

A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP  
OF MOVIES AND MILITARY  
RECRUITMENT

By

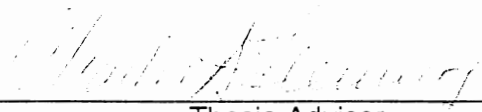
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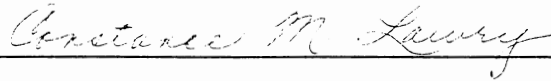
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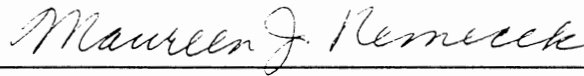
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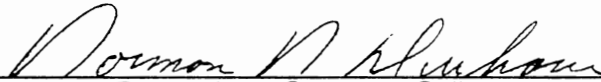
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Researching the possible relationship between movies and military recruitment is analogous to experiencing basic training.

Throughout the thesis process, there was constant physical exercise (working the brain muscles), an obstacle course (locating literature at the library and elsewhere) and practice (revising and editing).

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### General

The military establishment and the motion picture industry are two institutions that are notably effective in impressing certain types of images of the United States Armed Forces on society. Consequently, society develops favorable or unfavorable attitudes toward the military which also influences behavior. Supportive or non-supportive reactions to the military possibly can even correspond to an increase or decrease in recruitment rates.

Regardless of the effectiveness, both the military and the movie industry sometimes conflict over what images of the armed forces they communicate and this causes an imbalance in societal attitudes and behaviors.

#### Background

This relationship debuted circa World War I, coincidentally also the time by which Hollywood became the center of the nation's film production. Hollywood and the government were allies during this time. The former needed military equipment and technical advice to artistically enact realism, while the latter needed a mass medium to disseminate information/propaganda about its war efforts.

The government, in 1917, created the ad hoc Committee on Public Information (CPI), led by journalist George Creel, by Executive Order 2594, to collaborate with the new motion picture industry.

Larry Wayne Ward, former graduate student in the American Cinema/American Studies program at the University of Iowa, rationalized that the film industry's compliance with CPI

can be explained by the natural desire to help one's country in a time of crisis. Like many groups in American society, the men and women of the American film industry were anxious to 'do their bit.' It is also possible that propaganda films were good business: equating movie-going with patriotism may have encouraged attendance (Ward 58).

Thus the public was exposed to motion pictures that were favorable toward the armed services and that encouraged supportive action (such as joining the military).

These World War I ideas were also practiced during World War II, according to Steven Jay Rubin, who authored *Combat Films*. He wrote, "during World War II, Hollywood's dream factories created hundreds of motion pictures, many of them government-backed training films that explained the goals and technicalities of fighting a modern global war--films that explored war from a purely military perspective" (2).

Hollywood continued to generally portray "the American military as infallible, noble, and all-conquering in its movies about war and the armed forces" (220) after World War II and the Korean War, according to Lawrence Suid, motion picture analyst.

Following the stalemate of the Korean War came the era of the Cold War, along with McCarthyism and the threat and paranoia of domestic communism. But Hollywood made it picture-clear that the military would make a heroic rescue to "preserve the peace against an enemy who wanted to take over the world" (Suid 220).

However, with the Vietnam War came a change of attitudes toward the military.

Ultimately, of course, the military image, so long burnished by Hollywood movies, suffered . . . because military leaders and the nation itself had come to believe in the strength and infallibility of the armed forces, a [sic] image created in large part by movies. . . . It was the defeat in Vietnam . . . that forced the American people to reexamine their unquestioned acceptance of the military establishment (Suid 234).



Consequently, the alliance between Hollywood and the government was severed during the turbulent 1960s. Filmmakers turned to independent (civilian) markets instead of the government for their "antiestablishment, antimilitary movies [because] they found [that these] provided a perfect symbol for criticism of war and the military without denying the real need for a strong armed forces" (Suid 223).

Concurrently, the public maintained a "revulsion against things that are military" (*Congressional Quarterly* 23).

In addition, Samuel S. Stratton (Democrat, New York) of the House Armed Services Committee said in *Congressional Quarterly* in 1972, near the close of the war, that

I can only assume that it [the decline in morale] is because of the basic anti-military attitude that has developed in this country in the last few years as a result of the frustrations of Vietnam.

This has obviously affected the young people, Stratton said, who get from the [media] this attitude that military service is to be avoided at any cost (23).

Recruitment rates also dropped drastically following the Vietnam War, noted *Congressional Quarterly*.

Eventually, though almost a decade later, the public's attitude toward the military changed again, this time to a "gung-ho" mood, a term used by *Time* magazine (Lamar 30).

The Vietnam War incident apparently was forgiven and the public accepted, even took for granted, the armed forces.

A revival in producing military movies also brought peace between Hollywood and the government.

The partnership proved profitable once again for both Hollywood and the government, especially since the release of "Top Gun" in 1986.

"Its glorified portrayal of Navy life spurred theater owners in such cities as Los Angeles and Detroit to ask the Navy to set up recruiting exhibits outside cinemas where "Top Gun" was playing to sign up the young moviegoers intoxicated by the Hollywood fantasy" (Lamar 30).

## Statement of the Problem

Evidently, the movies have such a powerful effect on society that the government knew how to use them as a channel for public information and persuasion during wartime.

In peacetime, the government relaxed the control (primarily censorship) it once had of the media during wartime when Hollywood's support was essential to the war effort.

Hence, it is assumed that there is a relationship of military movies with public attitudes toward the armed forces and military recruitment (extreme behavioral reaction).

To continue serving in the public interest, for instance, making the public aware of military operations and portraying the military in a favorable light and motivating young people to join the service so that they can defend and preserve a democratic society, the media should and must assume an obligation of social responsibility--if the nation's cause is just.

And this idea has been endorsed by former United States President Woodrow Wilson who praised the motion picture industry when it voluntarily intends to devote its services "to the promotion of universal and lasting peace. It can render the greatest service...to the nation and to observant people everywhere throughout the world" (Ward 140).

## Theoretical Framework

On the assumption that there is some correlation between the elements--movies, military recruitment and public attitudes--the Cognitive Dissonance Theory would be most applicable in clarifying the relationship among these three elements. The theory holds "that two elements of knowledge are in dissonant relation if, considering these two alone, the obverse of one element would follow from the other" (Severin and Tankard 152).

For society to maintain a positive balance of the elements and, likewise, a positive attitude towards the military and the government, the media's role in serving this interest would be most applicable in adhering to the Social Responsibility Theory of the Press. This theory holds that the mass media should be "responsible for the quality of their offerings, print or broadcast....Social responsibility charges the mass media with the development of, and enforcement of, ethics in the public interest" (Black and Whitney 535).

### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the trends in Hollywood military-related productions with special emphasis on the nature of the relationship among Hollywood's and the government's efforts, American attitudes toward the armed forces and military recruitment.

In keeping with the purpose of this study, answers to the following questions are being sought:

How have military-related movies been used historically to positively affect public and service members' perceptions of and attitudes toward the armed services?

In what ways have movies positively depicted a particular branch or aspect of the military?

How do the Cognitive Dissonance Theory and the Social Responsibility of the Press apply to this study?

And, what is the relationship between these movies and armed forces recruiting?

### Methodology

To obtain answers to the above questions, qualitative research methods were used.

The basic procedure for this study was to determine the relationship among movies, attitudes and military recruitment as it applied to the Cognitive Dissonance Theory and then conclusions were drawn about this assumed affective relationship as it applied to the Social Responsibility Theory of the Press.

Thus, the research methodology for this thesis relied primarily on the interpretation of the statistical data and other pilot studies already compiled by the government and civilian researchers. Information obtained through archival or library research was also analyzed.

### Significance of Study

From the answers in this study, several groups would benefit: mass media students, scholars and practitioners, military officials and society-at-large.

