behavior of individual serviceman that prevented the DoD support.

Since Webb did not want to make any changes to the script, the picture was never produced.

Another film that was rejected was *A Few Good Men* (1992), starring Tom Cruise, Jack Nicholson, and Demi Moore. This film is about an incident that took place in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, which led to a court-martial of two Marines accused of the murder of another Marine. The Marine's death was caused by a disciplinary action that was "ordered illegally down through the chain of command."⁵⁴

Producers wanted to get DoD assistance that would significantly reduce the total cost of the film. In the official request they had to indicate the benefit for the DoD of participating in the project. They said that "the screenplay demonstrates the intricacies of the U.S. Military legal system at its best – a system, incidentally, which few civilians

⁵³ Strub, Philip M. Memo for Commandant of the Marine Corps. 14 Jan. 1994. Print.

⁵⁴ Stott, Jeffrey A. Letter to Philip M. Strub. 29 Aug, 1991. Print.

even know exist.” They added: “It’s about honor, duty, and loyalty. It’s about the Military justice system working at its finest.”⁵⁵

Consideration for production assistance was required from the Department of Defense, the U.S. Marine Corps, and the Department of the Navy. Navy Public Affairs was ready to support the film as they did “come off well in this story.”⁵⁶ The Marine Corps Public Affairs Office, however, was hesitant as the movie lacked positive Marine characters. As the film was telling a story of bad Marines, one of the major requests was for a positive marine character that would “balance” the bad Marines. “[t]here still does not exist a strong Marine character to serve as a counter-point to all the dirt bags...”⁵⁷ One of the internal memorandums on the film was titled: “Where are the ‘few good men’?”⁵⁸ The officer argues that the screenplay portrays Marines “as anything but good men.” He continues: “The officers are self-serving, ambitious, hollow, weak-willed, abusive liars. (Except for the lawyers, Col. Randolph and Lt. Ross.) The enlisted Marines are robots who blindly follow a ‘code’ which flies in the face of the ‘band of brothers’ relationship among Marines.” The author, however, does not say that there are no problems like this in Marine units, quite the opposite. But he is sure that “bad officers are such an aberration from the norm that they are quickly discovered, rapidly removed from positions of responsibility, and dealt with through punitive or administrative means.” In his opinion, “the depiction of Marines is totally negative and, in my opinion, totally false.”⁵⁹ Thus, a film where bad Marines are outbalanced by good Marines and

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Smith, Alicia W. Memo for Dr. Walker. 12 Sep. 1991. Print.

⁵⁷ Sherman, Michael T. Memo to Jeffrey A. Stott. 6 Sep. 1991. Print.

⁵⁸ Broeckert, Jerry. Memo to T. V. Draude. 18 Sep. 1991. Print.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

dealt with through administrative means will be an accurate portrayal of the military. Not only in the script for *A Few Good Men*, bad officers are not outweighed by good officers; they do not even understand that something they did is wrong.

A memorandum to Phil Strub from Dan Kalinger summarizes all the problems the Marines had with the script: “I see no way that the Department of Defense can or should support this film, even courtesy support.”⁶⁰ There were three reasons for that: Marines were pictured as corrupt and rigid; the script suggested that there was an “unwritten code” among Marines that permitted violence and retribution against weaker Marines; and the general portrayal of many Marines was negative.

After the meeting with members of Castle Rock Productions and the DoD representatives, it became clear that the DoD and filmmakers saw the script differently. The DoD main problems were: “the lack of balance in characterizations of Marines, the negative undertone of some sort of secret ‘code’ of conduct, and the total lack of redeeming qualities in the character of Col. Jessep, to be played by Jack Nicholson.”⁶¹ The director, however, saw Nicholson’s character “as a solid officer who makes a mistake” while the DoD saw him “as lacking the character and moral fibre expected of a Marine Corps colonel.” The DoD wanted to see an officer acting according to guidelines instead of a real person with flaws and mistakes. Rob Reiner, the director, unlike the DoD, perceived “the production to be a positive depiction of DoD in its vindication of the military justice system. While the ‘bad guys’ happened to be Marines, he thought that we [DoD] would be placated by making the judge and the prosecuting attorneys Marines.”⁶²

⁶⁰ Kalinger, Dan. Memo to Philip M. Strub. 5 Oct. 1991. Print.

⁶¹ Draude, T. V. Memo for the record. 18 Sep. 1991. Print.

⁶² Ibid.

The filmmakers and DoD were trying to find a compromise. The filmmakers offered to change the character of a female lawyer who is one of the “good guys” from a Navy lieutenant to a Marine officer. This was seen by the DoD as “a cosmetic change that would have little bearing on the overall depiction of the Marine Corps as an institution.”⁶³ What the DoD wanted was the expanding of the role of Col Jessep, the “good” guy among three leaders, who eventually commits suicide. The DoD wanted to eliminate the suicide; however, the director said that the suicide was “a critical dramatic turning point in the film” and was reluctant to make this change. The DoD seemed to be willing to cooperate, but only if major revision were made. However, such revisions were difficult to achieve with Reiner who was “obviously very passionate about this film” and wanted DoD help, but he did not “appear willing to make the types of substantial revisions we [DoD] would require in order to give it official support.”⁶⁴ The DoD and the Marines Office were ready to provide courtesy support to make sure that “Marine Corps haircuts, uniform and jargon are reasonably accurate.” However, unless major changes were made to the script, the DoD wanted “to avoid the public’s perception of Marine Corps endorsement.”

