

THIN RED LINES: EARLY COLD WAR MILITARY CENSORSHIP OF HOLLYWOOD  
WAR MOVIES

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## **ABSTRACT**

J. Davis Winkie: Thin Red Lines: Early Cold War Military Censorship of Hollywood War Movies  
(Under the direction of Joseph T. Glatthaar)

The U.S. military has long enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with Hollywood, stretching from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. But during the 1950s, the Department of Defense enforced an ad hoc censorship system on war movies through economic leverage provided by its Hollywood production support program. Thin Red Lines explores the origins, mechanics, and impact of the DOD's Hollywood liaison office, founded in 1949 under Don Baruch.

Baruch's office made edits to film scripts, and a thematic analysis of the edits reveals the "red lines" that filmmakers could not cross in their war movies. Seven red lines emerge: American war crimes, mass American casualties, disturbing combat scenes, excessive indiscipline/insubordination, toxic/incompetent leadership, American racial inequality, and excessive German or Japanese war crimes. Thus the Baruch office played a large role in shaping America's burgeoning memory of WWII and perhaps opened the door to moral injury in Vietnam vets.

To Dean and Gabrielle, who somehow tolerate my nonsense.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## INTRODUCTION

Our ability to influence [war movies] stems from the fact that in many cases...production of the picture is impossible without our assistance, [so] the producer comes to us and requests that assistance. The assistance which we may be able to extend may consist of technical advice, clearance to visit military installations to photograph backgrounds, clearance to board Naval vessels or military aircraft, or even permission to borrow certain military equipment needed for the authentic portrayal of certain scenes or actions. In the Department of Defense, we have...certain criteria, in light of which the acceptability of the proposal is viewed.

- LTC Clair E. Towne, U.S. Army, speech to 1951 Theatre Owners of America Convention<sup>1</sup>

The script of this picture “Sands of Iwo Jima” has been carefully reviewed and revised by Headquarters Marine Corps. It is felt the finished product will portray the work of the Navy and the Marine Corps in their march across the Pacific[.]

- Unsigned draft letter from USMC to James Forrestal’s widow, 1949<sup>2</sup>

In the wake of WWII, the newly-formed Department of Defense regarded the American motion picture industry – especially war movies – as “more than entertainment,” and so did the

American public. In her field-defining book, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a*

*Genre*, Jeanine Basinger argues that during the war, infantry combat films had “filled the needs

of the wartime public for information placed in a narrative and thus more personal context.”<sup>3</sup> But

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<sup>1</sup> Clair Towne, Speech to Theatre Owners of America Convention, 27 September 1951, Box 14, Folder 27, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C.

<sup>2</sup> Unsigned draft correspondence from USMC to Josephine Ogden Forrestal; 2 July 1949; Movie, Sands of Iwo Jima (1), 30 Dec. 1948-17 Jan. 1950 [cooperation with making of and publicity for]; Correspondence and Subject Files, ca. 1946 - ca. 1950; USMC Division of Public Information; Record Group 127 (RG 127): Records of the U.S. Marine Corps; National Archives at College Park.

<sup>3</sup> Jeanine Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 20



they took on a new significance after the Allied victory, playing a crucial role in shaping American historical memory. According to Basinger, the first wave of postwar WWII films constructed a new “filmed reality” that had to reconcile propagandistic popular conceptions of war with returning veterans’ combat experience, sparking a “reexploration process [that] would help us...understand how [the war] changed and affected us, and to justify what we did during those years.”<sup>4</sup> Yet an in-depth investigation of the war film industry and DOD records reveal that Basinger and others have missed a crucial element of the equation. In this study, I demonstrate that the military exploited its Hollywood production assistance program to establish a system of voluntary censorship for early Cold War combat films amid this “reexploration process,” playing an active part in enshrining the “good war” myth. This project also uncovers the military’s reasons for restricting peacetime creative expression during the height of McCarthyism, and what consequences its actions had for America’s burgeoning memory of the war.

Many scholars hold that the postwar “reexploration process” adopted a conservative, patriotic approach to balance the needs of combat veterans with those of the general public. They point to films that sanded off the war’s rough edges and downplayed (or omitted altogether) the horror of the combat experience.<sup>5</sup> In their eyes, these movies made the new cultural image of

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 140-42.

<sup>5</sup> See Craig Cameron, *American Samurai: Myth and Imagination in the Conduct of Battle in the First Marine Division, 1941-1951* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 245-251; Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Lawrence Suid, *Guts and Glory: The Making of the American Military Image in Film* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 91-125. Frank Wetta and Martin Novelli offer a compatible alternative framework – Hollywood created “moral fiction” for a public that was incapable of handling visceral reenactments of combat. Another phrase they coin to describe the films is “sentimental militarism.” See Frank Wetta and Martin Novelli, “On Telling the Truth About War: World War II and Hollywood’s Moral Fiction, 1945-1956” in *Why We Fought: America’s Wars in Film and History* ed. Peter Rollins and John O’Connor (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 259-282.

combat palatable for both veterans of the front lines and the rest of America. Others hold that images of the Korean War interrupted the “reexploration process,” inspiring darker, anti-militaristic themes that crept into even WWII-set films.<sup>6</sup> The early-to-mid 1950s were a fraught period when Americans were torn between war fatigue and the demands of militarization and anti-Communism. But virtually all scholars – regardless of their arguments – underestimate the scope, scale, and success of the military’s efforts to mold the cinematic image of combat. This study demonstrates that despite the military censorship system’s voluntary nature, it significantly shaped all postwar combat films. Participating movies ceded editorial powers to the DOD’s film liaison office (headed by Don Baruch) and military officers in return for a wealth of production support, and filmmakers who did not secure the military’s assistance had to reframe entire screenplays in the absence of tanks, planes, artillery, and loaned servicemen. Scholars have never fully understood this creative dilemma, though, due to the incomplete historiography examining early Cold War military-Hollywood relations.

But context necessitates a brief interlude to discuss the early years of the Cold War. During WWII, the alliance between the Soviets and the West was once born from no more than necessity. As the conflict drew to a close and the Soviets began to consolidate political and ideological control of Eastern Europe, it became apparent that the “Allies” would split. They did not divorce amicably. When the Soviets blockaded West Berlin in 1948, all semblance of cooperation broke down. The United States and United Kingdom adopted a policy of aggressive containment, intervening in the Greek Civil War and establishing NATO. The Soviets pursued ideological expansionism, seeing the Chinese Communists to victory in 1949 and assisting Kim

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<sup>6</sup> See Andrew Huebner, *The Warrior Image: Soldiers in American Culture from the Second World War to the Vietnam Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 135-148; Lisa Munday, *American Militarism and Anti-Militarism in Popular Media, 1945-1970* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012), 46-79.

Il-sung in his invasion of South Korea in the spring of 1950. Moreover, the stakes were now impossibly high – the Soviets had detonated an atomic bomb of their own in the late summer of 1949. None knew whether the conflict would escalate into outright war. And throughout the early years of this Cold War, audiences still filed into theaters across America – and the DOD endeavored to ensure that war movies would support the cause.

### **Historiography & Public Memory**

A narrow yet polarized vein of secondary literature offers partial insight into the military's early Cold War censorship practices. The first text to broach the topic was *Guts and Glory: Great American War Movies*, by Lawrence Suid. He published the initial edition while still working on his Ph.D. in American Studies at Case Western Reserve University; he released an expanded version in 2002.<sup>7</sup> The second book, David Robb's 2004 *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies*, attempted to revise Suid's argument, with limited success.<sup>8</sup> Both works explore the relationship between the military and Hollywood, but neither reconstructs the Department of Defense's patterns of censorship in any systematic manner.

When it comes to the first wave of post-WWII combat films, Suid writes a fine production history focused on back-room Hollywood politics and the technical aspects of making combat films. Ensuring technical accuracy in war films during this time period required the assistance of the military, but *Guts and Glory's* main objective is to chart the thematic and

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<sup>7</sup> Lawrence Suid, *Guts & Glory: Great American War Movies* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978); Lawrence Suid, *Guts and Glory: The Making of the American Military Image in Film* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2002). All references to Suid hereafter will be from the 2002 edition, as he did not change the relevant chapters of his book.

<sup>8</sup> David Robb, *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004).

chronological development of the American military image in film. It does not attempt to assess systematically the DOD and military's role in Hollywood. But Suid does portray the DOD and the military as willing partners for filmmakers – they were committed to ensuring “realistic” portrayals of the military on screen. With the help of documents exclusively provided to him by the DOD, he effectively relays the massive assistance the military provided to filmmakers: the Air Force loaned rare gun camera footage, twelve B-17 bombers, and an inactive air reserve base to Twentieth Century Fox to shoot *Twelve O'Clock High* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1949); the Marine Corps gave Republic “complete cooperation” on *Sands of Iwo Jima* (Republic, 1950), which included stock footage, equipment, technical advice, unrestricted access to Camp Pendleton, a miniature boot camp for the actors, and even a battalion's worth of marines.<sup>9</sup> The author, however, dances around a rather obvious question: what did the military want in return for all of this support? While he does mention script edits throughout the text, he fails to analyze them thematically or systematically and to embrace fully the *quid pro quo* nature of the arrangement.

In contrast to Suid, Robb focuses exclusively on the *quid pro quo* arrangement in *Operation Hollywood*, declaring it “Hollywood's dirtiest little secret.” He lays out the stakes and process of obtaining military cooperation rather succinctly, if a touch carelessly:

Film and TV producers have allowed this to happen because collaborating with the Pentagon can save them a lot of money. Millions of dollars can be shaved off a film's budget if the military agrees to lend its equipment and assistance. And all a producer has to do to get that assistance is submit five copies of the script to the Pentagon for approval; make whatever script changes the Pentagon suggests; film the script exactly as approved by the Pentagon; and prescreen the finished product for Pentagon officials before it's

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<sup>9</sup> Suid has since donated his papers to Georgetown University, though a portion of the collection is private. That was not always the case; researchers were once able to access them in their entirety with his permission. Why did it change? David Robb was one of the last scholars to use them; Suid, *Guts and Glory*, 113–14, 119–22.

shown to the public. It's a devil's bargain that's a good deal for both sides. And the only thing Hollywood likes more than a good movie is a good deal.<sup>10</sup>

The process of securing the military's approval is more complex than Robb suggests, as this study demonstrates, but Robb correctly identifies the symbiotic relationship between the military and Hollywood. He further argues that "the practice is blatantly unconstitutional" and an infringement upon studios' First Amendment rights because the military's approval process favors some filmmakers over others. While Robb's legal analysis may be lacking, his sources – Suid's documents from the DOD's Hollywood liaison office – supports his claim that the military has influenced film content over the decades.

What crippled *Operation Hollywood*, however, is that it is so disorganized and lacking in analysis that Robb is able to offer little beyond transcribing the sources themselves, which he sometimes does. Each chapter focuses on the military approval tribulations of one individual film, and although Robb enlivens the narratives by including interviews with the film industry professionals involved, his book is severely undercut for want of a coherent argument, chronology, or thematic analysis. One of the opening chapters is about *Forrest Gump*, and chapter 25 is but five pages about *Stripes*. What lies between and after is a smorgasbord of movies and photocopied documents. Robb's incessant sensationalism and editorializing frustrates readers seeking substantive analysis. By the same standard, his lack of references is exasperating.<sup>11</sup> Yet when Larry Suid published a scathing review of *Operation Hollywood*, Robb acquitted himself well in response, ultimately emerging victorious.

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<sup>10</sup> Robb, *Operation Hollywood*, 25.

<sup>11</sup> A brief note on this point. As critical as I am being of Robb's book, he was warm and helpful when I cold-called him in an effort to track down his sources.

The fall 2005 iteration of the journal *Film & History* featured a vitriolic exchange between Larry Suid and David Robb that began with the Suid's scorched earth review of *Operation Hollywood*. It was likely prompted by Robb's footnote on page 235 – the book's only footnote, in fact – that questions Suid's objectivity in light of the special access afforded him by the military and DOD. Remarkably, Suid opts not to attack the book for its disorganization or poor references but instead targets Robb's credibility. Suid holds nothing back in his polemic, spraying phrases such as “garbage in, garbage out,” “egregious errors of fact,” “nothing could be farther from the truth,” and “his criticisms are transparently false.”<sup>12</sup> He challenges Robb on multiple fronts, claiming that Hollywood's relationship with the military could not possibly be a secret because “Virtually every military movie [during the 1930s through 60s]... contained a title expressing the filmmakers' thanks for the assistance they had received from the armed services and acknowledged that the motion pictures could not have been made without the assistance. So where is the secret?” Suid also flagellates Robb – perhaps rightly so – for suggesting that the military may have infringed upon filmmakers' free speech rights:

Robb claims that as taxpayers, filmmakers should have access to military men and equipment whether or not a service likes a particular script. By that logic, any citizen could knock on the door of Air Force One and demand to be taken to his or her destination since the citizen paid taxes. Yes, the armed services require that a production must offer benefit to them or be in their best interest to qualify for assistance. General Motors was never going to help Ralph Nader make a movie about the Corvair. No organization wants to be portrayed negatively. Why should the armed services be any different and be required to provide help to a film which portrays historical events or military procedures inaccurately?