These groups, like Hollywood and the government, can gain a better understanding of what kind of relationship exists among the government-society-media, what impact movies have on society's attitudes and behaviors, how practical the aforementioned theories are to society and how the government and the media can collaborate responsibly in the public's interest.

### Limitations

This study was specifically limited to covering only films made for public distribution (not television movies) and films not made under government contract by civilian filmmakers (based on the accuracy of government data). The emphasis was on 1980s movies with military recruitment or training themes because, during this peacetime decade, there were no historical contaminants (wars, casualties, etc.) which could have affected the attitudes of the public ("gung-ho" neutral to positive) or the changing numbers/levels of military personnel.

However, this study was also limited in that it attempted to show a relationship--not cause-and-effect--of movies and military recruitment, since other factors (draft,

enhanced service benefits, recession, patriotism, heavy advertising campaigns, social pressures, etc.) besides movies could be attributed to recruitment rates.

### Outline of Study

The remainder of this study followed the general outline below to present a logical argument for a possible relationship of one of the aforementioned factors--movies--and military recruitment:

"Chapter II: The Cognitive Dissonance Theory." An explanation of the Cognitive Dissonance Theory in relation to the impact of military movies on society's attitudes and recruitment behavior in the United States since World War I.

"Chapter III: The Social Responsibility Theory of the Press." An explanation of the Social Responsibility Theory of the Press in relation to the government and military's and society's expectations of the motion picture industry.

"Chapter IV: Methodology." A description of the approach for obtaining data, such as recruitment statistics and the release dates of box office movies, and for analyzing them.

"Chapter V: Findings." An analysis of the data found from the methodology and case studies of 1980s movies with military recruitment and training themes.

"Chapter VI: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations." A summary of the study and findings with conclusions and recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER II

### THE COGNITIVE DISSONANCE THEORY

An overview of a relevant theory, the Cognitive Dissonance Theory, is helpful in putting into context and perspective the analysis of the relationship of the elements: public attitudes, armed forces and military movies.

The Cognitive Dissonance Theory is attributed to social psychologist Leon Festinger who developed it from similar concepts of balance, symmetry and congruity.

The concepts are based on the notion that humans need order or consistency in their lives.

Various theories contend that humans strive for consistency in a number of ways--between attitudes, between behaviors, between attitudes and behaviors, in our perception of the world, and even in the development of personality. In short, we try to organize our world in ways that seem to us to be meaningful and sensible (Severin and Tankard 144).

Anything otherwise is considered inconsistent or dissonant. Knowledge, awareness or cognition of dissonance is, simply, cognitive dissonance.

#### Evolution of the Theory

One of the earliest concepts of consistency, Balance Theory, was postulated by psychologist Fritz Heider. He studied the relationship among a person, some other person as the object of analysis and a physical object, idea or event and how these are cognitively ordered by the former person.

In Heider's paradigm, a balanced state exists if all three relations are positive in all respects or if two are negative and one is positive. All other combinations are unbalanced....[Furthermore], the concept of a balanced state designates a situation in which the perceived units and the experienced sentiments coexist without stress (Severin and Tankard 146).

Heider also theorized that the stress of an unbalanced state can be relieved only when change occurs within the situation to reach a balanced state.

Derived from this idea of balanced and unbalanced states is the Symmetry Theory which social psychologist Theodore M. Newcomb applied to study communication between people.

His model involved at least two people and an object of their attitude, where one person communicates something to the other about the object and where both people are positively or negatively attracted to each other and have intense attitudes toward the object.

Newcomb contended that attempts to influence each other to bring about symmetry (or balance or equilibrium) are a

function of the attraction one person has for another. . . . If we fail to achieve symmetry through communication with another person about an object important to both of us, we may then change our attitude toward either the other person or the object in question in order to establish symmetry (Severin and Tankard 147).

It is because a person strives for symmetry and consistency that Newcomb termed this conflict "a persistent strain toward symmetry," the amount of which is dependent upon the intensity of one person's attitude toward the object and attraction for the person.

Another adaptation of the consistency (balance and symmetry) theories is communication researcher Charles E. Osgood's Congruity Theory.

Osgood applied this theory to study attitudes that people have toward sources of information and the objects of the source's assertions.

In the congruity paradigm, a person receives an assertion from a source, toward which he has an attitude, about an object, toward which he also has an attitude. In Osgood's model, how much a person likes a source and an object will determine if a state of congruity or consistency exists. . . . Incongruity exists when the attitudes toward the source and the object are similar and the assertion is negative or when they are dissimilar and the assertion is positive. An unbalanced state has either one or all negative relations (Severin and Tankard 148).

But trying to achieve a balanced state or congruity, however, doesn't necessarily produce attitude change because of people's selectivity--selective

exposure, selective attention, selective perception and selective retention (Severin and Tankard 120-128).

*Selective exposure* is "the tendency for a person to expose himself or herself to communications that are in agreement [sic] with the person's existing attitudes and to avoid communications that are not."

*Selective attention* is "the tendency for a person to pay attention to the parts of a message that are consonant with strongly held attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors and to avoid the parts of a message that go against strongly held attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors."

*Selective perception* is "the tendency for people's perception to be influenced by their own wants, needs, attitudes, and other psychological factors."

And *selective retention* is "the tendency for the recall of information to be influenced by wants, needs, attitudes and other psychological factors."

In brief, W. Phillips Davison, James Boylan and Frederick T. C. Yu, Columbia University journalism professors and authors of *Mass Media Systems and Effects*, wrote that

there are thus many situations in which the principle of consistency has been found to govern people's behavior. They choose to expose themselves to information which is in accord with their existing ideas; they selectively give their attention to communications with which they agree; and if they learn something that conflicts with their attitudes or values, they forget it, dismiss it as unimportant, or reinterpret it so as to minimize the dissonance (138).

From the concept of selectivity presented in the Congruity Theory evolved the Cognitive Dissonance Theory.

"In cognitive dissonance the elements in question may be (1) irrelevant to one another, (2) consistent with one another (in Festinger's terms, consonant), or (3) inconsistent with one another (dissonant, in Festinger's terms)" (Severin and Tankard 153).

As with previous consistency theories, a person will strive to reduce dissonance to achieve consonance and in "trying to reduce it the person will actively avoid situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance" (Festinger 3). This is the concept of selectivity.



There are other implications of the Cognitive Dissonance Theory, recapitulated in Festinger's book of the same title. His main ideas included:

1. Dissonance may arise from logical inconsistency; cultural mores; one specific opinion is sometimes included, by definition, in a more general opinion; or past experience.
2. Dissonance almost always exists after an attempt has been made, by offering rewards or threatening punishment, to elicit overt behavior that is at variance with private opinion.
3. Forced or accidental exposure to new information may create cognitive elements that are dissonant with existing cognition.
4. The magnitude of the dissonance or consonance which exists between two cognitive elements will be a direct function of the importance of these two elements....The strength of the pressure to reduce dissonance is a function of the magnitude of the existing dissonance.
5. Dissonance may be reduced and consonance may be achieved by changing one or more of the elements involved in dissonant relations; by adding new cognitive elements that are consonant with already existing cognition; and by decreasing the importance of the elements involved in the dissonant relations.

Moreover, Festinger generalized that the existence of dissonance is "probably so prevalent, and various circumstances which can give rise to dissonance probably occur so frequently, that evidence of dissonance and manifestations of the pressure to reduce it are likely to be found in almost any context" (276).

#### Theoretical Application to This Study

The study of the relationships among the elements--public attitudes, the military (recruitment) and movies--is one such context to which the Cognitive Dissonance Theory can be applied.

In this particular case, the elements are the public, the military and movies.

The public has an attitude toward the military which is depicted in movies. Dissonance may arise when the public has a positive/favorable attitude toward the military and receives a negative assertion/depiction from the movies about the military, or vice versa.