Achieving a possible compromise was at a dead-end. The main DoD objection was the negative portrayal of the Marines. They wanted the filmmakers to balance the positive and negative elements of the overall script. The filmmakers already made significant changes by turning one of the principal Navy lawyers into a Marine; making one of the ancillary lawyers and the judge Marines; “placing a disclaimer at the beginning of the film to the effect that the picture is fictional and the incidents depicted are atypical

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

of the Marine Corps; and providing a brief monologue for the Marine judge at the end of the picture in which he inveighs against the principal culprit of the film.” However, those changes were not enough. For example, the DoD wanted the director to make the character of the XO, Lt. Col. Markinson, a “forceful, positive officer.” Mr. Reiner’s opinion on this change, however, was that by making such a change “the plot and characterization would change in an unacceptable way in terms of the drama, conflict, and thematic structure of the film overall.”⁶⁵ Since the time was tight, full cooperation seemed to be impossible, although both Navy and Marines provided courtesy support to the film since significant changes were already made.

On October 2, 1991, Phil Strub, Special Audiovisual Assistant, wrote an official letter to the producers rejecting the script. In the letter it was expressed that the fundamental concern was “the portrayals of the principal Marine Corps characters that we [DoD] find to be inaccurate and consistently negative.”⁶⁶ In the next paragraph Strub explained their position: “We don’t expect each and every military character to be a role model or recruiting advertisement, but we are convinced that a balance of positive and negative characteristics among the principal Marines would be more realistic, therefore more credible and involving to an audience, and potentially more dramatic as well.” In the film, Marines were negatively portrayed, individually and collectively. “Further, we have concluded that the current script reinforces the conclusion that not only is criminal harassment a commonplace and accepted practice within the Marine Corps, but that it requires a sister military service to uncover the wrongdoings and bring the perpetrators to

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Strub, Philip M. Letter to Jeffrey Stott. 2 Oct. 1991. Print.

justice. As presented in the script, the guilty Marines never even understand that they have done anything wrong.”

Thus, the overall image of the military depicted in the script for *A Few Good Men* was negative according to the DoD. The Navy was happy with its portrayal and, unconcerned with the overall message of the film, approved the script. The Marines in particular were not portrayed well, and that is why the assistance was not granted. Technical accuracies were easy to overcome, and the DoD representatives were eager to accept negative portrayals of some officers. What they could not accept was that the military system was not able to administratively deal with bad Marines and thus was far from being perfect. Therefore one can conclude that the DoD is willing to support films that show the military system at its finest, where the problems are corrected by the system and outbalanced by the positive characters that follow the guideline.

The process of approval/denial of films by the DoD is guided by the Department of Defense Instruction Number 5410.16 (January 26, 1989). DODINST 5410.16 says that in order for the DoD to support a project, it should benefit it or be in the best national interest. These two conditions are based on assessing four official requirements, three of them having the leading role in the decision-making process: a film should be accurate; it should be of informational value to the public; and it should help recruitment. While these four requirements are very specific, it is their interpretation that makes the approval process so subjective. As Colonel Shotwell, U.S. Marine Corps, wrote in his letter to the producer of *Field of Fire*, “determining supportability is a somewhat subjective process that is based on whether the script accurately and fairly portrays the U.S. military, whether it has recruiting or public information value, and whether the support is

feasible.”⁶⁷ In spite of being subjective, the decision-making process is based on three unofficial factors: technical and historical accuracy, behavior of individual serviceman, and overall image of the military as a system. The first factor of historical and technical accuracy never represents a real cause for denial, as these types of changes are easy to make and the filmmakers are usually eager to incorporate these changes into the script. The second factor of positive behavior of individual serviceman is more complicated, as it involves specific characters and actions. However, these changes are usually also incorporated to the script as they do not affect the general message and atmosphere of the movie. Thus, in *Flight of the Intruder* and *The Hunt for Red October* the level of profanity was reduced, and some characters were changed and became more positive. And in *Deep Impact* the role of military in national disasters was enhanced. The third factor, positive overall image of the military as a system, is the one that caused denial of the projects. The DoD wants to see films in which the military is presented as a self-guided system in which officers and soldiers do their job and do it well, and in which negative characters are always outbalanced by the positive characters and problems are corrected by the system. Negative characters or incidents can be shown in the film, but they have to be shown as exceptional non-common practice and the negative consequences of the actions should be resolved within the system. According to this factor, *Fields of Fire* was rejected because it portrayed Marines behaving in a negative way without any punishment or references that it is not a common practice. *A Few Good Men* did not get the DoD support because the director refused to change the drama of the story and outbalance bad Marines with good ones. Thus, the DoD decision on supporting

⁶⁷ Shotwell, John M. Letter to James Webb. 1 Aug. 1993. Print.

a film depends on the overall image of the military rather than the overall message of the film.

CHAPTER THREE

One of the most interesting films in terms of getting DoD support is *Clear and Present Danger* (1994) directed by Philip Noyce and produced by Mace Neufeld. The process of bargaining that took place between the DoD and filmmakers allows one to examine what factors are most important for the DoD in their decision on film support.

