

★ CHAPTER 2 ★

“A COMMERCIAL FOR US”

The cantina was crowded. Waiters dashed from table to table, balancing spicy dishes and exotic drinks on wooden trays. Ivy covered the walls and flowers adorned the tables. The restaurant was beautiful, but the smell of horse shit was overwhelming.

Producer Mace Neufeld and director Phillip Noyce sat at a large table with their location manager, Stuart Neumann, taking in the local color and flavor of Medellin, Colombia—the cocaine capital of the world and the setting for their next movie, *Clear and Present Danger*. Based on the Tom Clancy novel, the film would star Harrison Ford as CIA agent Jack Ryan, who battles drug kingpins in Colombia—and dangerous men in his own government.

Fabio Ochoa, the cantina’s owner, sat in an oversized chair across the room. Men, women, and children approached his table to shake his fat hand. Ochoa—all 360 pounds of him—had been one of the top drug lords in Colombia until the local authorities made him an offer he couldn’t refuse: Get out of the dope business and they would let him live. So he got out of the drug business—at least temporarily—and built a restaurant, and to make it a little different, he constructed a corral right in the middle of the dining room. So now, on this warm afternoon in 1993, he spends the day holding court and watching his grandchildren as they ride his elegant Paso Fino horses around the restaurant to the delight of his customers. It was just the kind of local color the producer had been looking for.

The filmmakers had flown into Medellín from Bogotá the night before. Their studio bosses back at Paramount Pictures were worried for their safety, and with good reason. Murders and kidnappings were common in this part of the world. And airplanes were crashing—or being bombed out of the sky—on a regular basis. Just before their plane took off from Bogotá, somebody came onboard, knocked on the cabin door, and handed the pilot a revolver. And just a few weeks earlier, cartel bandits had blown up several radar beacons along their route—instruments that were needed to navigate over the vast mountain range that separates the two cities.

But a State Department employee stationed in Medellín had been looking out for them. He showed them the sights, and steered them clear of the worst neighborhoods, and before long they were back home in Hollywood with some good stories to tell and a real sense of intrigue and danger that would permeate their movie.

But dealing with the Pentagon would prove even more difficult.

Right up until the day shooting was to start, Neufeld didn't know if he was going to get the Pentagon's approval for his movie. Phil Strub, the Pentagon's chief liaison to the film industry, was playing hardball. He wanted major changes in the script before he would give Neufeld what he wanted, which was the use of several F-14 jet fighters, three state-of-the-art Black Hawk attack helicopters, and access to Arlington National Cemetery.

In a July 20, 1993, letter to Neufeld, Strub said that the Pentagon wouldn't be providing assistance to the production because of its "very negative portrayals of the U.S. President and his national security advisor; U.S. military combat forces conducting illegal, covert operations in Colombia; very negative portrayal of Colombia."

Neufeld had read the Pentagon's guidelines for assisting film productions. They required filmmakers to accurately portray the military, but they didn't say anything about making the government of Colombia look good—or even the president of the United States, for that matter.

Neufeld was in a jam. Jet fighters would be hard to find, but he could get the special effects department to whip up something resembling an F-14 in flight; and he could rent Huey helicopters, put some machine guns in the doors, and paint them to look like army choppers. And he got

the prop department busy at work in case they had to turn a park into Arlington National Cemetery.

“We had some fake tombstones standing by,” location manager Neumann recalls. “A couple hundred.”

But it would be a lot more expensive to do all this, so Neufeld was still pressing the Pentagon for assistance. But it wasn’t going to be easy, and large parts of the script would have to be changed to satisfy Strub. Neufeld was reluctant to cave in at first, and battled Strub for weeks to keep the script intact. But in the end, Neufeld realized that unless he gave the Pentagon what it wanted, he wouldn’t get what he wanted.

“Perhaps the biggest hurdle the [Department of Defense’s] public affairs officers had to overcome was the filmmakers’ sense of our meddling in their product and our sense that they weren’t taking us seriously,” said Army Maj. David Georgi, the technical advisor that the army assigned to the film, in an internal memo dated July 26, 1994—a few days after shooting was completed.