The military is ultimately affected by this dissonance; it either receives support or non-support, which possibly has a consequent effect on the respective increase or decrease in recruitment rates.

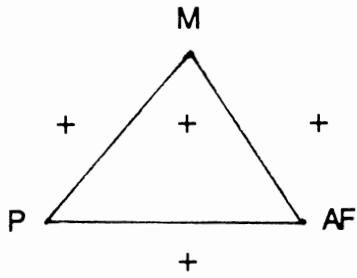
This can also be applied in a historical perspective.

During World War I and World War II, the elements were consonant. (Refer to Figure 1.) The public held positive attitudes toward the military, and the movies also depicted the military positively. Recruitment rates were notably high.

Even during the Korean War and Cold War, consonance existed. But, in actuality, "if Korea ended in a stalemate, most Americans attributed the standoff to political failures rather than any shortcomings within the armed forces [and if movies] contained a negative image, the fault invariably rested with one or two individuals, not the military as a whole" (Suid 220-221).

The public still held positive attitudes toward the military and movies continued to depict the military positively. Recruitment rates were still high.

This probably can be explained by selective attention and perception--that the public selects information consonant with the attitudes in the movie's depiction of the military.

Consonance

World War I

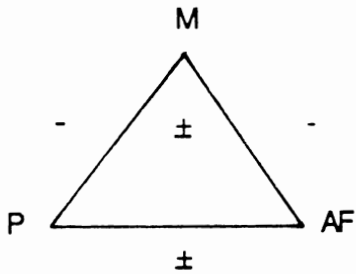
World War II

Korean War

Cold War

Key: P = public or people  
 AF = armed forces  
 M = military movies

Figure 1. Historical Consonant Trend

Dissonance

Vietnam War

Key: P = public or people  
 AF = armed forces  
 M = military movies

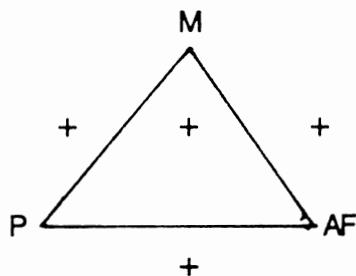
Figure 2. Historical Dissonant Trend

However, during the Vietnam War, the elements were dissonant. (Refer to Figure 2.) The public was divided in their attitudes toward the war and toward the military; some supported them while some were against them. The former public experienced dissonance when movies depicted the military negatively.

To reduce dissonance, the former public changed their attitude of the military from positive to negative and possibly behaved accordingly (to an extreme, such as by not joining the military). Hypothetically, recruitment rates drastically declined.

The public's attitude toward the military eventually changed since the Vietnam War during the 1980s to neutral or positive "gung ho." Following this trend, movies also began to depict the military positively. Recruitment rates showed stability or increase. Consonance was achieved. (Refer to Figure 3.)

### Consonance



Post Vietnam

Key: P = public or people  
 AF = armed forces  
 M = military movies

Figure 3. Recent Consonant Trend

## CHAPTER III

### THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY THEORY OF THE PRESS

Cognitive consonance can be preserved among the elements the public, armed forces and military movies, as explained in the previous chapter. Likewise, a democratic society can be preserved if there is enough military personnel to defend it.

These public/society interests must be served, according to the Social Responsibility Theory of the Press, which asserts that all forms of media, the motion picture industry included, aim "to conscientiously promote social good and community welfare" (Wood 58).

But the operative role of the mass media depends upon the country's social, economic and political structure.

Four classical theories of the press, categorized by a communications research team of Frederick Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm, describe the various roles of the media in a country.

The United States, a democratic-capitalist country, ascribes to the Social Responsibility Theory, a western concept, which evolved from the Authoritarian and Libertarian theories (Hachten 15).

#### Evolution of the Theory

The United States declared its independence in 1776 from Great Britain, an oppressive mother country, where the media was controlled by the monarch (Authoritarian Theory). To counter authoritarianism, the Libertarian Theory of the press evolved from the philosophical ideas of John Milton, John Locke, Thomas Jefferson and John Stuart Mill. This theory holds that

human beings are rational and are capable of making their own decisions and that governments exist to serve the individual. Unlike the authoritarians, libertarians hold that the common citizen has a right to hear all sides of an issue in order to distinguish truth from falsehood. Since any government restriction on the expression of ideas infringes on the rights of the citizen, the government can best serve the people by not interfering with the media (Dominick 57).

The theory also shaped the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which states that "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of the press. . . ."

Since then, the libertarian-style media operated to inform, entertain and sell, but chiefly to help discover truth and to check on government.

Furthermore, Farrar (10) believed that

the media of mass communications play a role of the first magnitude in libertarian society. By conveying opinions of all persuasions to the community, the press in effect becomes the marketplace of ideas, the forum through which opinions are debated and where truth will ultimately prevail . . . [However,] to work properly, libertarian theory requires certain conditions to be met. One is that all persons and all opinions must enjoy full and equal access to the intellectual marketplace. Another is that the audience--the public, the voters, will always seek out a wide range of viewpoints, then react intelligently to conflicting ideas.

When the nation manifested its destiny with the expansion of its boundaries and the increase of its population, so did the media manifest itself as an industry and business. The media, too, with its improved technology, could disseminate information to the masses at a quick rate.

But the press abused their liberties. "Yellow" and "jazz" journalism, muckraking, deceptive advertising, indecency, profanity, vulgarity and other abuses were being practiced by the media as each media-business tried to "outsensationalize" the other in order to make profits throughout the 19th century (Dominick 101).

Eventually the Libertarian Theory no longer applied to this situation and, to rectify its abuses, the Social Responsibility Theory emerged. This theory, however, was neither meant to supersede the Libertarian Theory, nor was it meant to be the ideal.

Constructed by the Commission on Freedom of the Press in 1942 which was chaired by Robert Hutchins, then chancellor of the University of Chicago, this theory does aspire to be ideal.

The name of the Commission was also the idea behind the requirements of a free society and ideals of a free press. The Commission listed that an ideal free press requires: (1) a truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning, (2) a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism, (3) the projection of a representative picture of the constituent groups in the society, (4) the presentation and clarification of the goals and values of the society and (5) full access to the day's intelligence.

Moreover, the Commission issued guidelines for the theory in 1947 which explained that it

ascribes basically the same six functions to the press as the Libertarian Theory: (1) providing information, discussion, and debate on public affairs; (2) instructing and informing the public to make it capable of self-government; (3) protecting the rights of the individual against the government through its watchdog function; (4) maintaining the economic equilibrium of the system by bringing together buyer, seller, and advertiser; (5) providing entertainment; and (6) remaining independent of outside pressures by maintaining its own economic self-sufficiency. The basic principles of the social responsibility theory uphold conflict resolution through discussion; there is a high regard for public opinion, consumer action, and professional ethics and jealous guard over private rights and important social interests (Cassata and Asante 78).

#### Theoretical Application to This Study

A further dimension of the Social Responsibility Theory of the Press which is relevant to the study of the relationship among the public (society), armed forces (government) and movies (media) is that the "government is granted a limited role in intervening in media operations and in regulating conditions if public interests are not being adequately served" (Hachten 22).

Additionally, the development of the theory also served as the basis by which various media organizations' professional codes of ethics were written.

But in regard to the government's intervention into media operations, the Pentagon can limit its support of Hollywood in their production of military movies.

"Before a producer receives military assistance for a TV or movie project, the screenplay is reviewed by officials at the Department of Defense (DoD) and by each of the services involved" (Lamar 30).