Suid's parting shot, however, is the most inexplicable portion of the review. He declares: “In almost 100 years of providing assistance to filmmakers, the military has never once prevented a

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<sup>12</sup> Lawrence H. Suid and David L. Robb, “Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies (Review),” *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 35, no. 1 (2005): 75–77, <https://doi.org/10.1353/flm.2005.0027>.

movie from being made or distributed. Robb's claim to the contrary demonstrates his inability to present an accurate account of the relationship between Hollywood and the armed services." This assertion allowed Robb to respond with a full broadside.

Robb's response, printed directly below Suid's review, opens with an accusation: "I am not a bit surprised, however, by the tone of this self-serving review, as it comes from an author who has allowed Mr. Phil Strub at the Pentagon's film office to review his book...before it was published... No legitimate historian would ever do such a thing." He quickly refutes Suid's claims, citing four specific instances from *Operation Hollywood* where films never escaped made it off the drawing board because they could not secure military support. In response to Suid's argument that the message of appreciation to the DOD in a film's credits constituted disclosure of the changes made to maintain the military's support, Robb retorts: "He appears to suggest that because the DOD receives a little "thank you" acknowledgement at the very bottom of a film's end credits, that everyone should know that the military had a hand in shaping the content of the film." Robb appears to be correct here; a short credit blurb belies the nature of the arrangement between the military and Hollywood. Another response from Suid offered more ad hominem attacks, but little more substance than the initial review. Suid and Robb's public spat is demonstrative of the massive gulf between them in a limited historiography.

Missing from the smoking rubble of their feud is a comprehensive understanding of the content limitations that the military imposed in return for their production assistance. Neither author systematically analyzes the military's requested script edits. This study instead uses correspondence between DOD officials, military officers, and filmmakers to thematically reconstruct the military's censorship program from the ground up. I do so by charting the "red lines" that filmmakers could not cross without forsaking military production support. There were many red lines, ranging from American war crimes to discussions of racial inequality in

America. Two ideologies pervading official circles in America – militarism and anti-Communism – shaped and influenced the various motivations driving the red lines.

But because the military's *de facto* censorship program was voluntary (and if one is inclined to believe the military's denials, not censorship), John Bodnar's framework for the formation of public memory lends itself to understanding the era's war movies. Bodnar argues that a dialectic between the "official and vernacular" shapes each individual object of public memory and commemoration.<sup>13</sup> Since political power and other structural factors favor official cultural expressions, the vernacular's role is diminished in public memory. In practice, this means that most memorials and other cultural sites of memory reflect the commemorative vision of the powerful, rather than that of the people. The arts – film, painting, music, and other forms of popular expression – are traditionally the realm of the vernacular. But this changes when censorship or other creative restrictions are in place.

To apply Bodnar to our period's war films, the U.S. military's official cultural interests heavily shaped and influenced filmmakers' otherwise vernacular expressions though its red lines. But the dialectic nature of Bodnar's framework also accounts for variations in the syntheses – the finished films. Thus this project demonstrates the need for a fundamental reevaluation of the early Cold War's Hollywood combat films. Movies did not merely shape initial public memory of WWII; they *were* the initial public memory of WWII, a veiled form of quasi-official commemoration.

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<sup>13</sup> John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 13.



## CHAPTER 1: MILITARY CENSORSHIP: ORIGINS & ORGANIZATION

The American military's voluntary system of film censorship did not appear from thin air at the onset of the Cold War. Rather, it emerged from the confluence of two trends in Hollywood: new forms of censorship under the Production Code Administration (PCA) and the federal government's Bureau of Motion Pictures (BMP), as well as a preexisting military production support program.

During WWII, in the Allied nadir of summer 1942, the U.S. government established the Office of War Information to manage domestic and international public information campaigns. The Bureau of Motion Pictures was their Hollywood-focused wing. Instead of trying to censor new releases, the BMP focused on encouraging the studios to line their films with propaganda offering ideological support for the war effort. Its first director, newspaperman Lowell Mellett, circulated a pamphlet that boiled down to one question for filmmakers: "Will this picture help win the war?"<sup>14</sup> In America, the BMP had no *de jure* mandate to suppress pictures that failed in the task in question. Hollywood scoffed at Mellett and ran him out of town. But his replacement, Ulric Bell, had a different approach. Under his watch, the BMP cultivated its relationship with OWI's export censors, gaining the indirect ability to deny lucrative export licenses to films that ran afoul of Mellett's guidelines. The timing was fortuitous. Historians Clayton Koppes and Gregory Black observe that because Hollywood films closely followed liberating American

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<sup>14</sup> Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 108–10.

troops into Western Europe, the “carrot of reconquered markets” now balanced “the club of censorship.” After Bell made a show of denying a handful of export licenses, his strategy began to work. The studios fell in line. “From a mixture of patriotism and the profit motive,” they conclude, “Hollywood became a compliant part of the American war machine.”<sup>15</sup> The military would not forget the BMP’s success with weaponizing indirect power to influence the movies.

If the Bureau of Motion Pictures was an early lesson for the postwar military in influencing film content, the recent history of the Production Code Administration was a veritable seminar on converting economic leverage into censorship power without alienating Hollywood executives. The Production Code Administration, founded in 1934, was Hollywood’s self-censorship apparatus. It colluded with theater owners to enforce a morality-based censorship program – the Production Code – on all American film releases. The PCA also utilized a new style of censorship; chief censor Joseph Breen intervened *during* the production process, eliminating offensive scenes and dialogue (mostly sex, profanity, or crime) before the studios poured resources into shooting them. The pre-expurgated films thus did not run afoul of local censorship boards, who had for decades physically hacked away at finished film prints to remove objectionable material after distribution. And the PCA’s Catholic moral compass proved a boon at the box office, according to Thomas Doherty: “Though born and billed as good for the soul, the Breen Office turned out to be very good for business.”<sup>16</sup> Not that producers had a choice. Although filmmakers tried and sometimes succeeded in deceiving the PCA, films that did not

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 139-41.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood’s Censor: Joseph I. Breen and the Production Code Administration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 80.

earn Breen's approval were barred from virtually all American theaters.<sup>17</sup> Hollywood quickly accepted sending scripts to the PCA for review as normal, and things would remain that way until its façade crumbled against a studio revolt in the mid-1950s.<sup>18</sup> But by then the military had already learned its lessons from the PCA.

The final piece of the puzzle was a preexisting relationship between the military and Hollywood that provided the economic leverage necessary for the military to exert influence over film content. In the decades preceding WWII, the military had provided production support to a handful of war films, expecting influence over the film's content and portrayal of the armed services in return. This had always been and forever would be the goal of military production support. Indeed, as Lawrence Suid describes, the Navy during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century "refused to cooperate on some scripts...considered unacceptable," which is reasonable. Yet the Navy did not stop there. The service even tried to "regulate" a number of films that did not seek their support, once even petitioning the National Board of Censorship in 1914 as part of a failed effort to suppress a film that depicted sailors as immoral.<sup>19</sup> Small setbacks notwithstanding, it became clear that the Navy's model for getting the message out worked, thanks to film's powerful potential for influence. Thus the Marine Corps also began supporting favorable movies during WWI in an effort to justify its continued existence as a separate branch of the armed forces, and the Army followed suit the following decade.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Sam Fuller, director of a film discussed at length later, *The Steel Helmet*, managed to sneak by the PCA a scene where an American kills a North Korean POW. He did this by producing a letter from the DOD authorizing him to review stock combat footage for the film, claiming that if the DOD "approved" such a scene, the PCA should as well. But as I demonstrate later, the military had offered no such approval.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 316-29.

<sup>19</sup> Suid, *Guts and Glory*, 12-14.

<sup>20</sup> Suid, *Guts and Glory*, 16-26.

But war movies' cultural significance – and the military's production support program – exploded during WWII. By Jeanine Basinger's count, more than 30 Hollywood combat films were produced during the war.<sup>21</sup> The military spared no expense in supporting these films, believing them to be an integral part of the Allied propaganda effort. Suid describes the military's increased effort: the producers of *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo* (MGM, 1943) had a month of near-unlimited access to Eglin Air Force Base and eighteen B-25 bombers; Twentieth Century Fox had special access to film aboard the *Yorktown (CV-10)* for *A Wing and a Prayer* (1944); the marines hitting the beach in *Guadalcanal Diary* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1943) were real United States Marines on training maneuvers in California.<sup>22</sup> With this extensive assistance from the military, war movies became more realistic with state-of-the-art equipment, reduced their production costs, and raked in profits at the box office. The increased volume and depth of war films only served to raise the military's image even more in the eyes of the public. As with the BMP's content influence, a "mixture of patriotism and the profit motive" kept the studios churning out films favorable to the military. But after the war ended and patriotic fervor slowly subsided, the profit motive loomed even larger – a motive ripe for exploitation by the military.

### **Baruch's Office**

Hollywood steered clear of combat-themed pictures immediately after the war, fearing audience fatigue. But even before war films returned to the screen, the newly reorganized military – first as the National Military Establishment in 1947 and as the Department of Defense in 1949 – acknowledged the genre's future potential by establishing a military-Hollywood liaison office to oversee and coordinate the production support program. Don Baruch, a former public affairs

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<sup>21</sup> Basinger, *The WWII Combat Film*, 263-77.

<sup>22</sup> Suid, *Guts and Glory*, 85, 87, 92.

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officer in the Army Air Corps/Air Force, led the new office.<sup>23</sup> Baruch's office did not interfere with preexisting support agreements that neared completion, such as *Sands of Iwo Jima*, *Battleground* (MGM, 1950), and *Twelve O'Clock High*, but Suid explains that it had a mandate to eventually "take over the cooperation process from the individual services and supervise the details of assistance." Reality was a little more complicated, though. Baruch's office did become the final approval authority for military cooperation, but the outbreak of war on the Korean Peninsula allowed the individual services to control the amount of assistance furnished, effectively giving cooperative filmmakers a blank check. Suid argues that the inability to govern the costs of cooperation reduced the power of Baruch's office: "Baruch could not require a service to assist on a movie...[and] had no involvement in the cooperation process."<sup>24</sup>

Regardless, Baruch became the gatekeeper for filmmakers seeking Pentagon assistance. A March 1951 policy memo from Clayton Fritchey, director of the DOD's Office of Public Information and Baruch's immediate superior, declared his subordinate's office "the sole authority for approval of cooperation of any component of the Department of Defense on the production of commercial motion pictures." The memo conceded that filmmakers may reach out to familiar contacts at "field installations of other components of the Department of Defense," but was adamant that "such requests will be forwarded immediately, without action or any expression of opinion to the requestor" to Baruch's office.<sup>25</sup> Direct communication between any

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<sup>23</sup> This office will henceforth be the "Baruch office," since the office's name (and Baruch's title) changed frequently. Its duties remained constant. Suid dates the office to 1949, citing his interview with Baruch.

<sup>24</sup> Suid, *Guts and Glory*, 136-37.

<sup>25</sup> Memorandum from Clayton Fritchey to the Secretaries of the Military Departments, "Military Cooperation or Collaboration on the Production of Commercial Motion Pictures for Either Theatrical or Television Release, March 20, 1951, printed in ed. Lawrence Suid, *Film and Propaganda in America: A Documentary History, Volume IV: 1945 and After* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991), 200-01.

individual armed service and a commercial filmmaker was not authorized save for arranging the logistics of the production support itself, after approval from Baruch's office. Thus the process of securing military cooperation began and ended on Baruch's desk.

