

# Why The Military Makes Movies

Project Proposal  
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# Summary

The Pentagon has a propaganda arm: the military-entertainment complex.

For over 100 years, the Pentagon has allowed producers of entertainment to use military resources in exchange for control and censorship over content. The DoD's website lists two reasons why: "to accurately depict military stories and make sure sensitive information isn't disclosed."

But there are clearly other reasons. For example, after *Top Gun* released in 1986 -- a movie that closely involved the Pentagon from the start -- the U.S. Navy saw a 500% spike in the number of young men wanting to be Naval Aviators. The DoD's own private data notes that *Top Gun* "completed [the] rehabilitation of the military's image, which had been savaged by the Vietnam War."

I want to explore the impact of the military's involvement in the media. How does it affect its image, recruitment efforts, and the kind of stories that get told?

# Questions

1. Which films and TV shows applying for help from the military were approved, and which were denied? Why?
2. What are the criteria (implicit and explicit) for a film or TV show to be “approved”?
3. Once approved, what kind of support does the military actually provide?
4. What is the relationship between media produced with the military and:
  - a. Military recruitment efforts?
  - b. Public opinion about the military?
  - c. Its popularity? (i.e. IMDb ratings or box office numbers)
  - d. Etc.
5. How many pro- and anti-military films have been produced over time?

# Data

My main source of data is the [Pentagon-Hollywood Collaboration Database](#) (PHCD), a PDF list of ~800 films, TV shows, and music videos that requested support from the military. The PHCD was the [result of a 2017 FOIA request](#) submitted to the Pentagon. Excerpt below:

Title	Sub-Title	Status	Media Source	Media Type	Production Company	Public View Date	History Status	Status Date	Remarks
LAST ACTION HERO, THE		LIM	ET	FILM	COLUMBIA PICTURES	06/28/1993	Note	01/05/2000	FILM ABOUT COMIC BOOK HERO TIME TRAVELING BETWEEN COMIC BOOK WORLD AND REAL WORLD. NO MILITARY THEME. REQUESTED PERMISSION TO PLACE FICTIONAL MOVIE PROMOTION SIGN (EVENTUALLY WAS A BALLOON) ATOP THE MILITARY RECRUITING STATION AT TIMES SQUARE IN NYC. WE SAID OKAY. MINOR PLUG FOR THE RECRUITING STATION. FILMED IN JAN 93 WITHOUT INCIDENT.
PENSACOLA	WINGS OF GOLD	APP	ET	TV	STU SEGAL PRODUCTIONS	05/18/1998	LIM RCV RCV APP Note	10/27/1992 10/27/1992 01/08/1998 01/14/1998 06/03/1998	DATE APPROXIMATED, NO FILE CASE RECEIVED: 98-AV-0001 APPROVED ASSISTANCE MINOR CHANGES REQUIRED; VERY POSITIVE STORY, MUCH MORE REALISTIC THAN ANY OTHER PREVIOUS EPISODE; HIGH POINT OF SEASON; AUTHORIZED FILMING FOR FOUR DAYS AT CAMP PENDLETON, TO INCLUDE TWO CH-46 HELICOPTERS

To supplement this data, I plan to add:

- [OMDb API](#) (for information about each film / TV show)
- [Gallup Public Opinion Polls](#) on Military and National Defense (1969-2020)
- [Active military personnel over time](#) (from DoD)
- Other data as I think of it!

# Challenges

- The PHCD -- my main data source -- is locked in a PDF file that doesn't cleanly transfer to a spreadsheet. A few friends kindly agreed to help me transcribe the data manually, so this is in progress!
- I notice this topic popping up on a lot of conspiracy websites and subreddits (as well as legitimate news agencies), so I want to tread carefully. Like any corporate product placement, the military will deny resources if doing so will affect its image. But where does this impulse cross the line into pro-war propaganda and censorship? Do I need to maintain “objectivity”?
- I don't believe the PHCD data is up to date. Is it worth submitting a FOIA request (like the journalist who acquired the original data) to possibly get more recent information? How do I do that?