Producers and filmmakers must then comply with the policies in DoD publication 5410.15 which outlines that:

1. Government assistance may be provided to an entertainment-oriented motion picture, television, or video production when cooperation of the producers with the Government results in benefitting the Department of Defense or when this would be in the best national interest, based on consideration of the following factors:
  - a. The production must be authentic in its portrayal of actual persons, places, military operations, and historical events. Fictional portrayals must depict a feasible interpretation of military life, operations, and policies.
  - b. The production is of informational value and considered to be in the best interest of public understanding of the U.S. Armed Forces and the Department of Defense.
  - c. The production may provide services to the general public relating to, or enhancing, the U.S. Armed Forces recruiting and retention programs.
  - d. The production should not appear to condone or endorse activities by private citizens or organizations when such activities are contrary to U.S. Government policy.

Note that compliance with the DoD guidelines is optional since movie makers do not necessarily need to receive assistance (military equipment or technical advice) from the government. Mandatory compliance would constitute government restraint, or censorship, a violation of the First Amendment.

Self-regulation, or "self-censorship, on the other hand, survives in industry-imposed ratings" (Farrar 299). Such a self-regulation code was written by the Motion Picture Association of America.

"The Association was formed and the code adopted to meet the threat of censorship. The points covered by the code and by the administration of it show



that the aim is to control the content of films so that they will pass the state boards of censorship" (Leigh 69).

But film distributors claimed that states' and cities' censorship rules violated the First Amendment. So the federal courts upheld the amendment and allowed moviemakers their rights, provided that they reform the obscene, profane, vulgar or violent contents in their films (Leigh 70).

Also another significant principle in the code, which is relevant to this study, is that the Association insists that in film contents "the official agents of law and respectability must not be ridiculed" (Leigh 70).

However, the code was more restrictive than the rules of the states' and cities' censorship boards. The code also could not keep pace with the dynamics of social values and improved technology.

Outdated and unenforceable, the code was replaced in 1968 by a new concept of self-regulation--the motion picture rating system--which classifies films, by letter denotation, based on the intensity of their contents.

Observance of the rating system, like compliance with DoD Regulations 5410.15, is optional since moviemakers are not required to submit a film for rating. But "in order for the MPAA rating system to work, producers, distributors, theater owners, and parents must all cooperate. There is no governmental involvement in the classification system" (Dominick 423).

Nevertheless, the purpose of the rating system and its creator movie code is "to keep in closer harmony with the mores, the culture, the moral sense, and expectations of our society," according to the MPAA (Rivers and Mathews 202).

But when the expectations of society conflict with actual government and military activities (such as the civil conflict over the alleged injustices of the Vietnam War),

the romanticization of the service--which made sense in vintage World War II films, because of the concept of . . . defense was still valid--[becomes] a disservice to its audience. . . . Believing in the military fighting unit requires some greater cynicism (Jacobson 11).

In this sense, the media/movie industry then assumes the responsibility of creating counter-support films. As recommended in the guidelines of the Commission on Freedom of the Press, the media then functions as the "watchdog" or as the "Fourth Estate."

The media can help make the movie-going public aware and even skeptical of the unjust activities in which their military is involved. They can help motivate the public in rallying for a peace-keeping force rather than for a war-based unit. And they can help emphasize to their audience/public that the military should be employed justly--to defend, not to destroy.

After all, it is in society's and the public's interest that the media serve them responsibly. Thus, as theorized earlier, the media should and must assume an obligation of social responsibility.

More specifically, the motion picture industry should and must be responsible for helping to support the government and the military in their positive and favorable depiction of the armed forces and by motivating young people to join the service so that they can defend and preserve a democratic society. And the motion picture industry also should and must be responsible for creating counter-support films to oppose unjust military operations and by making society aware of similar government activities so that the American people know why and for what their country's armed forces are fighting.

## CHAPTER IV

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

A qualitative secondary-data research approach was used to study the relationship among movies, public attitudes and military recruitment as it applied to the Cognitive Dissonance Theory and conclusions were drawn about this assumed affective relationship as it applied to the Social Responsibility Theory of the Press.

Assuming there was a balance (either consonance or dissonance) among the elements, several null and alternate hypotheses have been generated from the theories.

#### Hypotheses

##### Null Hypotheses

There is no relationship among movies, public attitudes and military recruitment.

Positive depiction of the military in movies and corresponding favorable public attitudes toward the armed forces has no relationship with the increase in recruitment rates.

Negative depiction of the military in movies and corresponding unfavorable public attitudes toward the armed forces has no relationship with the decrease in recruitment rates.

### Alternate Hypotheses

There is a relationship among movies, public attitudes and military recruitment rates.

Positive depiction of the military in movies, reinforced by favorable public attitudes, tends to be related with an increase in recruitment rates.

Negative depiction of the military in movies, reinforced by unfavorable public attitudes, tends to be related with a decrease in recruitment rates.

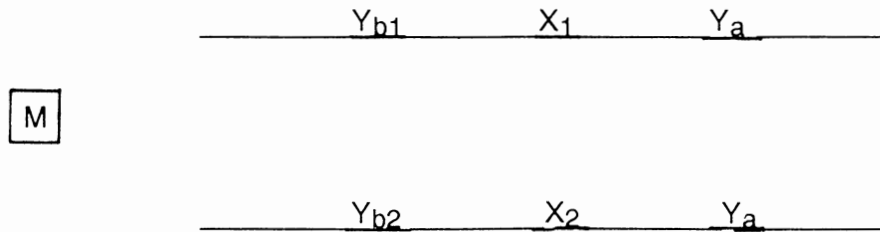
### Operationally Defined Variables

The elements in this study are also identified as variables. The independent variables are military movies and public attitudes toward the armed forces. The dependent variable is recruitment rates.

Military movies, operationally defined, are those films made for public distribution which portray the armed forces. These can be classified as positive depiction or negative depiction of the military according to movie critics' reviews.

Public attitudes, operationally defined, are those behaviors that show support ("gung-ho" moods, enlistments, etc.) or non-support (anti-military demonstrations, discharges, etc.) towards the armed forces. These attitudes can be classified as favorable or unfavorable by people's actions.

And recruitment rates, operationally defined, are the number of personnel in the Department of Defense (DoD) by branch (Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marine Corps and Navy). These can be classified as an increase or decrease in their annual personnel levels.



Key:  $Y_b$  = number of military personnel before release of movie  
 $X_1$  = release of positive military movie  
 $X_2$  = release of negative military movie  
 $Y_a$  = number of military personnel after release of movie  
 $M$  = matched branch of military depicted in the movie

Figure 4. Design Notation

The design notation or Kerlinger shorthand, Figure 4, illustrates the basic procedure for studying the relationship among the elements-variables.

#### Design Narration

DoD figures revealed the number of military personnel in a given fiscal year (FY) prior to the release of a movie, as denoted by  $Y_b$ . Critics' reviews revealed movie type (positive or negative), as denoted by  $X_1$  and  $X_2$  respectively. And DoD figures again revealed an increase or decrease in the number of military personnel in the same fiscal year--the same year of the release of a movie--as denoted by  $Y_a$ .

#### Limitations of the Study

Note that Figure 4 represents a quasi-experimental design--that there are known limitations in this study such as the cause-and-effect relationship (positive or negative depiction of the military in movies may be related to an increase or

decrease in recruitment rates, respectively) could have been merely speculative; the release dates of military movies and the changes in the annual numbers of military personnel could have been coincidental and other elements (recession, patriotism, retirements, "re-ups," casualties, etc.) could have been but were not considered.

### Procedures

The specific procedures for studying the tri-elemental relationship followed this format.

1. Reiterate that the general attitude toward the armed forces was "gung-ho" (neutral to positive) during the 1980s.
2. List movies with military recruitment or training themes within that decade (note the years of release).
3. Determine positive or negative depiction of the military based on movie critics' reviews.
4. Obtain numbers of military personnel for the branch of or division within the service(s) portrayed in movies.
5. Analyze whether depiction matched the numbers of military personnel before and after the release of the movie based on the Cognitive Dissonance Theory.
6. Accept or reject the null hypothesis.
7. Draw conclusions of the effective or ineffective influence of movies on recruitment based on the Social Responsibility Theory of the Press.