The process of negotiating on *Clear and Present Danger* consisted of several stages. In the first stage the armed services involved in the project were given the script for review. All of them recommended disapproving the project for some similar and some varied reasons. However, some people in the DoD thought that the film would be beneficial to the military and insisted on finding a compromise for support. All objections were discussed between the DoD and the filmmakers. The script was rewritten several times to meet all the objections, and then the final script was given to all the services involved for the second and final review. This entire expedited review process took five months. As a result, all services approved the project, and it got full DoD support.

In the first stage of the approval process the script was forwarded to the services involved: Office of Drug Enforcement Policy and Support; the United States Special Operations Command; Strategic Plans and Policy Directorate, Western Hemisphere Division J-5 (National Guard); Marine Corps Public Affairs Office; and Office of the Chief of Public Affairs (Army).

After receiving the official request for support and copies of the script, OASD/PA forwarded the script to the Office of Drug Enforcement Policy and Support (DEP&S) to review the script and recommend whether or not support should be authorized and what

changes should be made.⁶⁸ In two weeks the DEP&S issued a memorandum for OASD/PA recommending the DoD abstain from supporting the film. A one-sentence explanation of this conclusion was the following: “It [the script] depicts military members unquestioningly performing activities that are contrary to law and DoD policy.”⁶⁹ Thus, the problem was with the military participating in an illegal war against drug lords in Columbia.

The script was also forwarded to the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) to “determine appropriateness of military production support.”⁷⁰ The comments were the following: “There was little to no mention or reference of Special Operations Forces (SOF); SOF tactics, techniques or procedures were not compromised; and references to SOF equipment were minimal and accurate.” Hence, in terms of accuracy the script was eligible for support, but USSOCOM had objections to how other actors were depicted. These objections were indicated in the same memorandum: “However, in places the script does mock the President in his role as the Commander in Chief, the decision processes on the use of military forces, and the workings of the National Security Council (NSC).”⁷¹ Thus, the problem was not with accuracy in the service depiction but with the President and National Security advisor starting an illegal war and the military knowingly participating in it. The overall depiction of the higher institutions and military in general outweighed the accuracy in portraying specific

⁶⁸ Strub, Philip M. Memo for the Office of Drug Enforcement Policy and Support. 27 May 1993. Print.

⁶⁹ Newberry, Robert J. Memo for OASD (PA) ATTN: Special Assistant (Audiovisual.) 10 June 1993. Print.

⁷⁰ Strub, Philip M. Memo for United States Special Operations Command. 2 Jun. 1993. Print.

⁷¹ Ibid.

military service and its actions – in the final analysis USSOCOM did not recommend DoD support to this project.

Another agency involved in the process of determining DoD approval/denial of the project, Strategic Plans and Policy Directorate, Western Hemisphere Division J-5 (National Guard), was concerned with the potential damage to the US-Latin American relations if the DoD supported the film. In his comments to the OASD/PA, the Chief of the Western Hemisphere Division, J-5 Colonel Edward Ellis wrote that the viewer would have “a difficult time separating fact from fiction.”⁷² It was of particular importance to the U.S.-Latin American relations since the film was dealing with the issues between the United States and several Latin American countries that were “still very sensitive.” Thus the DoD approval of the film might have caused the viewers to believe that the U.S. armed forces were carrying out operations similar to those depicted in the film. Colonel Ellis pointed out that “[i]f Latin American nations believed that the US military conducted any of the following operations which occur in the book, US-Latin American relations and DoD programs could be damaged.”⁷³

The Strategic Plans and Policy Directorate provided four specific comments reflecting their concerns with the portrayal of the U.S. actions towards Latin American countries during the special operation. The first comment dealt with the sequence of the U.S. actions in the Latin American countries when the U.S. troops land in Bolivia and conduct operations in Columbia during which they attack drug-processing plants. They then launch a bomb against a target in Colombia and use Cobra attack helicopters to rescue the ground troops. This sequence of actions was of a particular concern to the

⁷² Ellis, Edward R. Memo for the Special Assistant for Public Affairs. 9 Jun. 1993. Print.

⁷³ Ibid.

Strategic Plans and Policy Directorate since it was portrayed as “unilateral US actions, not coordinated with the governments of the countries in which the actions take place.” The Strategic Plans and Policy Directorate pointed out in bold type that “Latin American countries are extremely sensitive to any violations of their sovereignty.”⁷⁴ The second comment was about the scene in which a U.S. fighter jet F-15 shoots down a civilian aircraft trafficking drugs. The Directorate’s clarification was that it was the U.S. policy to not shoot unarmed civil aircraft. This incident shown in the film could be especially harmful as the U.S. is trying “to convince other nations to agree to the same policy.” The third comment was about an impression in the script that “the Colombian military is either working for or ignoring, the illegal activities of the drug cartel.” The script made it clear that Colombian officers were bribed by the cartel, and some of them even were friends with the drug lords. The Directorate pointed out in bold type that, in truth, “the Colombian military is making great progress in the counterdrug wars – and with much sacrifice.” Such depiction would deteriorate the relations and “[a]t best, they will be offended at the movie’s portrayal of their character.” The fourth comment dealt with one of the final scenes in the script in which the President said that sometimes he would like to level Columbia, Ecuador, and Peru. The directorate simply pointed out that “[t]his statement will not win friends in Latin America.”⁷⁵

Summarizing their comments, the Directorate indicated that any of the mentioned incidents would “outrage” Latin Americans if they thought that the U.S. military was engaging and conducting such activities. Thus, the DoD in its decision to approval or deny the project should “consider the possible perceptions and ensuing consequences of

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

affiliation with this production.”⁷⁶ The Strategic Plans and Policy Directorate did not say reject or approve the project, but it was clear that significant changes in portraying Columbian government and military role in the operation were needed.