### **The Mechanics of Military Censorship**

In order to obtain military production support, filmmakers had to commit to a lengthy process that vaguely resembles modern academic peer review. Filmmakers pitched their ideas to Don Baruch – the editor in this analogy – in an official written request for support. Fritchey's memo describes the requests' prescribed structure: "a. The idea, background and tentative title. b. Anticipated production date, and distribution arrangements. c. Anticipated specific requirements for cooperation. d. Story outline or treatment."<sup>26</sup> Baruch or one of his deputies (Army officer Lieutenant Colonel Clair Towne, most frequently) would either reject the request or forward the story treatment to the branch of the military that was best suited to cooperate on the project – an external reviewer, in academic publishing terms. The service would review the proposal and send a memo to Baruch indicating whether it believed cooperation was feasible in light of the story outline and what amount of assistance was requested. For tentatively approved films, Baruch then would forward his and the service's comments to the filmmaker to guide the screenwriting process. Rejected films received an explanatory letter from Baruch, almost always expressing regret.

In both the initial rounds of consideration and the later parts of the process, the DOD and individual services evaluated how well each proposal conformed to a vague set of criteria, laid out by Fritchey in his March 1951 memo.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 201.

CRITERIA FOR EXTENDING COOPERATION: Official cooperation on the production of commercial motion pictures will be considered providing that:

- a. Production of the picture will be impracticable or impossible without the cooperation of the Department of Defense.
- b. Cooperation will not interfere or compete with private enterprise...
- c. Cooperation will not interfere with the military program; will not disrupt any training or operations...; will be at no cost to the Government.
- d. The finished product will be an accurate and authentic portrayal of a significant facet of military operations, historical incidents, persons or places; will be in keeping with the highest standards of propriety and dignity; will not be detrimental to Department of Defense policy regarding operations, morale, or discipline... will be in the best interests of National defense and the public good.<sup>27</sup>

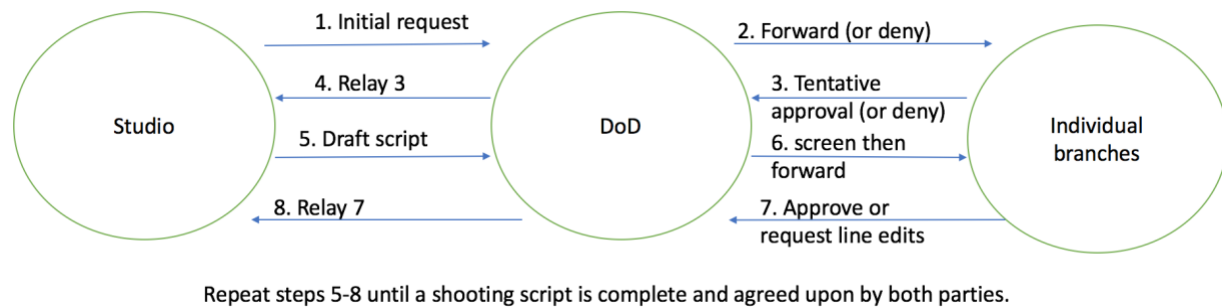
The only criterion regarding film content, (d), offers no guidance on what was “accurate and authentic,” or “the highest standards of propriety and dignity,” or “not detrimental” to DOD policy, or “in the best interests of National defense and the public good.” This project demonstrates that criterion (d) created a nebulous gray area in which Baruch’s office and military officers were able to chart their own “red lines” that filmmakers could not cross without forsaking military cooperation.

The red lines would come into play when the producers then sent their draft script to Baruch’s office. While a desk rejection remained within Baruch’s powers at this stage, he most frequently would forward the script to the relevant military branch for a more detailed script review. The assisting service would write up a cover letter detailing its recommendation on cooperation (yes/no, to what extent) and any broad issues with the script, but would attach several pages of line edits to the script. Baruch would review the edits, add some of his own, and forward them back to the studio to guide revision. Some scripts required more revision than others, much in the same way that some academic authors must revise and resubmit, while others find their work accepted on condition of revision. As is sometimes the case with academic peer

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 200; there is a part (e), but it only stipulates that requestors have the means to produce and distribute a feature film.

review, the script review process could send a script back and forth *ad infinitum* until Baruch was satisfied with the shooting script. From there, the military would determine whether to offer tentatively “full” or “limited” cooperation, and the studio would shoot the film. Full cooperation included physical production assistance and was limited to films that the military believed would play a key role in recruiting. Figure I depicts this process.



**Figure 1:** The Initial Approval Process

While participation in the production support program was technically voluntary, all cooperating filmmakers had to cede a great deal of editorial power to the military. A 1949 DOD publication, “A Guide for Obtaining National Military Establishment Cooperation in the Production of Motion Pictures for Television” lays out a post-production policy that almost certainly applied to films intended for theatrical release:

Requirements for Extending Cooperation

NME cooperation will be extended provided that the producer agrees:

- a. That no [financial] expense to NME or component thereof is involved...
- b. To submit a completed print of the film to the OPI [Office of Public Information] for review. It is suggested that this action be executed prior to the multiple printing of the film for distribution requirements, so that changes, if requested, will be confined to a minimum number of prints.
- c. To make any changes necessary to correct scenes which violate policy or contain information detrimental to the best interests of the NME.
- d. Not to exhibit or permit to be exhibited the portion of the film disapproved by the OPI.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> “Guide for Obtaining National Military Establishment Cooperation in the Production of Motion Pictures for Television,” 1949, printed in ed. Lawrence Suid, *Film and Propaganda in*



Screenings of completed films took place in Washington and typically included Baruch, his staff, and military brass that had approved or worked on the project. Although there is no evidence suggesting that producers signed contracts conceding final editorial powers to Baruch's office, virtually no filmmakers balked at making the final cuts. Baruch enjoyed this power because the military's support did not end when production ended.

For films that were authorized full cooperation, the military would frequently coordinate with the studio's publicity team on "exploiting" the finished product. Clair Towne explained the concept in a 1951 address to the Theater Owners of America: "If we cooperate on a picture that does not get seen by a large motion picture audience, we have in effect bet our money on a horse that didn't run. We will want to cooperate on the exploitations...to the end that the picture achieves the widest possible public acceptance."<sup>29</sup> This practice was delegated to the individual branches of the military. Exploitation typically involved parades at the premiere, special recruiting initiatives, and lobby displays featuring war materiel. Films given the royal treatment would also enjoy a long run in on-post and base theaters. Such events and installations boosted a film's public profile, and its profits, making military production support even more alluring to filmmakers.

Military cooperation was so attractive to Hollywood studios, in fact, that Baruch's office had to establish a first-come, first-served "priority" system in order to manage the deluge of requests for cooperation on overlapping topics. Filmmakers could hold priority for military production support for only three months at a time, and priority status would not be renewed unless a studio was making demonstrable progress towards submitting a shooting script and

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*America: A Documentary History, Volume IV: 1945 and After* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991), 200-01

<sup>29</sup> Towne, TOA Speech.

starting production. The priority system ensured that there was always another studio waiting in line to pick up a story topic if the priority-holder ran into any roadblocks on the way to script approval. But the most frequent roadblock was the military and its pursuit of “accurate and authentic portrayals... in the best interests of National defense and the public good.”<sup>30</sup> Thus the priority system also ensured that the Pentagon always had another suitor waiting and willing to conform to the red lines it enforced on cooperating films.

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<sup>30</sup> Fritchey Memo, *Film and Propaganda in America*, 201.

## CHAPTER 2: THE RED LINES

This project's primary contribution is its systematic and thematic reconstruction of the military's voluntary censorship program. But because the relevant doctrine and guidelines were extremely vague, it is impossible to use a top-down approach to analyze systematically what content early Cold War military censorship removed. Thus I thematically piece the system together using the numerous script edits requested by Baruch and the military's public information officers. Most of the edits were brief and punchy, offering little context. Yet when one considers the collective script edits to more than thirty films – as this study does – patterns of censorship emerge. Each individual edit equates to a short segment of a red line that filmmakers could not cross. I put them together in this chapter.

Other sources help make the red lines more evident. Draft film scripts provide context and illustrative insight into scenes that the military successfully suppressed, and a handful of personal papers from Hollywood gives us a window into how filmmakers perceived the red lines.

I divide the red lines into two categories: those that primarily served militarism-related purposes, and those that primarily served anti-Communist ideology. Both militarization and anti-Communism dominated official circles during the early Cold War. Distinguishing between the two concepts can feel artificial, especially when one considers the Korean War and the 1949 creation of NATO. But ideology and historical memory can transcend contemporary context, and red lines with goals explicitly linked to American militarization – such as capping USMC

casualties at 50% so as not to harm recruiting – only ever indirectly supported anti-Communist purposes.

The red lines were many. Those related to militarism sought to suppress depictions of American war crimes, excessive American casualties, disturbing combat scenes, notably undisciplined or insubordinate American troops, and toxic American leadership. Red lines directly serving anti-Communism aimed to remove or reduce progressive discussion of American racial inequality and German or Japanese war crimes. This system ultimately sanitized the era's war movies. Even as Technicolor brought film to life, the red lines ensured that combat was palatable for public consumption and that the morality of war remained black and white.

### **Militarism-Related Red Lines**

As the Cold War began, Americans asked whether their nation would be prepared for total war between the still-emerging Eastern and Western blocs. The Greek Civil War, the victory of the Chinese Communists, the blockade of Berlin, and the Korean War conclusively demonstrated that the ideological rivalry could rapidly turn violent – and nuclear weapons meant that the results could be cataclysmic. Thus a process of “militarization” (to borrow Michael Sherry's term) centered around the ideology of national security emerged in the United States, deeply influencing the everyday concerns and anxieties of many Americans.<sup>31</sup> Within this context, the military was inherently interested in increasing its budget and gaining power and influence within the American state, and civilians in the State Department and the National Security Council also encouraged militarization with NSC-68, which is commonly referred to as

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<sup>31</sup> Michael Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States Since the 1930s* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), xi; Sherry argues that “militarization” could be traced back to the 1930s – I do not aim to dispute that timeline, but rather to just borrow a descriptive term.

the “blueprint” of America’s Cold War strategy. But as Michael Hogan notes, proponents of militarization existed outside of government, too: “private citizens [also]...urged Congress...to put the country on something like a permanent war footing[.]”<sup>32</sup> Hogan only mentions one of the influential “private citizens” by name: Bernard Baruch, financier, former presidential advisor, and Don Baruch’s uncle. While the uncle sought to influence policy, the nephew quietly influenced the public.

Lisa Munday compellingly demonstrates that the American people whom Don Baruch endeavored to influence during the Cold War did not regard the “militarization” process as militarism. With Allied propaganda reels still echoing in their minds, she observes that “Americans...understood militarism in reference to the authoritarian regimes the nation had fought against in World War II.”<sup>33</sup> Moreover, there was a fundamental tension between the process of militarization and what Munday identifies as an endemic attitude of American anti-militarism. As she explained in a 2014 lecture at the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, U.S. anti-militarism dated back to the nation’s birth, and had six core beliefs: civilians should take precedence over the military, to include civilian control; a permanent, large military establishment is a threat to civil liberty; *just* wars are sometimes necessary; wars ought to be fought by volunteers if possible; individualism must be valued; and war is not to be glorified.<sup>34</sup>

Baruch’s office came into being at an inflection point, a massive upsetting of the uneasy balance between militarization and anti-militarism – the birth of the DOD. “Though American

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<sup>32</sup> Michael Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945-1954* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 474.

<sup>33</sup> Munday, *American Militarism and Anti-Militarism in Popular Media*, 6.

<sup>34</sup> Lisa Munday, “American Militarism and Anti-Militarism in Popular Media, 1945-1970,” Brooks E. Kleber Memorial Lecture in Military History (public lecture, U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle, PA, August 1, 2014).

society certainly militarized in many respects,” Munday argues that Hollywood movies (and other popular culture) reflected and sustained an American populace that “continued to identify themselves as fundamentally anti-militaristic.”<sup>35</sup> In advancing this thesis, she traces anti-militaristic messages in dozens of films from 1945 to 1970, including seventeen produced in the decade following WWII. To recall Bodnar’s framework for understanding public memory, such anti-militaristic expressions are certainly “vernacular” in character. But how did Baruch’s office and the reintroduction of the “official” affect this landscape? To what extent were further vernacular, anti-militaristic expressions suppressed? This chapter charts a series of red lines that either advanced the cause of militarization on screen or at least countered or tempered some filmmakers’ proclivity for anti-militarism.