Data for listing movies with military recruitment or training themes within that decade were extracted from critics' reviews in *The New York Times Film Reviews*, *Magill's Cinema Annual*, *Film Review Annual* and *The Motion Picture Guide*.

And data for obtaining numbers of military personnel were extracted from *Selected Manpower Statistics* and various DoD press releases.

## Expected Results

Results were expected to be yielded under balanced conditions (either consonance or dissonance only).

The null hypothesis was accepted if, only within a balanced situation, recruitment rates did not reflect movies' depiction and corresponding attitudes toward the armed forces.

The null hypothesis was rejected (and the alternate accepted) if, also only within a balanced situation, recruitment rates did reflect movies' depiction and corresponding attitudes toward the armed forces.

## CHAPTER V

### FINDINGS

#### Positive Attitudes

##### Toward the Government and the Nation

*Newsweek* reviewed the decade of the 1980s as the "era of good feeling" in America and attributed this positive attitude to Ronald Reagan (1980-1988), the former president whom the media called "Dr. Feelgood" (Will 15).

When Reagan assumed office in 1980, America was still recovering from the effects of the Vietnam War and the Middle East hostage crisis during the decades of the 1960s and 1970s. Incidentally, he "rose to the pinnacle of power at a moment when there was a rising wave of intellectual pessimism" (Will 15). And Americans wanted a change from those pessimistic years when Jimmy Carter (Democrat) was president.

Reagan (Republican) gave them a likely opportunity to rectify the old, negative attitudes about the government and diffused new optimism and new ideas in a new decade. *Time* analyzed that "Dr. Feelgood"

worked an alchemy of nostalgia and hope, visions of the past and future collaborating. . . . He gave the people reassuring images of a mythic American past--a sweet, virtuous America recrystallized by Reagan after the traumatic changes of the '60s and '70s. . . . [He restored] the morale of the American people...just as he restored...a faith in the institution of the presidency and in the idea of presidential leadership. he persuaded the American people that their optimism was once again valid (Morrow 34).



### Toward the Armed Forces

Reagan was a patriot who diffused not only his optimism to the American public but also his defense policies. He justified that massive increased defense expenditures of "\$154 billion in 1980 to \$266 billion in 1986", for example, to modernize equipment and expand the number of military personnel, were necessary to counter Soviet military superiority/posture, reported *Time* (Morrow 30).

And Americans agreed with his policies, said public opinion analyst Daniel Yankelovich (Will 30). They "bought the Reagan solution: cut welfare programs, or at least slow their rate of increase, to strengthen defense."

Public support of the government's financial activities for the armed forces/defense "will have a [consequent] effect on social attitudes towards the military profession," added United States Army Major General Robert G. Gard, Jr. added that consequent government financial support of the armed forces/defense and positive attitudes. "If they are lukewarm, apathetic or the armed forces are involved in discreditable or derisory operations, public opinion will react accordingly" (10).

### Toward the Media

Public opinions and attitudes toward government defense policies and events are formed when the America people become aware of government plans. People rely on and expect to be informed by the media about those policies and events.

Reagan's "Presidential Counsellor Edwin Meese told a group of journalists earlier in 1982 that the impact of the media is especially noticeable. 'The press,' he said, 'acts as an intermediary between the public and the government as a national interpreter of events'." (Fromm 29).

A mutual understanding of these expected duties has established a positive attitude-relationship between the American public and the media. "The American public turns to the source that is...trustworthy--the nation's media" (Hall).

## Toward the Movies

Movies are popular media for entertainment as well as sources of information/awareness of the government and armed forces for the public.

Even new military recruits admitted that the various media were sources of useful information about the branch of service which they joined. In a U.S. Navy Recent Recruit Study (August 1989), prepared by BBDO (Batten, Barton, Durstein and Osborne) Research, 1,026 recruit-respondents were asked to check the most frequent sources of useful information.

Table 1 shows that "Navy film" (16%), a Hollywood/civilian-made movie with predominantly Navy themes of characters, ranked as the fourth frequent useful source of information out of 14 other listed sources (22) in 1989. "Navy film" was also ranked as a fourth frequent useful source of information when a comparable study was conducted in 1987.

Media researchers also believe that "parental approval is a factor in enlistments" and try to target parents as "vehicles to carry the message" via commercials for the services or for military movies (Lawliss 72).

Furthermore, parents of the recruit-respondents in the above research frequently responded positively to their son/daughter joining the Navy and the military. Seventy-nine percent of the parents approved, 13% suggested it and 4% suggested they join another branch of the military other than the Navy. Only 8% of the parents reacted negatively.

Nevertheless, based on the responses, both recruits and their parents, and possibly the public, have considerable regard (positive attitudes) toward movies as entertaining sources of information/awareness of the armed forces.

TABLE I

FREQUENT SOURCES OF USEFUL INFORMATION  
(NAVY 1987 AND 1989)

Base: Total Respondents	<u>Total</u>	
	<u>1987</u> (902) %	<u>1989</u> (1026) %
Someone in Navy other than recruiter	43	43
Relative	32	28
Navy mail	20	24
Navy film	11	16
TV ad	10	12
Navy exhibit	7	10
Magazine ad	6	8
School counselor	5	7
Recruiter	3	9
Teacher	2	3
Radio	2	6
Coach	1	1
School newspaper	1	1
Other	4	7

## Positive Movies

Attitudes were positive toward the government, the nation, armed forces/military and the media during the Reagan Era. It might be expected, then, according to the Cognitive Dissonance Theory, that movies made about the armed forces would be, in general, positive also.

A revival of military movies in the post-Vietnam decade seemed "to participate in an attempt in the culture to restore the [military] to its pre-Vietnam credit and, in certain instances, to reintegrate it with a lost patriotic vision of the United States" (Ryan and Kellner 207).

A myriad of military motion pictures were produced by civilian movie makers with or without Department of Defense backing. But only four of those films in that decade contained military recruitment or training themes, as reviewed by movie critics.

The most popular box office movies, "Private Benjamin" (1980), "Stripes" (1981), "An Officer and a Gentleman" (1982) and "Top Gun" (1986), glorified military life and may have positively affected recruitment.

### "Private Benjamin"

This 1980 comedy casts Goldie Hawn as Judy Benjamin, a spoiled, dependent young widow who is unsure of herself and of her future. After the sudden death of her new husband, she impulsively joins the United States Army believing that the institution could take care of her and that she could be dependent on it. This movie "recounts the transformation of a dependent and ineffectual woman. . . . The ideological dimension of the film consists of intimating that the army is what made her strong" (Ryan and Kellner 207).

Potential women recruits can find a role model in Hawn's character. Moreover, "with 'Private Benjamin,' the military regains a lot of its lost prestige. One can believe in brass again" (Canby 304).

"And the runaway success of 'Private Benjamin' suggests just how completely the American moviegoing public has put Vietnam behind it" (*Film Review Guide* 1117).

### "Stripes"

This 1981 comedy co-stars Bill Murray and Harold Ramis as two unsuccessful friends who enlist in the army where only their lively spirit and sense of humor passes them through basic training. However unrealistic, the training helps them be successful when countering communists at American military bases in Europe.

The elements of this army comedy have seen much service: the leathery drill sergeant; the incompetent company commander; the uppity recruit who eventually makes good; the platoon of misfits; the pre-graduation binge; the vicissitudes of basic training; the recruits' first set of ill-fitting fatigues; the early-morning forced march.... [The producers] turned all this into a notably fresh and coherent comedy, full of well-judged tonal changes and at times rising . . . to heights of ecstatic good humour" (*Film Review Guide* 1117).

"Stripes" thus portrayed a stereotypical harsh military life as a fun and appealing one.