The Marine Corps Public Affairs Office had its own reasons to reject the script for *Clear and Present Danger*. First of all, their internal memorandum mentioned that the film would do “little (to nothing) in giving the public a better understanding of the mission of the Cobra [helicopter requested by the producers] or supporting the Marine Corps recruiting effort; we [the Marine Corps] would get little in return for the effort expended.”⁷⁷ The deal was simply not worth it for the Marines. One of the problems was that the script did not portray Marines “as heroes.” Moreover, they were participating in “an already busy scene” and were “just another part of the ‘whistle and bells’ in the firepower provided in that scene.”⁷⁸ In deciding on support to the project, the Public Affairs Marine Corps office was taking into consideration the image of their service rather than the image of the military in general. In the film they wanted to see Marines playing the main role in the operation. The Marine Corps Office, just like the other services, had problems with the operation in general, but for different reasons. The office had doubts that the Marine Corps and the DoD would use that level of firepower on “a not-so-formidable enemy.” They suggested that they probably had “a more formidable enemy during the LA riots.”⁷⁹ As for the comments on specific scenes, the Marine Corps Public Affairs Office objected to the scene showing the Navy bombing and killing civilians, even though it was not depicting Marines. The Office commented that

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Broeckert, Jerry. Memo for John Shotwell. 9 Jun. 1993. Print.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

this scene “portrays the military’s reactions to the death of the civilians as ‘that’s collateral damage and it’s just a fact of war that civilians will be killed.’ ” Major Jerry Broeckert, writing the memo for the OASD/PA, pointed out in this respect the following: “I don’t think we need to reinforce that stereotype.”⁸⁰ This scene with the Navy jet fighter bombing a civilian target would become one of the main changes made to the script. Just like the other services, the Marine Corps had some doubts about the overall story and actions of the higher institutions depicted in the script. They pointed out that “[a]t a time when relations between the military and the President are strained, it’s questionable why we should support a project that shows him running such types of operations in defiance of the Congress.”⁸¹ As a result of all objections, the Marine Corps Public Affairs Office recommended no support from the DoD. Unlike other services, the Marine Corps Office expressed an opinion that was very flexible. In the closing paragraph of the internal memorandum they mentioned that if the DoD decided to support the project and found that the Marine’s support would benefit the DoD, the Marine Corps would reconsider its position.

The Air Force Public Affairs Office also recommended no support to the project. The standard explanation was that the project did not meet the guidelines of the DODINST 5410.16, was of no informational value, and did not enhance public understanding of the Air Force. Specific comments included two objections. The first “obvious” objection was to portraying “the highest level of U.S. government engaging in illegal, covert activities.”⁸² The second objection was the same as that of the Strategic

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Hogler, Walter S. Memo for Special Assistant (Audiovisual.) 17 June 1993. Print.

Plans and Policy Directorate: the actions of the jet fighter. The Air Force Public Affairs Office indicated that “the Air Force wouldn’t shoot down an unidentified, unarmed, non-hostile aircraft in foreign airspace as described in the screenplay.”⁸³ Moreover, throughout the script there were references to other unarmed aircrafts being attacked by the U.S. military. The Air Force found such military activity infeasible. Thus, the main objections made by the Air Force were similar to those made by other services: the illegal operation conducted by the President and National Security advisor in defiance of the Congress and a fighter jet attacking an unarmed civilian airplane.

The Office of the Chief of Public Affairs (Army) after reviewing the script also recommended denial of the project in its current form. The Army Public Affairs Office had four main objections. Excessive use of harsh language throughout the script was a threat to the Army image on the screen. The second objection was that “[t]he mission of the Infantry squad deployed to Columbia is never clearly defined.”⁸⁴ The Army office, just as other offices, had problems with the covert nature of the operation. The Office was concerned that “the legal questions of authority, appropriateness, legitimacy, etc of the covert operation are not addressed.” The third comment, similar to the Strategic Plans and Policy Directorate, was about the Columbia’s unawareness of the operation. The Army’s objection was that “[i]t would be improper for Regular Army forces to participate in such an endeavor.”⁸⁵ The last comment dealt with the mission of attack helicopters that might not be “an authorized use of Army assets in a foreign country.”

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Marovitz, Mitchell E. Memo for Philip M. Strub. 22 June 1993. Print.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Although the Army denied the project, it was clear that if the necessary changes were made, cooperation would be possible.