The militarism-related goals of the military production support program appear to have been twofold and overlapping. One was to enshrine a clean-cut, disciplined, sanitized image of the American military and combat itself. To be clear, succeeding in this first goal often did not necessarily enshrine militarism proper in American popular culture, for not all positive portrayals of the military are militaristic. But this goal certainly pushed back against or sought to temper some of Munday’s core tenets of American anti-militarism as expressed in popular culture, namely valuing individualism and hesitating to glorify war. The second, aligned more directly with the aims of militarization, was to increase recruiting and retention among the force. The individual branches battled for volunteers who were “scared” into joining before being drafted (allowing them to choose their branch), and they also fought tooth-and-nail to convince draftees to reenlist following their initial period of service. But the first (and least flexible) of the red lines – prohibiting American war crimes – was almost entirely intended to maintain the military’s

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<sup>35</sup> Munday, *American Militarism and Anti-Militarism in Popular Media*, 12.

cultural image and buttress persistent denials of American wrongdoing during WWII and the Korean War.<sup>36</sup>

### *American War Crimes*

The script reviews of *Screaming Eagles* (Bischoff-Diamond Corporation, 1956) reveal how the military fought to ensure a pristine image of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division fighting across France. A June 6, 1952 letter from Baruch's deputy, Clair Towne, to screenwriter Virginia Kellogg explicitly refers to the damage Towne feared a prisoner-killing scene would cause to the 101<sup>st</sup>'s reputation. Towne explains the need to remove the offending scene before the Army would consider cooperation:

[W]e would like to point out...two areas in the story, where we believe that a definite change is indicated...

2. Page 34 scene 77. One of our officers kills a German coming out to talk surrender. This has to come out...the situation is covered by the Geneva Convention and the Rules of Land Warfare, and the Captain's act is in direct violation of both, and as such is a condemnation of the discipline and conduct of the paratroopers portrayed.<sup>37</sup>

Kellogg removed the prisoner shooting scene, as requested. *Screaming Eagles*, however, remained in pre-production purgatory for some time despite Baruch and the Army signing off on a final shooting script, authorizing "full military cooperation" for the Edward Small Productions

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<sup>36</sup> American soldiers committed various war crimes during the war, and commanders sometimes explicitly sanctioned them, as in the case of the 328<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. The 328<sup>th</sup>'s commander issued a fragmentary order instructing his soldiers to shoot SS soldiers on sight. But most American war crimes seem to have been spontaneous in nature, such as when soldiers of the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division killed a number of SS guards during the liberation of Dachau; Hugh Cole's official history of the Ardennes campaign attests to the official order but denies that any Americans followed through. Voluminous oral histories dispute this, though; Hugh Cole, *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge* (Washington, DC: United States Army Center for Military History, 1993), 264.

<sup>37</sup> Correspondence from Clair Towne to Virginia Kellogg, 6 June 1952, Box 9, Folder 16, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C.

project.<sup>38</sup> In early 1954, the company decided to throw out the approved script and “a fresh start was made.”<sup>39</sup> Unsurprisingly, the “fresh start” did not pan out, and *Screaming Eagles*, along with DOD priority for a 101<sup>st</sup>-based film, changed hands to the Bischoff-Diamond Corporation.

The new script contained another war crime. A May 26, 1955 memo from the Army to Baruch’s office regarding the new script made “the following comment and recommendation: ... Scene 129 – Eliminate [false] surrender maneuver [by the Americans]..this situation is in conflict with the Geneva Convention rules of warfare. German guards can be tricked by other means, such as diverting their attention while they are approached from behind.”<sup>40</sup> Baruch briefly elaborates in his letter forwarding the script edits to producer Sam Bischoff: “The make believe surrender sequence is objectionable... We recommend some other device be utilized which will not show our troops in an action contrary to the principles of the Geneva Convention.”<sup>41</sup> A July 27, 1955 memo from the Army to Baruch confirms that the next *Screaming Eagles* draft had indeed incorporated “[t]he changes requested in [the] Department of the Army memorandum”

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<sup>38</sup> Correspondence from Office of the Chief of Information, Department of the Army (CINFO) to various garrison commanders, 13 May 1953, Box 9, Folder 16, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C.

<sup>39</sup> Correspondence from Edward Small Productions to Johana Mueller, 14 April 1954, Box 9, Folder 16, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C.

<sup>40</sup> Memorandum from H. D. Kight to Don Baruch, 26 May 1955, Box 9, Folder 16, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C.

<sup>41</sup> Correspondence from Don Baruch to Samuel Bischoff, 26 May 1955, Box 9, Folder 16, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C.



from May.<sup>42</sup> The final picture received full cooperation from the Army and was released in May 1956.

A pair of movies set in Korea – *The Steel Helmet* (Lippert Productions, 1951) and *Men in War* (Security Pictures, 1957) failed to gain military production support because of their hesitance to sanitize their scripts of American war crimes. *The Steel Helmet*, one of acclaimed director Sam Fuller’s earliest efforts, centers around a small band of infantrymen trying to survive the early days of the Korean War, led by a hard-charging, callous, renegade NCO, Sergeant Zack (Gene Evans). Ironically, Zack’s most humanizing moment is his spur-of-the-moment revenge killing of a North Korean prisoner. A draft script relates how the scene unfolds after a North Korean sniper kills a young boy who had been following the Americans around:

*The paper prayer on the boy’s back falls to the floor. The Red picks it up and looks at the Korean writing on the piece of K-ration cardboard – the last prayer Short Round wrote.*  
THE RED: (reading) “To Buddha – please make Sergeant Zack like me.” (tosses it on floor) What a stupid prayer.

*Zack fires three times, sending three rounds into the Red’s belly. The Red crashes against the base of the Buddha and collapses.*

DRISCOLL: (whirling on Zack) And you’re the one who said don’t let emotions get the best of you!

ZACK: (angry with himself) All right, all right, all right – so I goofed off.

DRISCOLL: Now regiment’ll never know what’s out there!

ZACK: What’re you waiting for, Thompson? Sew him up, give him blood!

THOMPSON: You kidding? You blew a hole in him as big as a tunnel. I can drive a truck through it.

*Zack bends over the Red and shakes him violently.*

ZACK: (To the Red) If you die I’ll kill you!<sup>43</sup>

In an October 18, 1950 letter to Fuller officially refusing military cooperation, Clair Towne decries Zack as “an arrogant, despicable character, who...loses control of himself to the point

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<sup>42</sup> Memorandum from H. D. Kight to Don Baruch, 27 June 1955, Box 9, Folder 16, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C.

<sup>43</sup> Samuel Fuller, “The Steel Helmet,” undated draft film script, 1950, Writers Guild Foundation Archive, Los Angeles, p. 76-77.

where he kills a prisoner of war in cold blood. As a murderer he would be subject to the same penalties...[as those] who commit atrocities against our men.”<sup>44</sup> While Fuller made major revisions to other scenes in an effort to comply with other red lines and obtain military assistance for the premiere, his failure to remove the POW-killing was at the core of the Army’s final denial.

When *The Steel Helmet* hit theaters, Zack’s war crime made waves in newspapers across the country. While the poignant scene is inherently notable, many writers played up rumors that the DOD had “approved” the murder. These rumors came to a head on December 28, 1950, when Hollywood’s leading trade paper, *Variety*, ran a front page story that declared: “The War Department has...[stamped] a firm seal of approval on an episode in Lippert Productions’ “The Steel Helmet” wherein a U.S. infantryman in cold rage, kills a North Korean prisoner-of-war.”<sup>45</sup> Baruch’s office was incensed. They likely suspected that Fuller was misleading reporters in order to drum up publicity for the film. So in retaliation, they leaked information to anti-Communist columnist Victor Riesel about *The Steel Helmet*’s efforts to gain cooperation. The January 11 and 12 editions of Riesel’s column, *Inside Labor*, featured anonymous quotes from a DOD official (Towne) that denounced Fuller’s film.<sup>46</sup> It is unclear whether Baruch’s office maintained its

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<sup>44</sup> Correspondence from Clair Towne to Samuel Fuller; 18 October 1950; Steel Helmet to Because You’re Mine; Topical File 1943-52; Motion Picture Section, Pictorial Branch, News Division, Office of Public Information, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Legislative and Public Affairs); Record Group 330: Office of the Secretary of Defense; National Archives at College Park.

<sup>45</sup> “War Dept. About-Faces On Propaganda In Films,” *Daily Variety* 70, no. 16, 28 December 1950, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Draft copies of *Inside Labor* enclosed in undated correspondence from Alton Levy to Clair Towne; January 1951; Steel Helmet to Because You’re Mine; Topical File 1943-52; Motion Picture Section, Pictorial Branch, News Division, Office of Public Information, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Legislative and Public Affairs); Record Group 330: Office of the Secretary of Defense; National Archives at College Park.

relationship with Riesel, but the columnist made a standing offer “to come in at his own expense if ever the Dept. wants to consult him about the subtle nuances of similar scripts.”<sup>47</sup> The anti-Communist fury unleashed on *The Steel Helmet* – despite Fuller’s partial efforts to comply with the military’s red lines – thus stood as a deterrent to filmmakers who did not fully capitulate to the DOD’s demands.

The Army denied support to another 1950s infantry combat film, *Men in War*, because its producers refused to make the recommended script changes regarding American atrocities. To the Army, the most offensive scene in the Korea-set film was when Montana, a rough-hewn, insubordinate NCO, used a Thompson submachinegun to eliminate a surrendering foe. In the scene, Montana is closing in on a wounded North Korean sniper who had been hiding in a barrel. As he approaches, “the sniper, [with his] back to [the] CAMERA, pulls himself out of the barrel on his hands and knees.” Montana’s platoon leader, Lt. Benson, is watching from below at the bottom of a draw: “Don’t fire. Don’t fire,” he orders. The enemy soldier tries to surrender, remaining “on his hands and knees putting both hands on his helmen [sic] in surrender.” Montana advances, as if he is going to secure their prisoner, but “suddenly without warning, he fires a long burst,” murdering his surrendering foe.<sup>48</sup>

The Army took great exception to Montana’s war crime, seizing upon it and a multitude of other issues to declare the film “basically and wholly unacceptable at the present time.

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<sup>47</sup> Undated correspondence from Alton Levy to Clair Towne; January 1951; *Steel Helmet to Because You’re Mine*; Topical File 1943-52; Motion Picture Section, Pictorial Branch, News Division, Office of Public Information, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Legislative and Public Affairs); Record Group 330: Office of the Secretary of Defense; National Archives at College Park.

<sup>48</sup> Undated draft script of *Men in War* written prior to 22 June 1956, p. 31-32, Box 7, Folder 10, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C.

Therefore, cooperation by the Department of the Army cannot be considered.”<sup>49</sup> When Security Pictures submitted a new copy of the script for reconsideration in June, the Army claimed in a memo to Baruch, “in general, the second draft script remains basically the same.” They attached several pages of required script edits, and of them was to remove scene 113, where Montana “fires at a POW with complete disregard for the Geneva Conventions and orders from the platoon leader.”<sup>50</sup> The filmmakers balked at the requested edits, withdrew their request for the Army’s production assistance, and produced the film without the materiel and equipment they had sought. Perhaps for its creative stand, *Men in War* fared poorly at the box office – sources estimate that foreign receipts barely overcame a \$500,000 domestic loss.<sup>51</sup>

But Sid Harmon, the film’s producer, did not go quietly into the night. Harmon convinced a congressman, Barratt O’Hara (D-IL), to speak to a *Washington Daily News* reporter on his behalf. The resulting article decries the military’s production support program as biased towards “huge budget war films.” While the efforts to reform the Pentagon’s practices were unsuccessful, the article raised a major question: “Wonder what the Army is trying to hide...the fact that a soldier’s life isn’t really like it is in the movies?”<sup>52</sup> Reporter James O’Neill Jr. was not too far off base with his question, for one of the DOD’s other militarism-related red lines censored an overarching reality of war: mass American casualties.

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<sup>49</sup> Memorandum from H. D. Kight to Don Baruch, 29 May 1956, Box 7, Folder 11, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C.

<sup>50</sup> Memorandum from H. D. Kight to Don Baruch, 22 June 1956, Box 7, Folder 11, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C.

<sup>51</sup> “Men in War,” The Internet Movie Database, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0050699/>.

<sup>52</sup> James O’Neill Jr., “A Shot is Called,” *The Washington Daily News*, 28 February 1957, 28.