### "An Officer and a Gentleman"

This 1982 romantic drama stars Richard Gere as Zack Mayo, an undisciplined, selfish loner. He joins Naval Aviation Officers Candidate School trying to forget his troubled past. Throughout his basic training, he is challenged physically by a brutal drill sergeant and emotionally by a sensitive lover. But predictably, he becomes disciplined and unselfish; he becomes an officer and a gentleman. This film "plays on human sentiments...but it does so in order to reinforce the military institution" (Ryan and Kellner 208).

Movie reviewers described Gere's character as gallant and heroic, an image advertisers find that appeals to and attracts potential young male officers (Lawliss 72).

## "Top Gun"

This 1986 action-romance drama features Tom Cruise as Lieutenant Pete "Maverick" Mitchell, a flamboyant, daring and competitive aviator determined to claim recognition as "Top Gun," the highest title of the Navy's elite jet fighter pilots. He attempts to conquer his rival for the title (who loses) and manipulate/dominate his lover-instructor (who leaves him). Although he does become "Top Gun," he eventually learns that competition does not secure him happiness and settles for a position as a flight instructor, now equal--not dominant--in rank to his forgiving lover.

While some movie reviewers critiqued that "Top Gun" had an old-fashioned theme/plot, the *Motion Picture Guide* (287) named it "the most successful movie of the year." *Time* magazine added that the movie "had all the ingredients for a hit: a brash beefcake hero and a gorgeous, throaty-voiced heroine..., a pop-music soundtrack and MTV-style visual pyrotechniques" (Lamar 30).

Clearly, "the high-flying hardware turns "Top Gun" into a 110-minute commercial for the Navy" (Lamar 30). But "'Top Gun' isn't just like an ad for the U.S. Forces. It is one: made with full cooperation from the Pentagon, it places military personnel (real, not fictional) higher than film technicians on the end-credits. It is hardly necessary...to spell out the implications of such a project in relation to Reaganite policy and U.S. military involvements" (Williamson 1446).

And because the producers of "Top Gun" requested assistance from the Navy (who provided the real jets--for a fee), their partnership was mutually profitable.

"Top Gun" became "one of the top-grossing attractions of 1986" (*Magill's Cinema Annual* 1987 437). And "the Navy was handsomely rewarded for its [cooperation] as it watched enlistments soar when the film became a hit. Some theater owners actually asked the Navy to put recruiters in their lobbies to catch young men coming out with the sound of jets still ringing in their ears. The Dutch Air Force, among others, reported much the same phenomenon when it played there" (*The Motion Picture Guide* 228).

## Positive Recruitment

Annual figures from the Department of Defense (*Selected Manpower Statistics*) were compared against corresponding numbers of military personnel when movies with military recruitment or training themes were released.

Overall, the figures seemed to reveal positive recruitment.

When "Private Benjamin" was released in 1980, it was expected that the rate of women's enlistment in the Army would increase. Prior to the movie's release (1979), the Army had an active duty strength of 55,151 enlisted women. At the end of fiscal year (FY) 1980, the Army had an active duty strength of 61,729 enlisted women--an increase of 6,578 enlisted women. Refer to Figures 5 on page 34.

When "Stripes" was released in 1981, it was also expected that the rate of general commissions and enlistments in the Army would increase. Prior to the movie's release (1980), the Army had a total (active duty and reserve forces) strength of 777,036 soldiers. At the end of FY 1981, the Army had a total (active duty and reserve forces) strength of 781,419 soldiers--an increase of 4,383 soldiers. Refer to Figure 6 on page 34.

When "An Officer and a Gentleman" was released in 1982, it was expected that the rate of general commissions in the Navy would increase. Prior to the movie's release (1981), the Navy had an active duty strength of 85,462 officers. At the end of FY 1982, the Navy had an active duty strength of 87,273 officers--an increase of 1,811 officers. Refer to Figure 7 on page 35.

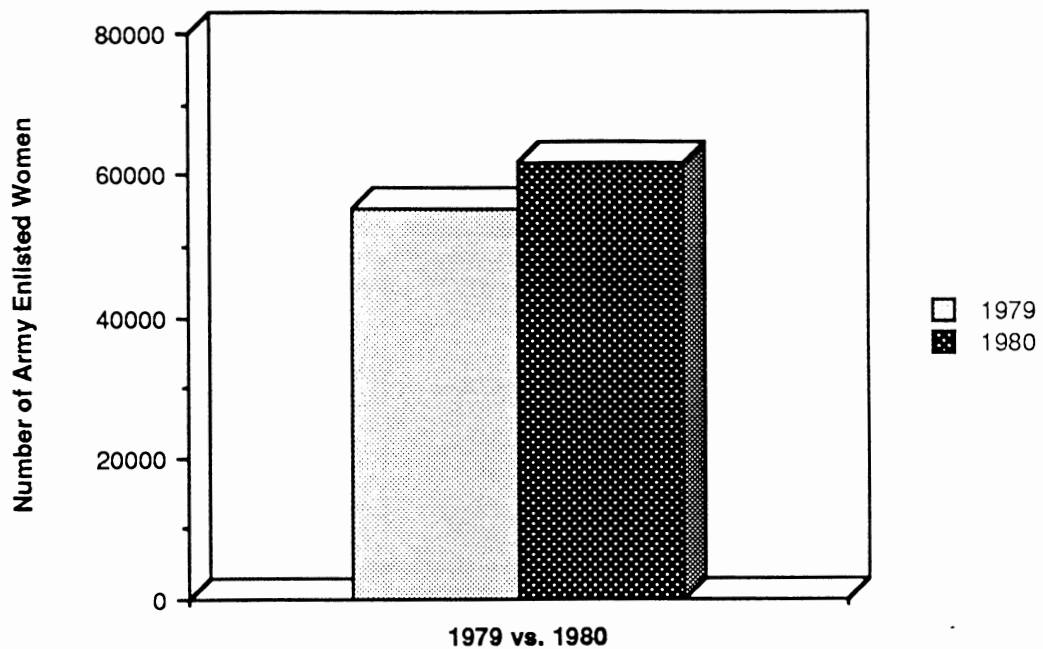


Figure 5. Before and After "Private Benjamin"

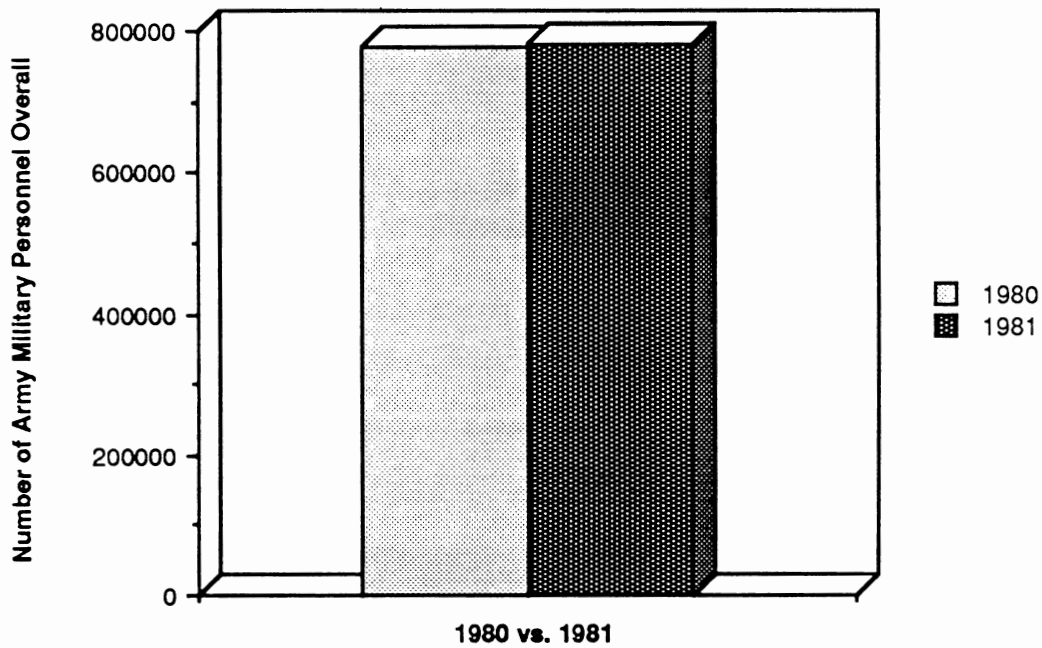


Figure 6. Before and After "Stripes"