“There was a tension, almost until the day filming began, which manifested itself in our comments which went unanswered in subsequent drafts of the script,” Georgi wrote. “When the filmmakers realized that unless the services were satisfied with the script, approval would not be granted, the changes were finally made.”

One of the script changes that the Pentagon insisted on was a line spoken by the president of the United States at the end of the movie. Frustrated by the violence and lawlessness of the drug cartels, the president says, only half-jokingly, in a November 10, 1992, draft of the script, that he wishes he could blow up most of South America.

“Those sons-of-bitches,” the president says, referring to the Colombian drug lords. “I swear, sometimes I’d like to level that whole damn country—and Peru and Ecuador while we’re at it.”

Strub, however, was not going to allow anything like that in a movie that the Pentagon was supporting.

“At the end of the script, the President of the United States swears that, sometimes, he’d like to level Colombia, Ecuador and Peru,” wrote Air Force Col. Edward B. Ellis, chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff’s Strategic Plans and Policy Directorate, Western Hemisphere Division, in a June 9, 1993, memo to Strub. “This statement will not win friends in Latin America.”

So at the request of the Pentagon, the offending dialogue was eliminated. But that's not all Strub wanted changed.

In the original script, the film begins when a Coast Guard cutter discovers the luxury yacht *Empire Builder* adrift in the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico, its owner—a close personal friend of the president—brutally murdered. We soon learn that the president's friend and his wife were murdered by Colombian drug lords, and during a meeting at Camp David, the president tells his national security advisor and the director of the CIA that he wants revenge for his friend's death.

"I am sick and tired of those monkeys," the president says in the November 10, 1992, draft of the script. "I promised the American people I'd do something about this drug problem, and we haven't done squat. I want these goofs to get a message."

"What sort of message, Mr. President?" asks his national security advisor.

"That poison of theirs is gonna stop flooding in here like piss from a tall cow," the president angrily responds. "We're gonna shut 'em down! And while we're at it, I wouldn't mind bustin' some butt, if you know what I mean."

"I hear you, sir," says the director of the CIA.

"Let those jaboloneys know we're all fed up with their bullshit!" the president fumes.

"Sir—what you're asking for—it can't be accomplished through routine police agencies," says his national security advisor.

"What the hell you think I got CIA here for?" the president bellows.

"But, Mr. President, even we have limits in this kind of effort," the CIA director responds.

"This type of endeavor requires maximum resources," says the national security advisor.

"Interpret that for me, please," the president says.

"Sir, either our national security is threatened by these people, or it is not," the national security advisor says.

"Yeah—well, I said that, too, didn't I?" the president asks.

"Yes, sir, you did," says the national security advisor.

"Boys, let's just put it this way," the president says. "I want some payback—and y'all better see I get it."

This revenge motif was too much for Strub and the Pentagon, how-

ever. It would have to be eliminated if the producers were to get military assistance for their picture. And it was eliminated.

In the final draft of the script, the president comes off much more diplomatically in the scene where he gives the orders to strike back at the drug lords. Gone is any mention of “payback.” Gone is any mention of “bustin’ some butt.” Gone is any cursing. Gone is any reference to the Colombian drug dealers as “monkeys” and “jaboloneys.”

In the final shooting script, the president is more resolute—angry about the murder of his friend, to be sure, but his orders are based on national security, not revenge. This scene has now been boiled down to its bare essence. The president simply says: “These drug cartels represent a clear and present danger to the national security of the United States.”

Numerous other changes demanded by the military were also made in the script, including the elimination of a scene in which a navy jet shoots down an unarmed civilian airplane that’s transporting a shipment of cocaine. At the Pentagon’s request, the script was changed so that the plane is blown up on the ground by American soldiers—without any loss of life.