### *Mass American Casualties*

In the early Cold War scramble to attract recruits and reenlistments, the Marine Corps and the Army desperately sought to reduce the number of American casualties suffered in Hollywood films. The Marine Corps characterized any cinematic casualty rate above 50% as unrealistic regardless of the unit's size, despite grim evidence to the contrary – in war, sometimes patrols disappear, sometimes infantry companies are obliterated, and sometimes entire divisions suffer thousands of casualties in less than two weeks.<sup>53</sup>

After the First Marine Division suffered more than 10,000 casualties at the Chosin Reservoir in late 1950, the Corps began denying cooperation to films with a high casualty rate. This practice first appeared in 1951 with *Retreat Hell!* (United States Pictures/Warner Brothers, 1952). An unsigned Baruch office memorandum from early 1951 explains, “They want to avoid the concept that the Marine Corps casualty rate is excessive, which has been a criticism in the case of HALLS OF MONTEZUMA.”<sup>54</sup> A letter from Director of Marine Corps Public Information, Brigadier General John McQueen, to Clair Towne details how a draft story treatment of the film crossed the line, and why the line existed:

You know as well as I do that one aspect of commercially-made motion pictures tends to militate against the recruiting effort... I refer to the blood-bath business of having practically all the central characters die in the war. Neither is this realistic, because it tends to suggest casualty rates much higher than those we actually experience... [they should]

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<sup>53</sup> One example of small-unit annihilation is the Goettge Patrol on Guadalcanal in 1942, when a twenty-five man unit suffered twenty-four killed. By evening on D-Day, Company A of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 116<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment only had 18 unwounded soldiers remaining of 230 who hit the beach. Two Army regiments (8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, 31<sup>st</sup> Infantry) were destroyed by Chinese forces in late 1950, and the First Marine Division suffered more than 10,000 casualties (of an authorized strength of 22,000) when it bore the brunt of ten Chinese divisions at the Battle of Chosin Reservoir in 1950.

<sup>54</sup> Undated Baruch office memorandum for the record, early 1951, *Retreat Hell*, Movie Subject Files, Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division.

delete the emphasis on the battalion being “no larger than a provisional company”...The climax suggests that the Marine Corps is a one-way street, and that those who weren’t killed earlier will be killed in the fighting which follows.<sup>55</sup>

McQueen also invokes *Halls of Montezuma* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1951), a WWII-set film which received massive production from the Marines, as a precedent for the story change, and he links the blowback to anti-Communism:

The many casualties in “Halls of Montezuma” provoked a considerable amount of criticism, and certainly didn’t inspire mothers to encourage their sons to enlist in the Marine Corps. Not only that, but a number of people, including Westbrook Pegler [a prominent anti-Communist columnist], suggested that the whole casualty approach was Communist-inspired. I don’t want to find us in a similar situation with “RETREAT HELL”, and I urge you to correct this script before it goes further.

Warner Brothers reframed the narrative to suit the Marines’ request, and received an estimated equivalent of \$1,000,000 in production assistance in return.<sup>56</sup> Following the success of *Retreat Hell!*, reducing casualties became a primary goal in the military’s production support program.

Warner Brothers again proved cooperative on casualties in *Battle Cry* (Warner Brothers, 1955), after Don Baruch relayed the following in a 1953 letter to WB executive George Dorsey: “Of the total Marine Corps personnel identified one place or another in the picture, we should be able to see that at least fifty percent come out of the war alive.”<sup>57</sup> He did not have to ask twice – the studio quickly complied with this request.

The Marines also successfully induced Allied Artists to reduce the number of friendly casualties portrayed in *Hold Back the Night* (Allied Artists, 1956). The film follows a USMC

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<sup>55</sup> Correspondence from John McQueen to Clair Towne, 24 April 1951, *Retreat Hell*, Movie Subject Files, Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division.

<sup>56</sup> Suid, *Guts and Glory*, 139.

<sup>57</sup> Correspondence from Don Baruch to George Dorsey, 16 October 1953, Box 2, Folder 21, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C.

rifle company's fighting withdrawal from the Chosin Reservoir in the mountains of North Korea to a designated evacuation point on the coast. In the words of USMC Director of Information & Brigadier General Frank Wirsig, an early draft script had "many Marines...killed or wounded. This is realistic, as in any war...however, as now written where over 200 men in a company start, and less than a dozen finish, [the script] is not acceptable."<sup>58</sup> Wirsig suggested various ways the filmmakers could rectify this problem (and earn USMC cooperation): there could be men in the company at the start of their retreat; a platoon could detach for another mission during the retreat; healthy men could accompany their wounded comrades on the medivac helicopters. The studio embraced all of Wirsig's suggestions and received special access to the USMC Mountain Warfare Training Center at Pickel Meadows, CA to shoot the film. But even after Allied Artists had made the requested edits, Wirsig remained extremely concerned about casualties. In response to the approved shooting script, he said: "It is strongly recommended that it be clearly understood...that due to evacuation of wounded, only a small percentage of the casualties were killed...This...should be kept in mind while shooting the picture."<sup>59</sup> The filmmakers obliged – the main character in command of the rifle company is evacuated by helicopter almost immediately after he is wounded.

Concern over casualty rates also partially led Baruch's office and Marine Corps to effectively kill a proposed project by John Wayne, who played the iconic Sergeant Stryker in *Sands of Iwo Jima*. Wayne wrote to Don Baruch on August 25, 1954 to propose "GIVEAWAY

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<sup>58</sup> Memorandum from Frank Wirsig to Don Baruch, 23 February 1955, Hold Back the Night, Movie Subject Files, Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division.

<sup>59</sup> Memorandum from Frank Wirsig to Don Baruch; 4 November 1955; A7 SAF (TV), A. Engel and F. Kline to A7 SAF, Lebanon Files; Correspondence Files of the Office of the Commandant and Headquarters Support Division Central Files Section, 1950-1958; Record Group 127: Records of the U.S. Marine Corps, National Archives at College Park.

HILL...the battle of the First Marine Division in the so-called Iron Triangle area...[in] late March and early April 1953.”<sup>60</sup> He enclosed a story treatment by Andrew Geer, who had commanded 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines at the battle. Baruch forwarded the treatment to Frank Wirsig for official USMC review, and Wirsig held little back: “The bloody carnage depicted in many area of the script is objectionable from both a recruiting and public relations standpoint...The calling of [artillery] on own troops by a Marine battalion commander even though justified and the complete loss of units...[would] cause recruiting stations long periods of inactivity.”<sup>61</sup> In his response to Wayne, Baruch reframes the issue as one of accuracy: “Marine Corps does not wish to present combat in false fashion without showing sacrifice and death in our own forces, but the present treatment contains an excess of carnage...[and] would be detrimental to Marine Corps recruiting.”<sup>62</sup> But Andy Geer *was* the battalion commander that day. Wayne never responded to Baruch’s letter, and “Giveaway Hill” never made it onto the silver screen.

The Army also objected to high casualties in Virginia Kellogg’s early drafts of *Screaming Eagles*. Clair Towne – who was an active-duty Army officer assigned to Baruch’s office at the time – broke down the characters’ fates in a letter to producer Edward Small:

[W]e identify and name seventeen people in the story. Of the seventeen, five are killed in action, two are wounded in action and die, one is wounded in action and loses his legs, and one suffers a broken back. This poses a rather grim outlook for the fathers and

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<sup>60</sup> Correspondence from John Wayne to Don Baruch, 25 August 1954, Box 14, Folder 34, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C.

<sup>61</sup> Memorandum from Frank Wirsig to Don Baruch, 15 October 1954, Box 14, Folder 34, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C.

<sup>62</sup> Correspondence from Don Baruch to John Wayne, 21 October 1954, Box 14, Folder 34, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C.



mothers whose sons have gone into the airborne or for any young man who may be considering service in that elite branch of the U.S. Army. The men of our present day airborne units would be the first to dispute that there is anything like a casualty rate of those proportions in their chosen profession.<sup>63</sup>

Towne was right to invoke “the men of our present day airborne units” as evidence against contemporary airborne casualties – the Army’s three airborne divisions did not fight in the Korean War.<sup>64</sup> But the risky nature of airborne operations led airborne units of all sizes to be virtually annihilated throughout WWII.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, Robert Williams has identified the inherent risk of airborne operations as a conscious element of the cultural aura surrounding WWII paratroopers – the “airborne mystique” simultaneously was reinforced by personal risk and made paratroopers more willing to assume risk.<sup>66</sup> But as requested, the next draft of *Screaming Eagles* significantly reduced the number of American casualties.

### *Disturbing Combat Scenes*

Baruch’s office and the military also sought to remove a handful of disturbing combat scenes and dialogue from early Cold War Hollywood war films. Softening these scenes helped to counter

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<sup>63</sup> Correspondence from Clair Towne to Edward Small, 6 November 1952, Box 9, Folder 16, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C

<sup>64</sup> The only Army airborne formation to fight in Korea was the 187<sup>th</sup> Airborne Regimental Combat Team, which was considered to be independent from the 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division.

<sup>65</sup> The British 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division lost more than 75% of its paratroopers in and around Arnhem during Operation Market-Garden. While this study is not about the British, their fate shows what losses were plausible. Robert Williams reports that the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division and the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division combined for a 40% casualty rate during the first 33 days of the Normandy campaign, which approaches the rate depicted in the draft of *Screaming Eagles*.

<sup>66</sup> Robert Williams, “The Airborne Mystique: A Cultural History of the American Paratrooper,” (Working paper, 2018).

vernacular currents of anti-militarism and assisted in the militarization of American society by making combat palatable to the general public.

As most powerfully demonstrated during the Vietnam War (notably by Eddie Adams's photo of a summary execution in the streets of Saigon), images and reports of war's horror could have a powerful effect on public opinion. But Vietnam was not the first time such images invaded American life. Andrew Huebner demonstrates that news images and reports coming out of the early Korean War centered around "fatigue," "sorrow," and mounting losses. Even more concerning to the military, perhaps, visual rhetoric emerging from Korea began to imply a darker side to American servicemen; as Huebner explains: "The notion that American GIs could be war criminals was by no means the prevailing image in the 1950s, but the faintest hint of that idea stirred in Korea."<sup>67</sup> Having lost control of the news photos coming out of Korea, the military wanted to see theaters preserved as a site of comparatively sanitized, mythical warfare. Once they were remolded by the military and PCA, movies could offer an alternative narrative – one where Americans never committed atrocities, never lost too many men, and death was relatively quick for all involved.

To preface this particular red line, though, one should understand that it overlapped significantly with the Production Code Administration's censorship mandate. Baruch's office frequently allowed Joe Breen and the PCA to handle dialogue and scenes that went too far in their "brutality and possible gruesomeness" – a phrase that echoed across hundreds of letters sent from Breen to filmmakers.<sup>68</sup> Sometimes Baruch noted in memoranda that the PCA "should take

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<sup>67</sup> Huebner, *The Warrior Image*, 101-110.

<sup>68</sup> This observation is made from my general comprehension of the PCA's files on early Cold War combat films, which I consulted at the Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

care of us” on certain scenes, and once even made a film’s final military approval contingent upon PCA approval.<sup>69</sup> But in a couple of instances, the military felt compelled to intervene despite having the PCA as a reliable backstop for sanitizing disturbing combat scenes.

In one scene of *Hold Back the Night*, the retreating U.S. Marines face a Chinese assault that threatens to overrun their convoy. They beat back the enemy with the help of close air support from USMC aircraft. In an early version of the shooting script, a brief scene was to feature the napalm’s grisly aftermath. But a letter from Don Baruch to producer Dick Hoerance was unambiguous: “Scene 84 – delete smoking and charred Chinese bodies.”<sup>70</sup>

In a similar vein, a draft shooting script of *Battle Cry* features a scene that is emotionally rather than visually disturbing. It would have forced audiences to ruminate on the act of taking a life:

CLOSE ON DANNY IN FOXHOLE NIGHT

*He is haggard, eyelids heavy, fighting to stay awake. Suddenly his eyes widen with an expression of terror. He grits his teeth, the sweat starts pouring down his face.*

MAC’S VOICE: And then when you least expect it you come face to face with the enemy...

*Danny raises his rifle slowly and his finger slips into the trigger. He licks his dry lips.*

MAC’S VOICE: ...And as you zero him in through your peep-sight, and your finger tightens on the trigger, that sensation of revulsion – a human being is going to die at your hands...

*SOUND of sharp fire as Danny pulls trigger. He closes his eyes and shudders.*<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Don Baruch, Memorandum for the Record, 12 January 1954, Box 2, Folder 21, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C; Correspondence from Don Baruch to George Dorsey, 22 April 1954, Box 2, Folder 21, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C.

<sup>70</sup> Correspondence from Don Baruch to Dick Hoerance, 24 February 1955, *Hold Back the Night*, Movie Subject Files, Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division.

<sup>71</sup> Undated draft script of *Battle Cry* annotated by Don Baruch, December 1953 (annotations early January 1954), Box 2, Folder 21, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C., 84.

Don Baruch's annotated copy of the script has a large X scrawled on each side of Mac's second dialogue, and a handwritten memo notes, "Page 84 "revulsion" cut."<sup>72</sup> A USMC public relations officer verbally relayed Baruch's comments to the studio, and the scene did not appear in the final film.