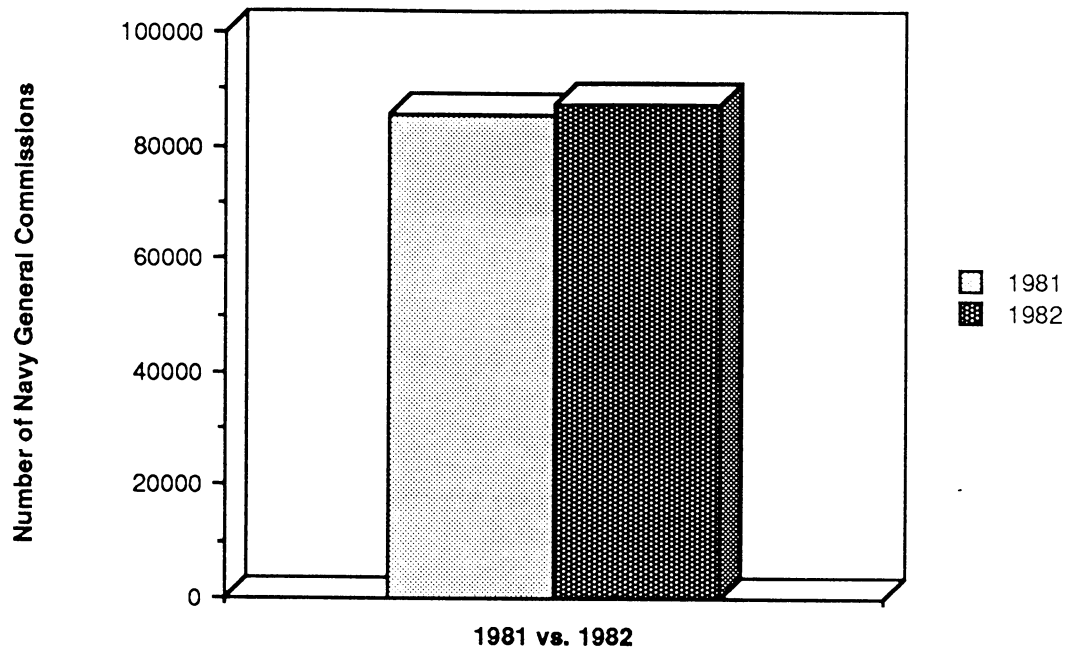


Figure 7. Before and After "An Officer and a Gentleman"

And when "Top Gun" was released in 1986, it was expected that the rate of general commissions in both the Navy and Air Force would increase. Prior to the movie's release (1985), the Navy had an active duty strength of 70,857 officers and the Air Force had an active duty strength of 108,400 officers. At the end of FY 1986, the Navy had an active duty strength of 72,051 officers and the Air Force had an active duty strength of 109,043 officers--respective increases of 1,194 Navy officers and 643 Air Force officers. Refer to Figures 8 and 9 on page 36.

Although there certainly were other factors/variables/elements involved, generally, the release of military movies in the 1980s were related with coincidental positive (increase in rates) of recruitment.

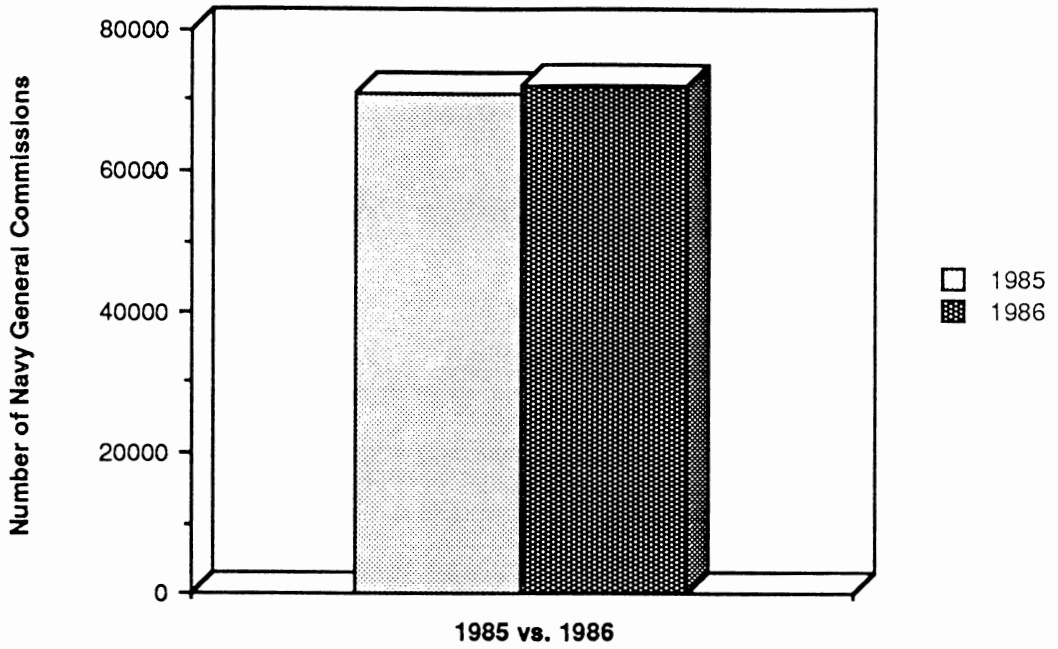


Figure 8. Before and After "Top Gun" (Navy)

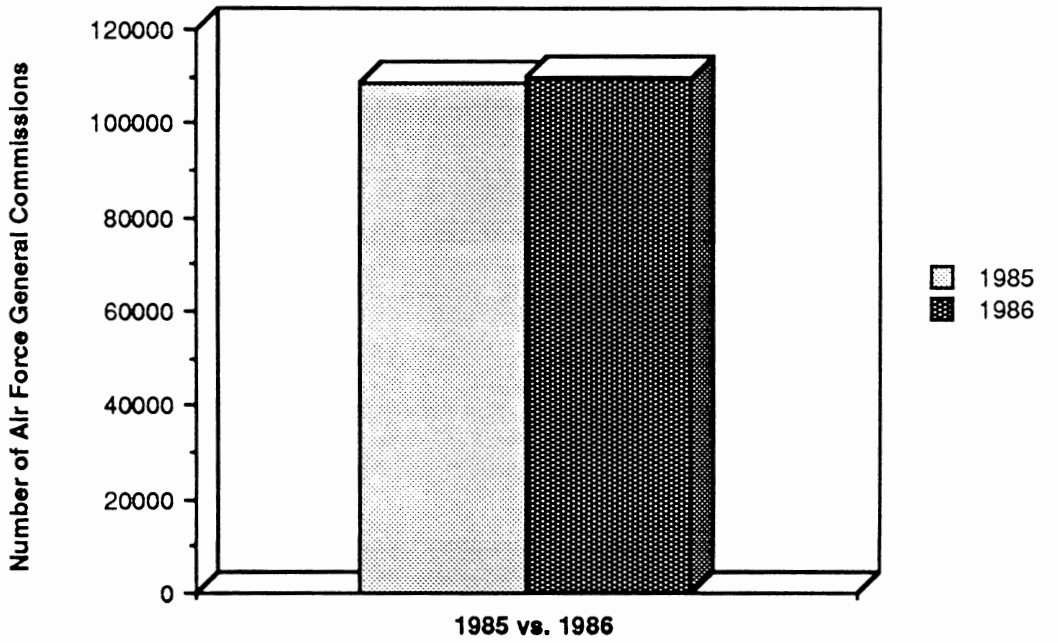


Figure 9. Before and After "Top Gun" (Air Force)

## CHAPTER VI

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

This thesis was undertaken to examine the possible relationship between and not the cause-and-effect of military movies and recruitment rates.