The Department of the Navy recommended that the DoD provide no support to the film “based on the script as presented.”⁸⁶ The general explanation was that the fictional portrayal of the Navy did not depict a “feasible interpretation of Navy operations and policies as required by DODINST 5410.16.”⁸⁷ Specifically, the Department of the Navy had five comments: three on the depiction of the Navy and two about other aspects of the script. As for objections to the Navy depictions, the first comment was on the lack of knowledge by the Navy command of the A-6 mission to bomb the drug-cartel hacienda. The comment said that neither the commanding officer of the carrier or the battle group commander would allow an armed aircraft to launch without knowing of its mission. Depicting something like this would mean that “the Navy’s has no control over its pilots.” The second comment was on extensive use of profanity throughout the script. It was calculated in the memorandum that there were eighty instances of profanity and such a broad and unreasonable use of it “conveys an incorrect and negative stereotype of the military.”⁸⁸ It was added later in the paragraph that “[i]n this day of Navy core values and awareness of human values in the workplace, this is unacceptable.” The third comment was about a specific Navy enlisted character whose behavior was not explained enough in the script. As for the two general objections, the Department of the Navy did not approve of the “negative characterization of the President as an evil, self-serving man

⁸⁶ Shrou, Gary. Memo to Philip M. Strub. 12 Jul. 1993. Print.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Marovitz, Mitchell E. Memo for Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, Public Affairs (Audio Visual.) 15 Jul. 1993. Print.

without principles.” The second comment was on the Latin America characters portrayed in the script as “negative, raising the issue of possible negative stereotyping.”⁸⁹

Thus all the services involved recommended disapproval of the project. The main objections all services consistently cited were the role of the President and the illegal nature of the operation. In the initial script the President is ordering the illegal covert operation in Columbia prohibited by the Congress. The DoD objected to such action of the Commander-in-Chief despite the fact that in the previous decade President Reagan played a similar role in the Iran-Contra affair. It was revealed during the Iran-Contra hearings, seven years before the film *Clear and Present Danger* was released, that the President had ordered illegal operations in Latin America and the head of the U.S. military knowingly participated. The illegal military operation described in the script resembled the illegal support to the Contras in Latin America directed by the Reagan Administration. Former President Reagan was aware that the Contras were receiving support from the United States despite an Act of Congress forbidding support. In fact, Ronald Reagan ordered U.S. support to help keep the Contras together in “body and soul.”⁹⁰ As for the DoD objection to the military knowingly participating in illegal operation, in reality, during Iran-Contra, the Secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger, was aware of the illegal nature of activities during Iran-Contra. Thus, although similar events happened in reality, the DoD refused to support a film showing these activities.

Other major objections mentioned in addition to the role of the President and the illegal nature of the operation were the killing of the civilians during military operations,

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ “The Iran-Contra Affair 20 Years On.” *The National Security Archive*. The George Washington University. 24 November 2006. Web. 20 June 2011.

negative portrayal of the Latin American countries, total unawareness of the Columbian government of U.S. actions, and the launch of the fighter jet from the carrier with the captain knowing nothing about its mission. Although the support was denied by every service, almost all of them were open to negotiations on possible cooperation, pointing out that the script cannot be supported “in its current form.” Meanwhile, as the memo from the Office of the Chief of Public Affairs (OCPA-LA) said, “[t]here appears to be a ground swell movement throughout DoD to support the movie *Clear and Present Danger*.” The situation was that Phil Strub, Special Audiovisual Assistant at OASD/PA, felt that the movie production would be “supported by DoD – once the required service branch changes are made and several higher-up policy level alterations occur.”⁹¹ So, the assistance to the project, in spite of all the objections and recommendations of denial from all the services, was still possible. On July 20, 1993, Strub, the head of the Washington film liaison office, wrote a letter to Mr. Mace Neufeld, the producer of *Clear and Present Danger*, giving a negative answer to his request. However, in the closing paragraph he indicated that if the producers were ready to make necessary changes, the DoD would be willing to discuss alternatives that would “add to the accuracy and visual impact of the script, without compromising the plot or drama.”⁹² Seven changes indicated by Strub summarized the objections of different services: very negative portrayals of the U.S. President and his national security advisor; U.S. armed forces carrying out illegal, covert operations; very negative portrayal of Columbia; Army forces “conducting ambushes in which the objective seems to be killing lightly-armed, ill-trained peasants instead of destroying drug production facilities”; the Navy launching a

⁹¹ Georgi, David A. Memo to SAPA-ZA. 16 Jul. 1993. Print.

⁹² Strub, Philip M. Letter to Mace Neufeld. 20 Jul. 1993. Print.

covert air strike and the subsequent “trivializing” of collateral damage; an Air Force fighter attacking an unarmed civilian aircraft; and a Marine helicopter gunship attacking “a lightly-defended drug overlord’s residence, with very modest effect.”⁹³ This letter would become the main guidance for the producers in changing the script in order to get DoD support.