### *Excessive Indiscipline/Insubordination*

The military wanted to police the behavior of cinematic soldiers outside of combat as well; maintaining a clean-cut, well-disciplined cultural image necessitated good discipline from Hollywood's servicemen. Indeed, Lisa Munday identified scenes of indiscipline and insubordination depicted the individualism celebrated by anti-militarists. The 1951 Fritchey memo establishing criteria for films seeking military support addressed such scenes: they must not "be detrimental to Department of Defense policy regarding...discipline."<sup>73</sup> Baruch and military public affairs officers had a very liberal interpretation of this vague policy – they sought to crush anything more than a modicum of American indiscipline or insubordination in the movies.

Unsurprisingly, the military required that soldiers on screen follow orders in combat scenarios. In *Hold Back the Night*, the retreating Marines wake up one morning to find their vehicles immobilized: their engine oil has frozen and their batteries have died overnight. Understanding that their current position is untenable, the company commander, Captain

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<sup>72</sup> Don Baruch, undated handwritten memo, early January 1954, Box 2, Folder 21, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C.

<sup>73</sup> Fritchey Memo, *Film and Propaganda in America*, 201.

Mackenzie, tells his first sergeant to ready the men to continue on foot. In an early draft, the following ensues:

MACKENZIE: We'll carry [the wounded].....Get the men on their feet,

EKLAND: Aye, aye, sir.

*He goes along the road, calling out "Hit the deck," "Everybody up" ....stirring some men with his foot....The men groan and grumble, but no one gets up. Mackenzie looks at the wounded Couzens on the stretcher lashed across the jeep hood. His dark eyes are open, and he is staring at Mackenzie who lights a half-butt of a cigarette, gives Couzens a puff.*<sup>74</sup>

USMC Brigadier General Frank Wirsig took offense to the exhausted men's lack of motion, requesting that "some of the men at least try to obey the order...Marine units have experienced more trying conditions; there has never been a situation where the men did not try to obey an order. It is inconceivable and completely unrealistic that none of the men would move."<sup>75</sup> In the final cut of the film, this objection is satisfied when two Marines struggle to their feet before Mackenzie successfully bribes the remainder with a bottle of scotch. Wirsig also was displeased by one private's attitude towards his superiors, and declared in the same memo that "Beany's "shut up" and general attitude toward Lieutenant [was] unacceptable and unrealistic." The final version of the film softened Beany's insubordination.

The Army requested a similar series of changes from Hal Chester of Alliance Pictures on a draft project entitled "Battle Hell" (released in 1956 as *The Bold and the Brave* by RKO).

While a May 9, 1955 letter from Don Baruch to Chester offers little context, it asks that Chester "eliminate questioning of command authority" three times. Baruch also requests that Alliance

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<sup>74</sup> Draft script of *Hold Back the Night*, revised 15 March 1955, Box 28, Folder 202, Paul Kohner Agency Records, Margaret Herrick Library Special Collections, Los Angeles, CA.

<sup>75</sup> Memorandum from Frank Wirsig to Don Baruch; 4 November 1955; A7 SAF (TV), A. Engel and F. Kline to A7 SAF, Lebanon Files; Correspondence Files of the Office of the Commandant and Headquarters Support Division Central Files Section, 1950-1958; Record Group 127: Records of the U.S. Marine Corps, National Archives at College Park.

“eliminate disrespect for the patrol leader” and “eliminate ‘go back to your post’ – as order was not obeyed.”<sup>76</sup> Alliance was eager to gain the military’s production support as soon as possible, so it was only two days before Chester submitted a revised script that satisfied the Army’s objections.<sup>77</sup>

But the military also wanted Hollywood’s soldiers to behave themselves outside of combat. A 1952 B-movie, *Battle Zone* (Walter Wanger/Allied Artists, 1952), follows two fictional USMC combat photographers as they compete for the affections of a Red Cross nurse. The Corps provided cooperation to Allied Artists in shooting the film, but not before a sequence “liable to misinterpretation by the general public” was changed:

Scene 121-128 – This sequence concerns the night club in Seoul. It is not desirable that members of the Marine Corps be portrayed as fighting during the day and then finding a convenient night club to attend at night. There were strict regulations which prohibited the drinking of Korean beverages and the eating of Korean food. This sequence...must be changed.<sup>78</sup>

An April 24, 1952 memo from the USMC Director of Public Information, Brigadier General John McQueen, confirms that “new pages” for the *Battle Zone* script complied with this

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<sup>76</sup> Correspondence from Don Baruch to Hal Chester, 9 May 1955, Box 2, Folder 23, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C.

<sup>77</sup> Correspondence from Hal Chester to Allison Conrad, 11 May 1955, Box 2, Folder 23, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C.

<sup>78</sup> Correspondence from Clair Towne to Richard Heermance, 25 March 1952, *Battle Zone*, Movie Subject Files, Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division.

request.<sup>79</sup> In return, Allied Artists received access to Camp Pendleton, CA to shoot the majority of the film.<sup>80</sup>

The Corps had a similar problem with an early draft of *Hell to Eternity* (Atlantic Pictures/Allied Artists, 1960), a film dramatizing the WWII experiences of Guy Gabaldon, who won the Silver Star for valor on Saipan. Baruch wrote producer Irving Levin on June 20 1958 to suggest, “The scenes in Hawaii should be toned down. We do not find anything objectionable in Marines wanting dates, but we feel it would be to our best interests not to have the apparent “goal,” as it were, made so obvious.”<sup>81</sup> After protracted negotiation, the studio finally relented and edited the scene to have only one of their group openly preoccupied with finding female companionship.<sup>82</sup> Because of their willingness to cooperate, Allied Artists was able to shoot the film on Okinawa with extensive assistance from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division.

While the military did not want to see screen servicemen chasing women while on leave, the Army *especially* objected to what it saw as “a gang fight first between our paratroopers and the glider troops, and then with the MP’s [military police],” during a leave scene in a story treatment of *Screaming Eagles*. As Clair Towne explained to producer Edward Small,

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<sup>79</sup> Memorandum from John McQueen to Clair Towne, 24 April 1952, Battle Zone, Movie Subject Files, Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division.

<sup>80</sup> Correspondence from Walter Mirisch to Clair Towne, 6 August 1952, Battle Zone, Movie Subject Files, Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division.

<sup>81</sup> Correspondence from Don Baruch to Irving Levin, 20 June 1958, Hell to Eternity, Movie Subject Files, Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division.

<sup>82</sup> Correspondence from Irving Levin to Don Baruch, 19 January 1960, Hell to Eternity, Movie Subject Files, Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division.

“[P]aratroopers are trained in Judo...their roughness, if one wants to call it that, is a **disciplined** toughness and not the roistering chip-on-shoulder pugnaciousness of the bowery brawler.”<sup>83</sup>

Another brawl referenced in the same letter about *Screaming Eagles* foreshadows our next red line. Towne (and the Army) were aghast at “another knock-down and drag-out fight between a private soldier and our First Sergeant [the senior enlisted soldier in a company], witnessed by the other men in the company.” But Towne’s comment was not made out of disciplinary concerns (though they no doubt applied). He viewed it rather as an indictment of Army leadership: “To show Mike [the first sergeant] resorting to force or accepting the challenge of a private is very poor evidence of the First Sergeant to command his men[.]”<sup>84</sup>

#### *Toxic/Incompetent Leadership*

Indeed, Baruch’s office and the military considered it paramount to eliminate portrayals of leaders striking their men, as well as nearly all conceivable forms of toxic or incompetent leadership. As Baruch explained it to producer Howard Koch in a letter referencing a shooting script for *Beachhead*, “Delete the actual fight [betweed an NCO and a junior enlisted Marine]. It is considered unfavorable to show a Sergeant on a mission striking one of his men, especially for a personal reason.” Rather, he suggested, “We believe the scene could be quite dramatic if Bouchard [another character] steps in between the two men before any blows are struck.”<sup>85</sup> In the final film, Bouchard jumps between the two quarreling Marines before either lands a punch.

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<sup>83</sup> Correspondence from Clair Towne to Edward Small, 6 November 1952, Box 9, Folder 16, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C; emphasis added.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Correspondence from Don Baruch to Howard Koch, 25 June 1953, *Beachhead*, Movie Subject Files, Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division.



The effort required for Alliance Pictures to keep a similar NCO-junior enlisted fight in *The Bold and the Brave* is the exception that proves the rule. An early draft script had a fistfight between two of the film's main characters, Preacher and Fairchild. As Chesnutt describes him, Preacher is an infantry NCO "who displays negligence of duties, [and] is inconsistent in action[.]" Therefore Chesnutt asked Don Baruch to direct the studio to "eliminate [the] fight between the Preacher and Fairchild. This also eliminates scenes 235-241."<sup>86</sup> Because the studio considered the fight to be the climax of Preacher and Fairchild's relationship, producer Hal Chester begged Baruch to reconsider, explaining in a telegram, "this is a fight between two personalities not between soldiers." "To change the script at this date..." he elaborates, "is impossible and will result in a disastrous financial loss."<sup>87</sup> After this telegram and a number of phone calls and letters from Chester, Baruch relented and allowed the fight, but only if the filmmakers collaborated with an officer from the Army's local public affairs office to reconfigure the fight sequence to indicate a clash of personalities rather than a fighting his subordinate. To this end, Chester later indicated that he had "deleted...scenes 239, 240, [and] 241."<sup>88</sup> But *The Brave and the Bold* received only "limited" cooperation, and the Army asked the filmmakers to remove a credit title acknowledging its production support.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Memorandum from James Chesnutt to Don Baruch, 3 May 1955, Box 2, Folder 23, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library.

<sup>87</sup> Telegram from Hal Chester to Don Baruch, 10 May 1955, Box 2, Folder 23, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library.

<sup>88</sup> Correspondence from Hal Chester to Don Baruch, 11 May 1955, Box 2, Folder 23, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library.

<sup>89</sup> Correspondence from Don Baruch to William Feeder, Box 2, Folder 23, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library.

The military did not smile upon leaders fighting one another, either. On April 5, 1955, the Navy officially authorized “full cooperation” with Universal on *Away All Boats* (Universal, 1956), “with the following exception.” As Navy public relations officer W.S. Beecher Jr. elaborated to Don Baruch, “Scenes 231 and 232...can be played as written [only] by eliminating the violence. It is realized that conflict must be shown at this time, but it is not considered appropriate for an officer to bang a sailor’s head against a coconut tree or for a chief [a senior NCO] to slug an officer.”<sup>90</sup> Universal resolved Baruch’s objection by making the punch plausibly an accident (the officer is breaking up a fight) and removing the officer’s retaliation.

Baruch’s office’s comments on a Marine NCO’s actions in a scene from *Retreat Hell!* that required “some modification” explain why the military wanted such scenes of physically violent leadership out of films. Notably, the scene in question did not even depict the violence itself, but merely a private conversation that referenced its off-screen occurrence. Clair Towne wrote to Warner Brothers producer George Dorsey, saying: “This is supposedly the third time that the Colonel has reprimanded Costello (a senior NCO) for roughing up his men. The implication is that this happens, and it is only when it happens too often that something is done about it.”<sup>91</sup> In their eyes, likely, fostering abusive portrayals of the military would harm its public image and decrease recruiting and retention.

Thus another scene removed from *The Bold and the Brave* demonstrates that military also did not want cinematic leaders to make psychologically abusive threats of violence. In an early combat scene from a draft script (dated April 11, 1955 and entitled “Battle Hell”), Preacher and

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<sup>90</sup> Correspondence from W.S. Beecher Jr. to Don Baruch, 5 April 1955, *Away All Boats*, Movie Subject Files, Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division.

<sup>91</sup> Correspondence from Clair Towne to George Dorsey, 27 April 1951, *Retreat Hell*, Movie Subject Files, Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division.

Fairchild, his subordinate, face an attack from four German soldiers. Preacher engages the advancing Germans without hesitation, but as the screen directions note, “Fairchild isn’t firing.” Preacher begins to exhort Fairchild to fire his weapon, exclaiming, “I can’t do this all alone!” He eventually “shoves his carbine right into Fairchild’s ear,” and he screams, “SHOOT!!! SHOOT HIM BEFORE I KILL YOU!!”<sup>92</sup> What was Army public affairs officer James Chesnutt’s appraisal of the scene? “Get Fairchild to fire without threatening him with the rifle.”<sup>93</sup> Less than a week later, producer Hal Chester confirmed to Don Baruch that “the action by Preacher threatening Fairchild with a rifle has been deleted...He keeps his eyes, and gun, on his own adversary.”<sup>94</sup> Preacher still verbally threatens Fairchild, but the Army felt that was justified in the middle of a firefight, with German soldiers closing in on their position. Regardless, a leader making a physical threat was too much in the eyes of the military.