“The script has been revised to reflect DOD [Department of Defense] concerns regarding military command and control, recognition of Colombian sovereignty and an improved depiction of the Presidency,” wrote Major Georgi, on December 8, 1993, in his after-action report on the film’s production. “In short, military depictions have become more of a ‘commercial’ for us, more than damage control, and the production offers good public information value.”

Turning films into “commercials” for the military is what it’s all about for Strub and the Pentagon. Whether they succeed or fail is largely dependent on how craven the producers are, and there is no shortage of craven producers in Hollywood.

For Major Georgi, *Clear and Present Danger* was the last of a dozen movies and twenty television shows that he worked on for the Pentagon as a technical advisor before retiring from the army in 1994. He still works occasionally as a military consultant for Hollywood movie producers.

Georgi, a candid man who loves the army, doesn’t pull any punches when discussing the role he and the military play in shaping movies.

“Nothing was easy, but the process was simple,” he says. “I’d get a call at my office in L.A. and they’d say they want military support, and I’d say, ‘Okay, send me a treatment.’ And right then, you could tell if it was going to get support. If they hesitated, it usually meant they had something to hide—something in the script that might not portray the military so well.”

Once a film got approved for military assistance, Georgi would be on the set everyday to make sure that the producers stuck to the approved script and didn’t try to sneak antimilitary scenes into the film that hadn’t been approved.

“On *Clear and Present Danger*, if things were being changed, if they were shooting scenes in different ways, I’d say, ‘Well, I’m taking my toys and I’m going home,’” he recalls with a laugh. “‘I’m taking my tanks and my troops and my location, and I’m going home.’ And that would draw the attention of the producer. That occurred on nearly every production that I supported at some time. On almost every production, there was a disagreement that had to be resolved during shooting. I’d say, ‘Shoot it like it’s in the script,’ and then they would want to shoot it a different way. There were compromises on both sides.

“Always, somewhere in the mind of the producers, they’d try and turn the picture in the direction that they had originally presented to us. They always had that in the back of their minds. It would be my job as a technical advisor to make sure that the movie did not stray substantially from the original approved version.”

But is that an appropriate role for the military? Making sure that scripts don’t change substantially from their original “approved versions”? What does that do to the filmmaking process? Many movies undergo script changes right up until the last day of shooting. The director may not know if something is working on film until he shoots it and sees the rushes—the day’s footage. In Hollywood, the guiding principle is: If something isn’t working, change it. But the job of the Pentagon technical advisor is to put a brake on that process, to keep filmmakers from changing their minds and changing their scripts—which is antithetical to the filmmaking process.



Phil Strub, the head of the Pentagon's film office (*right*), and Maj. David Georgi (*left*), tour the set of *Clear and Present Danger* with an unidentified soldier (*center*). The film's producers agreed to make numerous script changes in exchange for Pentagon assistance. (Photo courtesy of U.S. Army)

NOTES

"CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER"

8 Dec 93

After over six months of active negotiations, the Paramount Pictures production of "Clear and Present Danger" has moved beyond the coordination and staffing stage enroute to securing DOD approval of military support. Mr. Phil Strub, ATSD(PA)/AV, representatives of J-3 Special Operations Division, and OCPA-LA have been working closely with the producers and writers of the production to develop a script acceptable to the armed forces. Staffing has been accomplished with DOD, J-3, SOCOM, USASOC, USCG, Navy, USAF, CIA, FBI, DEA, and the White House.

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. Through the intervention and assistance of a Special Operations technical advisor, guidance has blended operational realism with the exploits of story characters. 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 short, military depictions have become more of a "commercial" for us more than damage control and the production offers good public information value.

A military requirements list is currently under revision.

Production commenced 8 Nov 93. The USCG will provide support 13-14 Dec.

An informal "deadline" of 17 Dec has been established for DOD project approval to allow the time necessary to coordinate service support in late December, and January - March 1994.

MAJ GEORGI

Maj. David Georgi's notes on *Clear and Present Danger*, December 8, 1993.