Since support for the project was denied, after receiving the official rejection, the producers asked the DoD for technical assistance to correct errors in the script and possibly enable DoD support of the production. The DoD was undoubtedly interested at least in technical support that would allow them to affect the military depiction without giving any commitments. In an internal memo Special Assistant to the Chairman for Public Affairs William Smullen wrote to the Director of the Joint Staff about providing technical assistance to the script without full support: “[E]ven if we do not provide official DoD support, filming will start in October, and this may allow us to limit danger that might otherwise come from blatantly misleading portrayals of special operations.”⁹⁴ Besides, inside the DoD it was expected that the film would “enjoy the same level of popularity as seen in Clancy’s ‘*Hunt for Red October*.’”⁹⁵ Box office results are always of great importance to the DoD. Since for the DoD films are PR tools, the size of the audience is crucial. Having the same producer as *The Hunt for Red October* and *Flight of the Intruder*, big box office hits, *Clear and Present Danger* had all chances to become another hit. Now that it was clear that both the DoD and filmmakers were highly interested in cooperation on the film, the negotiation process on the changes began. The

⁹³ Idib.

⁹⁴ Strub, Philip M. Memo for the Director of the Joint Staff. 2 Aug. 1993. Print.

⁹⁵ Greer, James L. Memo to Gen Hogle. 23 Jul. 1993. Print.

whole process resembled a game, in which each side was trying to get as much as possible while giving to the other side as little as possible.

For the producers to receive official support, they had to meet all the criteria and make the necessary changes. Since the consent of all the services was needed, the filmmakers had to take into consideration the requests of each service. After individual service representatives met with the DoD to discuss support of the project, a list of all main objections was made, and the filmmakers started their part of incorporating necessary changes into the script. Although the number of changes was quite impressive, the producers were willing to incorporate them into the script in order to get DoD support that otherwise would be impossible. John Horton, the producers' representative at the DoD, wrote to the associate producer Lis Kern: "I think that Strub [head of the OASD/PA] would like to find a way to help but he needs some contributions from us to provide a pay off for the military involvement in the film. Otherwise he'll wish us luck but we'll have some large production problems to overcome."⁹⁶

The Army Public Affairs Office had a major objection to the members of their light infantry divisions fighting with "relatively defenseless and underpowered peasants" that were growing and shipping drugs. The Army representatives said that they "would like to see the peasants pictured as more heavily armed and more aggressive."⁹⁷ Enemy image was something the Army was most concerned about. They wanted the scripted enemies to be "characterized as more than the undisciplined, semi-trained campesinos that are slaughtered by US Army personnel." The Army Office for Public Affairs suggested that "professionalizing the enemy force would alleviate much of the depiction

⁹⁶ Horton, John E. Memo to Lis Kern. 25 Oct. 1993. Print.

⁹⁷ Greer, James L. Memo to Gen Hogle. 23 Jul. 1993. Print.

of the US forces defeating ‘innocent’ or ‘inculpable’ guard personnel.”⁹⁸ Such changes were not difficult to incorporate into the script. As a result, peasants working in the secret drug bunkers were heavily armed with guns and rifles and shown guarding and working with a lot of drugs – a portrayal that was meant to make the enemy look ruthless and dangerous. In the film there is also a scene where the special operations force detect a drug warehouse guarded by 150 armed mercenaries. Now the enemy significantly outnumbered the U.S. military force that was caught in a harsh situation.

The Navy Public Affairs Office had their main objection to the scene depicting an aircraft taking off from a carrier to fulfill the mission of dropping a laser bomb. The problem was that from the dialogue it was clear that the commanding officer did not know of the aircraft’s mission. This scene was also seen as “an easy fix.” As a result of this objection, any dialogue indicating the captain’s unawareness was eliminated from the film, leaving a beautiful scene of a jet fighter taking off from the carrier in the middle of the gulf. As film producer Mace Neufeld wrote to Strub, head of the Washington film liaison office, “we [filmmakers] have also eliminated the Painter/Captain sequence alluding to the Captain being unaware of the A-6 smart bomb launch from the carrier.”⁹⁹ The Navy scenes were limited to the A-6 aircraft taking-off from the carrier, a few aerial sequences, dropping of the bomb, and a Navy military funeral at Arlington Cemetery. All these scenes were acceptable under the conditions imposed by DODINST 5410.16. As the Navy Office wrote to the Washington Public Affairs office, “[t]he production company has successfully resolved all prior objections raised by this office.”

⁹⁸ Marovitz, Mitchell E. Memo for Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, Public Affairs (Audio Visual.) 15 Jul. 1993. Print..

⁹⁹ Neufeld, Mace. Letter to Philip M. Strub. 2 Nov. 1993. Print.

The main problem was with the Air Force Public Affairs Office. While at the beginning the only major objection was that two F-15s shoot down an unarmed civilian aircraft, now the service did not want to participate at all and suggested to cut down their role to the one of guarding other services' aircraft. There was dissatisfaction with this decision inside the DoD. They did not want the Air Force to be seen as the "wimpy" service. "While the others are killing the bad guys, all the Air Force does is help the Navy, Army, Marines and Coast Guard by flying around in some fat radar plane."¹⁰⁰ The main change required by the Air Force was made: instead of the U.S. Air Force bombing an unarmed airplane trafficking drugs in the air, the plane is blown up by the special operations forces while it is standing on the ground. Thus, civilian casualties are avoided. Not only was this scene deleted – in the final version of the script there were no Air Force scenes at all.