In addition to removing toxic, abusive leadership, Baruch’s office and the military also endeavored to portray all NCOs and commissioned officers as courageous, competent leaders – or at least not excessively cowardly and incompetent. Portraying the military hierarchy as effective and efficient would contrast sharply with anti-militarist conceptions of idiot officers and bungling NCOs. For *Beachhead*, this red line required cutting dialogue “unfavorable to the Service” where Fletcher, an NCO, reflects on a mission that went badly in Guadalcanal: “So I was stupid... I don’t even remember sending the platoon to be killed.” Don Baruch shares his reasoning in a letter to producer Howard Koch: removing this dialogue “will...give the

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<sup>92</sup> Robert Lewin, “Battle Hell,” draft film script, 11 April 1955, Writers Guild Foundation Archive, p. 13.

<sup>93</sup> Memorandum from James Chesnutt to Don Baruch, 3 May 1955, Box 2, Folder 23, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library.

<sup>94</sup> Correspondence from Hal Chester to Don Baruch, 11 May 1955, Box 2, Folder 23, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library.

impression that Fletcher believes he lost his men because it was a lack of proper leadership, but we as an audience will feel that it was not...his fault. It would be detrimental if the audience thought a Sergeant deliberately ordered his men to death because he was scared."<sup>95</sup> Indeed, incompetent leadership (resulting in the deaths of several Marines) was considered bad, but incompetence resulting from cowardice was worse.

Edits to *Retreat Hell!* also indicate a distaste for incompetence born from misguided bravery. At one point in draft script sent to Baruch's office, an enlisted Marine was hesitating to move forward in combat for "a legitimate reason," but "under the lash of Captain Shields' tongue[,] he advances." Clair Towne wrote to Warner Brothers, concerned that "Captain Shields is ordering...an unsound advance." He elaborates: "Bravery is one thing, but a wasteful sacrifice of men in the face of an unsound tactical situation is something else, and is not likely to result in a sympathetic attitude on the part of people who have lost sons, husbands, brothers, and fathers in the Korean conflict."<sup>96</sup> Towne (and the military establishment as a whole) worried that the public would conflate one bad cinematic officer with the entirety of the real-life officer corps.

Out of concern that the public would erroneously extrapolate from the failures of war film officers, the military disliked the infantry platoon leader depicted in Sam Fuller's *The Steel Helmet*. Towne was again the voice of the DOD, writing to Sam Fuller on October 18, 1950 in response to a draft shooting script: "[The] incompetent, cowardly officer...is to say the least, not typical of the officer corps of the U.S. Army." He feared that "the average audience would be left with the...impression that similar cases are common." Ultimately, he claims, the film would be a

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<sup>95</sup> Correspondence from Don Baruch to Howard Koch, 25 June 1953, Beachhead, Movie Subject Files, Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division.

<sup>96</sup> Correspondence from Clair Towne to George Dorsey, 27 April 1951, Retreat Hell, Movie Subject Files, Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division.

“great injustice...[to] the many competent, intelligent, and responsible officers who are fighting and dying in command of their units in Korea[.]”<sup>97</sup> As part of a last ditch effort to gain the military’s favor so the Army would assist with promoting the film, Fuller changed the script to have the platoon leader become more effective throughout the movie, culminating in his heroic death. If the lieutenant died for the DOD’s approval, his death was in vain. But his heroics blunted a Communist attack – ironic, given the anti-Communist pushback against the film.

### **Anti-Communism’s Red Lines**

Anti-Communism was the dominant ideology and public topic *du jour* throughout the early Cold War. The perceived influence of Communists on American cultural institutions – and Hollywood in particular – was the *casus belli* for the empowerment of official organs of anti-Communism ahead of the Second Red Scare. And according to Larry Ceplair and Stephen Englund, “the seeds of doubt were planted” in Hollywood during the late 1930s and early 40s by the House Special Committee on Un-American Activities, the forerunner of the later standing committee of blacklist infamy.<sup>98</sup> Ceplair and Englund argue that the so-called Dies Committee (named for its Democratic chairman from Texas, Martin Dies Jr.) perceived the American film industry as “an enemy...which it was determined to root out and destroy.” But little came of the committee’s efforts, and it quietly retreated from Hollywood in 1943.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Correspondence from Clair Towne to Samuel Fuller; 18 October 1950; Steel Helmet to Because You’re Mine; Topical File 1943-52; Motion Picture Section, Pictorial Branch, News Division, Office of Public Information, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Legislative and Public Affairs); Record Group 330: Office of the Secretary of Defense; National Archives at College Park.

<sup>98</sup> Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930-60* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003), p. 158.

<sup>99</sup> Ceplair and Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood*, pp. 124, 156-58.

In 1947, though, the Dies Committee's standing successor, the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) held a series of hearings aimed to "expose" the extent of Communist influence in Hollywood, issuing subpoenas to many of the film industry's most prominent figures.<sup>100</sup> HUAC had a group of uncooperative witnesses – the Hollywood Ten – arrested and sentenced to prison for contempt of Congress. HUAC's unwritten message to Hollywood was that none of these individuals (or other suspected Communists for that matter) could work in the industry ever again. Thus the infamous "Hollywood blacklist" was born with the Hollywood Ten at its core. This blacklist grew exponentially throughout the 1950s, changing the political landscape of Hollywood through fear, betrayal, and economic intimidation.

Anti-Communism also shaped the political landscape of the burgeoning federal bureaucracy – and Baruch's office was certainly a part of this growing bureaucracy – during this same time period, thanks to the crusade of Sen. Joseph McCarthy (R-Wisconsin) and his fellow travelers. McCarthy weaponized his seat on the Tydings Committee and later his chairmanship of the Senate Committee on Government Operations to attack perceived Communists from the State Department, the Office of the President, the Voice of America, and, eventually, the U.S. military. Many of McCarthy's victims had only tenuous (if any) links to Communists. Thus his attacks had a chilling effect on the federal bureaucracy, the members of which were already compelled to sign loyalty oaths and were subject to various internal loyalty probes.

It was within this maelstrom of anti-Communist fervor that Baruch's office and the military's Hollywood cooperation program operated. The "red lines" that supported militarization and countered anti-militarism also indirectly served anti-Communism because the

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<sup>100</sup> These witnesses were divided into "friendly" witnesses – those who were fingering suspected communists – and "unfriendly" witnesses – those who refused to address their personal political activities or those of others, citing their First Amendment rights.

military was at the core of America's grand strategy of anti-Communism, as laid out in the Truman Doctrine and NSC-68. But there were another set of red lines that *directly* upheld anti-Communist ideology. They restricted discussion of racial inequality in American society and depictions of German and Japanese war crimes. Baruch's calculus was explicitly political, but other prejudices may have crept into their enforcement of the red lines.

### *American Racial Inequality*

Such personal prejudice found its way into Don Baruch's appraisal of a scene in *Battle Cry* where a Hispanic Marine – Pvt. Pedro – makes a speech decrying the racism he faced in his home state of Texas. As originally written, Pedro's speech, delivered in a bar after he wins the Silver Star, would have been a provocative, poignant piece of cinema (Figure 2).

CLOSE ON HUXLEY

His gay mood stops for an instant as he looks over room and sees Pat. Andy's back is to him. He stares long and hard at her, then suddenly returns to greeting his men.

BAR PEDRO

sits - tight and morbid. Danny and Marion approach him.

DANNY:  
Mind if we join the bachelor's corner?

MARION:  
(pats Pedro on back)  
Congratulations on your Silver Star.

PEDRO:  
Speedy doesn't think so.

DANNY:  
Has he been riding you again? What's the matter with that guy, anyhow!

Pedro just gulps down his drink.

MARION:  
Speedy really isn't a bad fellow...but bigotry is a childhood disease...

PEDRO:  
And I've lived in an epidemic all my life.  
(shakes his head)  
I'm sorry, my friends, I'm drunk. It is just that he never loses an opportunity to remind me I am a dirty Mexican. I am sorry I ever came to New Zealand.

MARION:  
I don't understand. I think it's a delightful country.

PEDRO:  
Yes, and that is why Pedro is sorry. Because for the first time in my life I have been treated as a man...I can walk into a restaurant, ride a street car, sit in movies...no one stares at me here... The people, they call me Tex...Like I am a real Texan. No one here knows what a 'spic' is.  
(Marion and Danny lower their eyes -- after a pause)

I want you to know, my friends...Pedro does not fight for democracy because Pedro has no democracy. I come into the service to learn medicine so I can go back to my rotten shack town in Texas and keep the little ones from dying of filth. I am sorry I come to New Zealand because I know I must return to Texas...

(CONTINUED)

*Terrible*

Figure 2: Undated draft script of *Battle Cry*, annotations likely made by Don Baruch.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Marked-up draft script of *Battle Cry*, annotations likely made by Don Baruch on 12 January 1954, Box 2, Folder 20, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C.



By declaring “Pedro does not fight for democracy because Pedro has no democracy” alongside references to Jim Crow, the scene draws a parallel between the struggle for civil rights and “the good war,” which was ostensibly fought to protect the free, democratic world. The actor who played Pedro, Victor Milan, told David Robb that “[E]verybody applauded when we concluded...It could have been a defining moment in a career.”<sup>102</sup> Screenwriter Leon Uris had seemingly hit a home run.

But in Don Baruch’s eyes, the scene was “terrible.” On April 22, 1954 – the first day that the Army-McCarthy hearings were televised nationwide from gavel-to-gavel – Baruch wrote to Warner Brothers executive George Dorsey about Pedro’s speech: “The racial conflict and hatred indicated between Speedy and Pedro is not considered in the best interest of the government. The speech by Pedro, Page 93, Scene 175, is especially objectionable as it could be used by the Communists for anti-American purposes.”<sup>103</sup> But who did Baruch fear more – the Communists or the anti-Communists? Towne colluded with anti-Communist columnist Victor Riesel to discredit Sam Fuller in 1951, but since then McCarthyism had gone into overdrive. It is plausible that Baruch was looking over his shoulder, but another document hints that more sinister motives may have been at play. Regardless of intent, however, Pedro’s speech did not make it into the final cut of the film.

An April 20 memorandum for the record by Baruch uses a racial slur for Pedro, raising questions about his personal worldview. Written after (or perhaps as) he annotated the script, but before he had comments from the Marine Corps to send back to Warner Brothers, Baruch typed

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<sup>102</sup> Robb, *Operation Hollywood*, 291.

<sup>103</sup> Correspondence from Don Baruch to George Dorsey, 22 April 1954, Box 2, Folder 21, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C.

that he “[f]eel[s] script has been greatly improved to remove certain objections, still has [a] few points which should be taken care of especially [sic] the part about racial hatred with [the] Taxan [sic] and Spic.....”<sup>104</sup> In a private memo, Baruch casually deployed the exact slur that the Hispanic marine had so powerfully reclaimed in a scene that would be left on the cutting room floor. While there is no evidence to suggest that Baruch’s discriminatory worldview directly affected his consideration of racially progressive scenes, another proposed script from 1954 reveals that purging Pvt. Pedro was not an isolated incident.

John Wayne’s abandoned 1954 story treatment, “Giveaway Hill,” included a racially-conscious, fictional Marine named Jesus Perez, who the DOD & military did not like.<sup>105</sup> Baruch’s office and the Marine Corps disliked it due to high American casualty rates and a “feeling of futility for the fighting done...in Korea.”<sup>106</sup> But a memorandum from USMC Director of Information, BGen Frank Wirsig, mentions Perez: “The treatment of PEREZ in certain areas of the script would provide Communist propaganda with reams of new material in their “I hate America” campaign.”<sup>107</sup> Though he toned down Wirsig’s rhetoric when he passed the USMC’s comments to Wayne, Baruch agreed that “Many scenes dealing with Jesus Perez, we believe,

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<sup>104</sup> Don Baruch, Memorandum for the Record, 20 April 1954, Box 2, Folder 21, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C.; somehow, Robb misses this memo despite quoting documents from the same folder.

<sup>105</sup> The “Giveaway Hill” folder in the DOD Film Collection at Georgetown’s Lauinger Library does not contain Wayne’s story treatment, though references are made to it in the folder’s documents.

<sup>106</sup> Correspondence from Don Baruch to John Wayne, 21 October 1954, Box 14, Folder 34, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C.

<sup>107</sup> Memorandum from F. H. Wirsig, USMC, to Don Baruch, 15 October 1954, Box 14, Folder 34, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C.

would be potential material for anti-American propaganda.”<sup>108</sup> Wayne never responded to Baruch’s letter.