Two theories, the Cognitive Dissonance Theory and the Social Responsibility Theory of the Press, provided the bases for examining the relationship.

The first theory, the Cognitive Dissonance Theory, presented that the public seeks to maintain a balance of elements in their lives. Balanced elements are regarded as consonant whereas imbalanced elements are regarded as dissonant and the public seeks to reduce such dissonance.

In this particular study, the elements included their attitudes as influenced by movies and expressed toward the military.

Dissonance arises when movies depict the armed forces in themes which are contradictory to either actual government activities, public attitudes toward the military or both.

When reducing dissonance produced by movies, usually attitudes toward the military were changed. The public demonstrated support or non-support (the extreme behavior of which was to actually join or not join the military). Positive or negative public attitudes may thus have been reflected in the respective increase or decrease in recruitment rates.

This is a historic trend which is evident by relating the corresponding yearly recruitment rates to the coincidental release dates of military movies.

Consonance was obvious during World War I and World War II when public attitudes were patriotically supportive of the military. Movies depicted the military positively. And recruitment rates were high.

Consonance was also evident during the Korean War and Cold War when public attitudes were generally supportive of the military. While negative themes were infrequent, movies depicted the military positively overall. And recruitment rates were still high.

Dissonance, however, prevailed during the Vietnam War when public attitudes were divided in support or non-support of the military. Movies depicted the military negatively. And recruitment rates were low.

Consonance, again, was achieved during the Reagan Era when public attitudes reverted to supporting the military. Movies depicted the military positively. And recruitment rates were high.

This trend indicates a coincidental, affective relationship of movies to recruitment.

The second theory, the Social Responsibility Theory of the Press, presented that the media must assume the responsibility of benefitting society. In this particular study, movie makers must assume the duty of producing films which make the public aware when the government is involved in just or unjust activities (war, nuclear arms race, international relations policies and other activities involving the armed forces) and which aid in military recruitment efforts when it is vital that the government needs to strengthen its defense personnel levels.

Their movies can benefit society primarily by encouraging civilians to develop positive attitudes toward and/or join the military--which helps increase recruitment rates. A related benefit includes enhancing service members' morale toward their own jobs which reduces the "un-re-up" rates.

More enthused and patriotic personnel ensure American national security and a stronger and prouder defense posture in the world.

## Conclusions

While anecdotal evidence and historical literature reviews support the claim that there is a relationship among movies, public attitudes and military recruitment, DoD figures and information contradict or fail to support that claim.

Although reviews were positive about "Private Benjamin," "Stripes," "An Officer and a Gentleman" and "Top Gun," and public attitudes toward the military were favorable during the nationalistic Reagan Era, the figures showed positive (increase in rates) recruitment.

However, these statistics alone were not strong enough to support the claim. Therefore, a safe conclusion must be drawn; the null hypothesis, rather than its alternate, must be accepted: evidence to support a relationship was not developed.

This conclusion has been reinforced by United States Army Colonel John C. Myers, Director of Advertising and Public Affairs. In a letter to the researcher, he wrote,

[R]ecruiters are often asked if movies have a significant influence on recruiting. Over the years, we have noticed no measurable changes in enlistments following the release of movies with military themes.

Today's . . . recruits do not enlist on impulse. They are motivated by [other opportunities]. They become aware of . . . [these opportunities and] . . . benefits through advertising and publicity programs . . . [and not necessarily through movies] (March 8, 1991).

Besides, several elements/variables, such as the all-volunteer force (AVF), advertising campaigns and enhanced benefits, must yet be considered before an increase or decrease in recruitment rates is attributed to military movies.

A major element to consider which could have affected recruitment rates was the (AVF) concept.

Prior to the establishment of the AVF in 1973, the draft (obligatory military service) guaranteed stable--neither positive nor negative--recruitment rates. But it is additionally speculative that the high rates during World War I, World War II, Korean War and Cold War were attributed to patriotism and nostalgia rather than to movies only.

However, when the AVF was enacted, at the close of the Vietnam War, there remained bitter impressions of the draft and military service in general which may have contributed to the decline in recruitment rates.

Recruiters had a difficult time in convincing potential service members to join the military during the period. They depended on recruiting aids--advertisements--to help them at least meet their recruitment quotas.

Advertising campaigns were another element to consider which could have affected recruitment rates.

"Every modern marketing technique is employed in selling military careers, and the advertising and promotion budgets of the services rival those of major corporations" (Lawliss 71).

Such determination in advertising, promoting, marketing and publicizing the military along with enhanced benefits provided by the government also could have contributed to the growth in recruitment rates.

Relatively, the benefits are economically attractive--yet another element to consider which could have affected recruitment rates.

"Military pay increases made the services more competitive with the civilian job market. . . . [And] it comes as no surprise to learn that recessions stimulate enlistments" (Lawliss 71).

Or, simply, "recruiting had been strong when unemployment rates were high but faltered when unemployment fell" (Newitt 30).

Thus various other elements, the AVF, advertising campaigns and enhanced benefits, also could have contributed to the fluctuating recruitment rates. It was merely coincidental that military movies were released during those times.

Nearing the time of completion of this study, the United States Congress approved President George Bush's (Republican, elected 1988) request to send military troops to the Persian Gulf and join the allied forces in liberating Kuwait from Iraq. Coincidentally, "Flight of the Intruder" was released.

The 1991 war movie features an all-star cast (Danny Glover, Willem Dafoe, Brad Johnson, Rosanna Arquette) in a Vietnam theme. "Flight of the Intruder" is set on an aircraft carrier and in enemy airspace. The A-6 Intruder plane, "which carries no defensive weapons, is flown by a pilot and a bombardier/navigator whose survival depends on their ability to work in tandem" (Paramount Pictures 1).

Vietnam themes have frequently been negative and the theme of "Flight of the Intruder" is no exception. The movie's basic plot is that there are

too many missions with too little purpose and the death of [a] flying partner prompt [the Intruder pilot] and his new bombardier . . . to conduct an unauthorized mission deep behind enemy lines. The flight--a bombing raid on a missile depot in downtown Hanoi--brings their personal code of honor into conflict with their commitment to serve as ordered (2).

These Vietnam experiences and dissenting attitudes, revived by "Flight of the Intruder," are heightened, especially with current protests and anti-war demonstrations of the Gulf Crisis throughout the nation.

The conclusive balance, then, would predict a decrease in recruitment rates.

Still, the nation is also equally and fervently patriotic. And movies--or no movies--solely cannot be attributed to this conclusion since there are factors/elements to consider which may affect recruitment rates: the possible reinstatement of the draft, social pressures, personnel needs and quotas determined by Congress, recessions, etc.

Whether these elements are interrelated to recruitment, further research is necessary to verify predictions.

### Recommendations

As recommendations for further research, perhaps a more concentrated study on the subject of movies may find a minimal link of movies to recruitment.

Also, an update on this study may continually analyze the trends of recruitment rates as a result of 1990 releases of "Firebirds," "Navy Seals" and "The Hunt for Red October" and the 1991 release of "Cadence."

Insider points-of-contacts (a DoD official and a movie producer together) with coordinated information rather than statistical figures versus anecdotal support may consolidate conclusions so one information does not contradict the other.

And use of other mass communications theories (propaganda-persuasion, cultivation analysis, agenda setting/building or diffusion) with emphasis on military movies may provide a simplified approach to studying their relationship to recruitment.

As a recommendation for using the information presented in this completed research, it is highly recommended that two powerful entities--the media (movies) and the government (military)--unite to preserve a strong and proud America.



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