Aside from the specific objections made by each service, the producers also had to deal with more general objections to the entire operation being illegal and negative portrayals of the U.S. President and Columbia. After receiving comments from the DoD, the script was rewritten again. The new version included some changes on these important issues. In his letter to Strub, Neufeld wrote about the changes that were made in the new script: "[W]hile the President indicates to Cutter [the National Security Advisor] that something must be done about the drug problem, he is kept in the dark with respect to the details, thus preserving his deniability. Further, Cutter's assurance to Ritter [CIA Deputy Director,] that the operation is legal, is clearly established in both dialogue

¹⁰⁰ Greer, James L. Memo to Gen Hogle. 23 Jul. 1993. Print.

and picture.”¹⁰¹ Thus the President technically preserves his deniability in the final version of the film, although it is clear for the viewer that the entire operation is his personal retaliation. As for the military, they are sure that they are conducting a clandestine operation fully authorized by the National Security Advisor. This worked for the DoD because their main objection was that the military was knowingly taking part in a covert operation. Now they were taking part in what they believed to be a clandestine authorized operation. The main objection of the military was satisfied.

Five months after the official letter to the producers indicating all the objections, Strub wrote a memorandum to all services involved asking for the decision on the final substantially revised script. As Strub said in the memorandum, almost all of the changes in the script were made “to ameliorate the negative and inaccurate portrayals.”¹⁰² Strub listed four major changes made to the script in order to make it “reasonably accurate and positive.” The first change was that now the military was depicted as implementing “authorized, legal, clandestine (vice covert) operation.” It was also clear from the script that a military chain of command authorized the mission. Thus, although the nature of the operation was still clearly viewed as covert and illegal by the audience, it was fine with the DoD since the military thought the operation was authorized by the President.

The second change was that the negative portrayals of Colombians and U.S. diplomats were erased from the script. As for the depiction of Columbian government, all the references about its cooperation with the drug lords were eliminated. The only change that was made in the final script concerning Latin American countries was that

¹⁰¹ Neufeld, Mace. Letter to Philip M. Strub. 2 Nov. 1993. Print.

¹⁰² Strub, Philip M. Memo Chief of Public Affairs. 20 Dec. 1993. Print.

the word “Hispanics” was corrected to the word “Spanish-speaking” in the revised script.¹⁰³

The third change was made to ensure “rules of engagement”: the military now was not killing guards and attacking unarmed aircraft. Instead of bombing an unarmed airplane trafficking drugs in the air, it is blown up by the special operations forces while on the ground. Thus, nobody is injured and one of the main objections to killing civilians is observed.

The fourth change was that a Navy A-6 was no longer launched without the awareness of the Captain or battle-group commander. This scene did not have any dialogue whatsoever anymore.

Some other changes that can be seen in the film were also important to the understanding of the DoD approval process, their requirements, and factors that affect their decision. Thus, one of the most engaging scenes in the film is the rescue sequence of saving the survived soldiers in Columbia by Ryan, Clark, and helicopter pilot Colonel Johns. According to the original script, Johns was a military pilot under the command of the National Security Advisor. Once he learns that the soldiers were betrayed by the NSA, he wants to help Ryan and Clark, but he cannot disobey the orders that are not to operate any government craft unless instructed by the commanding officer, the National Security Advisor. In order to bypass the orders, Johns says he is sick and helps Clark and Ryan with their mission.¹⁰⁴ The DoD strongly objected to this sequence. Strub wrote to Neufeld that Johns would not undertake an unauthorized rescue mission and it is irrelevant if he was using a military helicopter or was on leave. Moreover, Johns could

¹⁰³ *Clear and Present Danger* Script. Scenes 19A.

¹⁰⁴ *Clear and Present Danger* Script. Scenes 268 - 272.

only receive orders from his military chain of command, not directly from the National Security Advisor. Besides, the Colombian government must have been made “aware of the rescue mission and showing its approval by providing some support.”¹⁰⁵ While requesting all these changes, the DoD did not forget to mention that they were “not trying to infringe upon the scriptwriter’s domain, just reflect the military rules of engagement, political limitations, and other fundamental aspects of the military that will maintain a reasonable amount of realism and accuracy, within the context of the fictional movie.”¹⁰⁶

Another important change that was made in the film was made in a scene in which a jet fighter drops a laser-guided bomb on the hacienda where all the drug barons are. In the ambush the audience sees Special Forces soldier Chavez operating the laser designator and the CIA agent Clark who is in charge of the operation. In the original script the sequence is the following: the target is acquired and lit, the pilot gets ready to drop the bomb, children emerge from the house and gather around the truck – the target of the bomb. Then the soldier says “Sir”, Clark replies “Yeah, I see them, keep it on the truck,” pilot says “Bombs away,” the laser-guided smart bomb “separates cleanly and falls slowly toward the sea of clouds.”¹⁰⁷ Thus, the target was set after they see children and women playing on the ground, therefore killing civilians. The DoD objected to the purposeful killing of the civilians, especially women and children. As the idea of innocent casualties was important for the filmmakers, they wanted to preserve it while having the DoD support. This task required some creativity. What the filmmakers did was that they changed the sequence of the events. So, in the final script and film, the

¹⁰⁵ Strub, Philip M. Letter to Mace Neufeld. 16 Dec. 1993. Print.

¹⁰⁶ Strub, Philip M. Letter to Mace Neufeld. 3 Dec. 1993. Print.