In addition to excising explorations of racial inequality for Americans of Latino ethnicity, Baruch’s office and the Army were perturbed at Sam Fuller’s efforts to incorporate discussion of the Japanese-American internment camps into *The Steel Helmet*. Two scenes from an undated shooting script of the film would have addressed the issue head-on. In the first, a dialogue between a captured North Korean intelligence officer and a *Nisei* “retread” soldier, Tanaka, who had served with the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat team in WWII, the Communist prisoner tries to flip Tanaka: “How can you shoulder a weapon for people who threw Japanese-Americans into a prison camp in the last war?” Tanaka furiously reflects on how his parents lost their business, and how he only escaped the camp by joining the Army. “The Red... certain he has found an ally,” senses Tanaka’s anger and presses his advantage: “Why? That is what I don’t understand. They call you dirty yellow Jap rats and yet you defend their hypocritical principles... Do you know what are you fighting for now?” Tanaka’s response? “Sure – my life.”<sup>109</sup> Towne was not impressed with Tanaka’s response. He wrote a memorandum for senior Army public affairs officer Lieutenant Colonel Robert V. Shinn asserting that Fuller “deliberately weakens Tanaka’s stand on ‘why he is fighting’... How much crap can [the] U.S. public take?”<sup>110</sup> The other race-

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<sup>108</sup> Correspondence from Don Baruch to John Wayne, 21 October 1954, Box 14, Folder 34, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C.

<sup>109</sup> Samuel Fuller, “The Steel Helmet,” undated draft film script, 1950, Writers Guild Foundation Archive, Los Angeles, pp. 70-71.

<sup>110</sup> Memorandum from Clair Towne to Robert Shinn; 18 October 1950; Steel Helmet to Because You’re Mine; Topical File 1943-52; Motion Picture Section, Pictorial Branch, News Division, Office of Public Information, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Legislative and Public Affairs); Record Group 330: Office of the Secretary of Defense; National Archives at College Park.

related dialogue in the draft is between Zack and his lieutenant, Driscoll, who confides in his white comrade: “I still think the government was right in throwing every Jap behind barbed wires...All those slant-eyes are the same. They’re two-faced. I wouldn’t trust any of them.”<sup>111</sup>

This led an unknown Army officer reviewing the script to declare:

The chief objection I found is that [the] author uses opporunity [sic] of this Script [sic] to point up racial situation in [the] U.S.. He loses no opportunity to exploit this angle...uses “gooks” in its worse [sic] form, and is not even clever in getting across American misuse of Japanese on west coast during [the] last war. Inferences seem deliberately guaged [sic] to make [an] issue out of [the] race problem again...strongly recommend that the Army not lend its material, footage and prestige to the filming of such a stinking production. <sup>112</sup>

As written, these scenes – similar to Pvt. Pedro’s scene years later in *Battle Cry* – would have struck at the core of the fledgling “good war” mythology, marking the stark contrast between American racial inequality and the war’s idealistic justifications such as Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms.<sup>113</sup> The irony was not lost on Fuller’s Communist prisoner, who, “with triumphant contempt” in response to Tanaka’s wartime experience, observed: “Democracy!”<sup>114</sup> Notably, Fuller significantly rewrote these scenes for the final version of the film as part of his last-ditch effort to win the Army’s approval. But for Baruch and the military, reality took a back

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<sup>111</sup> Samuel Fuller, “The Steel Helmet,” undated draft film script, 1950, Writers Guild Foundation Archive, Los Angeles, pp. 49-50.

<sup>112</sup> The memo is signed, but the signature is illegible. Unknown author, undated memorandum likely created late October 1950; Steel Helmet to Because You’re Mine; Topical File 1943-52; Motion Picture Section, Pictorial Branch, News Division, Office of Public Information, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Legislative and Public Affairs); Record Group 330: Office of the Secretary of Defense; National Archives at College Park.

<sup>113</sup> Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms, as laid out in a speech on January 6, 1941, were freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from want, and freedom from fear.

<sup>114</sup> Samuel Fuller, “The Steel Helmet,” undated draft film script, 1950, Writers Guild Foundation Archive, Los Angeles, p. 70.

seat to the political demands of anti-Communist ideology, as also demonstrated by the final red line: excessive enemy war crimes.

### *Excessive Japanese or German War Crimes*

Although enemy war crimes were a staple of wartime cinema, featuring prominently in both newsreels and feature films as a way of motivating the American people against their foes, the geopolitical realities of the Cold War quickly changed this calculus. Sometimes this logic was readily transparent, as was the case with *Prisoner of War* (MGM, 1954), which starred a stoic Ronald Reagan.

*Prisoner of War* was hastily produced after American POWs freed from North Korean camps shared their tales of torture, shocking and captivating the American public. The film's setting is a North Korean POW camp where Ronald Reagan's character, an intelligence officer, goes undercover as a prisoner.<sup>115</sup> His mission is to gather intelligence on Communist torture, brainwashing, and mind control practices within the camp. Notably in light of the red line concerning Americans breaking the Geneva Convention, the film depicts a multitude of Communist war crimes, including executions, beatings, and torture.

The Army and DOD took no umbrage with the North Koreans carrying out such atrocities, but they did voice their concerns about the way the American prisoners spoke about their former enemy: the Japanese. A memorandum from the chief of the Army's Public Information Division, Colonel George Patrick Welch, to Baruch identifies the following required "adjustment" as "of relatively greater importance than the others": "There are many references in

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<sup>115</sup> I would be remiss not to stress the absurdity of this plot. "Going undercover" as a prisoner simply means allowing oneself to be taken prisoner. Reagan parachutes into North Korea solely for this mission.

this story to mistreatment of our personnel by the Japanese in World War II...As a substitute [in this particular scene] it is suggested that Sgt. Sloan be a “former” liaison sergeant with the Russians (or a “former” ally), where he personally witnessed their mistreatment of POWs and the Russian brainwashing technique.”<sup>116</sup>

Another sentence in the same memo explains the blatantly political calculus at play: “While we know this [Japanese mistreatment of American prisoners] to be true, pointing it out at this time could not help our relations with Japan, now allied with us against Communism.” When MGM disregarded the DOD’s edit requests, the Army refused to authorize any of its commands to assist with promoting the film, which fell on its face at the box office. In the eyes of the DoD and military, U.S.-Japan relations were too strategically important during this hot stage of the Cold War for filmmakers to jeopardize by invoking recent history.

Similarly, Baruch’s office invoked the need to uphold U.S.-West German relations while relaying edits to the Bischoff-Diamond Corporation regarding *Screaming Eagles* in May 1955. Baruch asked Bischoff to remove the “farmhouse scene with the German soldier forcing his affections on the French girl.”<sup>117</sup> But war crimes were not his only concern – he also requested that Bischoff eliminate the term “Krauts.” Baruch’s reasoning for the edits was political: “Please keep in mind we are friendly with the Germans today and therefore, [we] would not approve anything tending to make them ridiculous or to offend them.” Bischoff complied, so the Army used “showings of this motion picture... as a means of promoting enlistment in the U.S. Army,”

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<sup>116</sup> Memorandum from George Welch, to Don Baruch, 21 November 1953, Box 9, Folder 2, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C.

<sup>117</sup> Correspondence from Don Baruch to Samuel Bischoff, 26 May 1955, Box 9, Folder 16, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C.

thus boosting the film's profile.<sup>118</sup> But concerns about international relations were only a small part of the broader system this study has uncovered.

### **The System in Whole**

This project set out to analyze thematically the individual script edits that comprised the military's Hollywood censorship system during the early Cold War in order to reconstruct them as a systematic whole. The system that emerged from the documentary record was *ad hoc*, imperfect, and best reconstructed through the lenses of the purposes it served. It significantly reduced or toned down filmmakers' attempts to engage with proscribed themes – “the red lines” – in the period's war movies. Although early Cold War militarization and attempts to counter anti-militarism served anti-Communist ideology, many of the red lines are best understood for their militarism-related roots: American war crimes, mass American casualties, disturbing combat scenes, excessive indiscipline/insubordination, and toxic/incompetent leadership. A pair of red lines, though, were directly and explicitly inspired by anti-Communism: restricting discussion of American racial inequality or excessive German or Japanese atrocities.

The censorship system was extremely effective, affecting the creative freedom of even films that eschewed the approval of Baruch's office. Critics who argue that the system was not “censorship” conveniently ignore the words of filmmakers who did not submit to the DOD's requests, an action that would theoretically preserve their creative freedom. The producer and director of *Attack* (United Artists, 1956), Robert Aldrich, ceased his attempts to appease Baruch when it became apparent that the Army would never approve cooperation because of the film's

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<sup>118</sup> Order from Army CINFO to subordinate commands, 27 April 1956, Box 9, Folder 16, Department of Defense Film Collection 1, Georgetown University Lauinger Library Special Collections Research Center, Washington, D.C.

negative portrayal of National Guard officers, culminating in a group of soldiers killing their commanding officer. But Aldrich did not just quietly produce his film and move on. He reached out to a U.S. Representative from Illinois, Melvin Price, and Price raised hell in the national media, alleging “censorship.” While nothing came of Price’s statements, Aldrich’s actions partially dispel the notion that filmmakers could simply opt-out of the system. Moreover, the saga of Sam Fuller’s *The Steel Helmet* demonstrates that the system could successfully compel Hollywood to make major revisions without any guarantee of official cooperation.



## CONCLUSION

How do we make meaning from the censorship system's sweeping scope and stunning success?

First and foremost, our new understanding of the red lines and their effects demands that scholars reevaluate the early Cold War's Hollywood war films and, by extension, the military's role in enshrining America's hagiographic memory of WWII. Indeed, Jeanine Basinger describes how "most important aspect of" WWII combat films made between late 1949 and 1960 was that they "provided a ritual in which the American audience [could] watch the war together, celebrate its satisfactory completion, reenact its combat, and come together in their understanding of it."<sup>119</sup>

And the American people regularly partook in this sacrament. By amateur movie researcher Bruce Cogerson's tally, one or more WWII films cracked the box office top twenty in nearly every year of the 1950s, and many others were in the ranks of middle-performers that helped studios balance their books.<sup>120</sup> Thus, censoring this period's war movies likely had an outsized effect on American cultural conceptions about military service, combat, and WWII.

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<sup>119</sup> Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 141.

<sup>120</sup> Bruce Cogerson, *Ultimate Movie Rankings, Yearly Reviews*. Accessed 9 March 2019, <https://www.ultimatemovierankings.com/yearly-reviews-1936-1959/>; 1956 and 1958 are exceptions. I also want to briefly address the problem of tracking down box office rankings (or even the box office data for a single film) – there is no centralized, agreed upon database. Cogerson, despite his lack of formal training, does perhaps the best job of aggregating and reconciling box office numbers from corporate ledgers, *Variety* magazine, and historians who have tabulated and published data for certain studios.

To that end, a promising (and underexplored) avenue of research is the role of the Production Code Administration in this censorship and memory-shaping process. In what ways did the PCA reinforce the military's red lines, and what red lines may they have added of their own?

Additionally, what effect could the sanitizing of WWII films have had on the Vietnam generation? Scholars have extensively considered the effect of Vietnam War films and imagery on succeeding generations, thanks in part to an episode in Anthony Swofford's *Jarhead* where Desert Shield/Storm Marines cheer throughout a private screening of *Apocalypse Now*.<sup>121</sup> Fewer scholars have applied this framework to explore the received cultural expectations of warfare that the Baby Boomers carried into the jungles of Vietnam. None have done so in light of this project's systematic reconstruction of the red lines that shaped the movies that drove the boomers' received cultural expectations of military service and combat. They were the children who absorbed what Basinger calls the shared "ritual" of 1950s war movies, and Lisa Munday observes that "children and teenagers were more accepting of glorified images of war than adults were."<sup>122</sup> Does it then follow the military's censorship system, by tempering (if not outright obscuring) the moral agony of war in service of militarization and anti-Communism, set the boomers up for moral injury in Vietnam? "Thin Red Lines" has thus opened a multitude of avenues for further research.

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<sup>121</sup> I should note here that a *Washington Post* reporter, Henry Allen, wandered around eastern Saudi Arabia on the eve of Desert Storm, asking soldiers about their received cultural images of war. Nearly every single servicemember responded with Vietnam imagery. See Henry Allen, "Images of the Last Real War," *The Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), Jan. 3, 1991.

<sup>122</sup> Munday, *American Militarism and Anti-Militarism in Popular Media*, 11.

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