¹⁰⁷ *Clear and Present Danger* Script. Scenes 162-166.

bomb is dropped first, and then the military personnel see women and children playing on the lawn just before the bomb hits. It is too late for any actions, thus the military responsibility is reduced. This sequence satisfied the DoD because there was nothing their service could do to prevent the civilian casualties as opposed to the original script in which the military knowingly bombed civilians. The producers were also satisfied with the new sequence as it did not change much in the perception of the situation – that during the military operation innocent women and children were killed.

Thus, all the necessary changes were made by the filmmakers, and the film enjoyed full DoD cooperation. In his report Major Georgi, the DoD consultant on the set, wrote in his notes on *Clear and Present Danger*: “The script has been revised to reflect DoD concerns regarding military command and control, recognition of Colombian sovereignty, and an improved depiction of the Presidency.” He continued saying that “Special Operations tactical operations have been made credible, military personnel are realistically portrayed and military equipment and weapons systems are correctly, intelligently and properly used.” In essence, the DoD instead of minimizing the damage from the inaccurate portrayal of the military as it was planned at the beginning, now created a film in which the military was portrayed in a positive light as professionals and even heroes. Major Georgi expressed this idea in following words: “In short, military depictions have become more of a ‘commercial’ for us more than damage control and the production offers good public informational value.”¹⁰⁸

Thus, as clearly expressed in one of the internal memorandums, it was the positive nature of the overall image of the military that allowed the DoD to provide support to the

¹⁰⁸ Georgi, David A. Notes on *Clear and Present Danger*. Dec. 8, 1993.

film *Clear and Present Danger*: “In sum, although the nation’s executive office is not treated well in the film, the members of the Department of Defense and Department of Transportation are seen as caring professionals out there doing a difficult and dangerous job for the nation . . . and doing it well.”¹⁰⁹

It is important to note that the DoD is interested in the overall image of the military rather than the overall message of the film. The film’s message can be pro-war or anti-war; however, it will be the overall depiction of the military as a system that will affect the DoD decision. That is partially why it is possible that the same film can be rejected by one office and approved by another. This happened with *A Few Good Men* when the Navy supported the film as they were portrayed well, while the Marines rejected it. That is also the reason why *Clear and Present Danger* finally got DoD assistance even though the overall message and atmosphere of the film had not changed a lot in comparison with the original rejected script. Thus, the DoD in their decision on supporting or rejecting a film is basically guided by the overall image of the military.

¹⁰⁹ Marovitz, Mitchell E. Memo for Chief of Public Affairs. 26 Jul. 1994. Print.

CONCLUSION

For almost a century the Department of Defense has been assisting Hollywood in making war films. The DoD provides producers with military equipment, bases, and personnel at a significantly low cost, and in return the DoD gets the right to change the scripts. During the negotiations between the DoD and the producers regarding the script, filmmakers aim to obtain DoD consent while trying to prevent significant changes to the script. The DoD, in turn, tries to observe the DODINST 5410.16 provision and ensure a positive image of the military in the film.

According to the main provision followed by the DoD in their decision on approval/denial of the script, there are two main conditions under which the DoD support should be provided: a film has to be beneficial for the Department of Defense or be in the best national interest. These two conditions are based on the consideration of four requirements. First, a film has to be accurate and feasible in portraying the armed forces. Second, a film has to have informational value to the public. Third, a film has to enhance the U.S. Armed Forces recruiting and retention programs. Fourth, a film should not appear to endorse activities that are contrary to U.S. policy. While these four criteria are referred to in DoD decisions on approving/denying projects, the study of the internal correspondence on numerous films shows that the changes that the DoD request fall under three categories: accuracy (both historical and technical,) behavior of individual serviceman, and overall image of the military. Changes based on accuracy rarely prevent the DoD from providing their support, as these changes are easy to incorporate into the script, and they do not usually affect the storyline. Changes on behavior of individual serviceman might require modification of some characters and their actions. Producers

usually tend to incorporate these changes as well. It is the third factor, however, of overall military image, that most causes both rejection of the film by the DoD and refusal of film producers to accept changes. This factor is the most important for the DoD in their decision for approving/denying a project. A film can be historically and technically accurate and still will not be supported because of the negative military image. The overall message of the film does not affect the DoD decision on support nearly as much as the overall image of the military. Thus, a film can be anti-war in its overall message and might still get DoD support if it shows the positive overall image of the military.

The film *Clear and Present Danger* represents a valuable case study because the extensive negotiations between the DoD and film producers and changes made to the original script allow one to examine how the DoD makes their decision on supporting/rejecting a project and what affects this decision. Studying the considerable internal DoD correspondence on this film shows that while technical accuracy was important to the DoD it was the overall image of the military that they were most of all concerned with. The main change that was required by the DoD was the improvement of the military image. Despite the film negatively portraying the White House and criticizing the establishment, the military was shown as professionally carrying out a mission that they believed was in the U.S. national interest.

Thus, the studying of numerous correspondences shows that in providing support to films the DoD is conveying the positive image of the military that is meant to educate the public on the U.S. armed forces and enhance recruitment. Whether this is censorship or mutual exploitation, it is important for film audiences to be aware of the relationship between Hollywood and the Pentagon.

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