



THE NEED FOR SPEED

By Charles Apple | THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

While war movies are nearly as old as movie cameras and projectors themselves, the world got a taste of a new brand of war movie on May 16, 1986 — 40 years ago — when “Top Gun” opened in theaters.

The film portrayed Navy pilots in training, in combat and relaxing between flights. It featured fast action, hit music and some of Hollywood’s brightest, up-and-coming stars.

It’s become such a landmark for the U.S. Navy that whenever pilots at the real Top Gun school quote a line from the movie — whether intentionally or not — they are immediately fined \$5.

‘SON, YOUR EGO IS WRITING CHECKS YOUR BODY CAN’T CASH’

“Top Gun” was inspired by an article by Ehud Yonay in California magazine in May 1983 about the Naval Air Station Miramar in San Diego, where elite Navy pilots work on improving cutting-edge dogfight training.

Producers Jerry Bruckheimer and Don Simpson — fresh off of “Flashdance” and “Beverly Hills Cop” — commissioned a screenplay and tried

to talk David Cronenberg or John Carpenter into directing the project. Both declined, so they went to Plan C: Tony Scott, brother of Ridley Scott and who had, in the early 1980s, directed a TV commercial in which a Saab 900 automobile was shown racing a Saab 37 Viggen fighter jet.

Bruckheimer and Simpson also gained the Navy’s cooperation and

were able to use Navy equipment and officers in production of the film. F-14 fighter pilot Scott Altman, for example, flew the stunt in which the main character confronts an enemy pilot while flying upside down. Altman would later become a NASA astronaut and would fly four space shuttle missions — two as commander.

The soundtrack of the movie would

sell 7 million copies and would spend five weeks at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 album chart.

Released nationwide on May 16, 1986, “Top Gun” would gross \$357.4 million worldwide, the biggest-grossing movie of the year. It would be nominated for four Academy Awards and win one — for Best Original Song: “Take My Breath Away” by Berlin.

‘TALK TO ME, GOOSE’

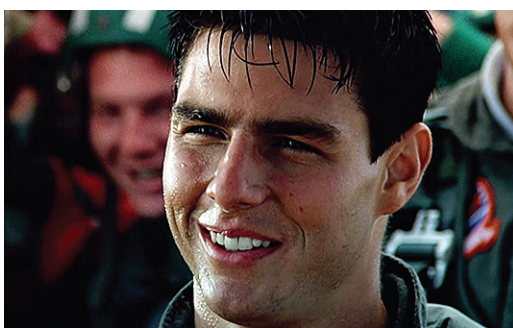
John Travolta was the first choice to play Maverick, but his salary demands were too high. Matthew Modine was offered the role but said the script was too pro-military for his tastes. Also considered were Kyle MacLachlan, Emilio Estevez, Charlie Sheen, Patrick Swayze, Sean Penn, Rob Lowe, Michael J. Fox and Ralph Macchio.



Producers saw “Risky Business” and decided Tom Cruise was perfect for the role. Cruise was in London filming “Legend” with Scott’s brother, Ridley Scott, who talked him into considering the job. Cruise was a bit reluctant — he considered the film to be “Flashdance in the sky.” Producers then offered to let Cruise help punch up the script.



Bruckheimer explained: “So the Navy Blue Angels take Tom up there and they do five Gs. They do barrel rolls, they do everything ... he gets on the tarmac, runs to a pay phone ... and he says ‘I’m in! I’m doing the movie! I love it! This is great!’” Cruise admitted the aerobatics caused him to use a barf bag. The only actor who never threw up: Anthony Edwards, who played Goose.



Ally Sheedy was offered the role of “Charlie” Blackwood but said no one wanted to see a movie about fighter pilots. Linda Fiorentino complained the film glorified war. Also considered were Brooke Shields, Demi Moore, Debra Winger, Daryl Hannah and Linda Hamilton. Relative unknown Kelly McGillis got the part after producers saw her performance in “Witness.”



Val Kilmer was offered the part of “Iceman” Kazansky, but was reluctant to sign on — he said he found the script “silly” and disliked the warmongering. Scott assured him: “I know the script is insufficient, but it will get better, Val. Wait until you see these jets. They take your breath away.” Kilmer later admitted he enjoyed the shoot, calling it “both a blast and an education.”



Paramount paid the Pentagon \$1.8 million for the use of its planes and two aircraft carriers. In addition, producers agreed to make a few script adjustments. The opening dogfight was moved from Cuba to international waters. Some of the coarse language was toned down. And Charlie was changed from an enlisted personnel to a civilian contractor.



The scene when Maverick is telling Charlie he was flying inverted over the MiG, Ice Man coughs “Bull****.” That line wasn’t in the script. It was ad-libbed by Val Kilmer. One frequent criticism of the film is how arrogant the pilots seem. In fact, the Navy has a strict “excellence without arrogance” rule for its aviators.



Scott took an entire day to film the volleyball sequence, which had taken up only one page in the script. They played a real game and even kept score. Scott focused on views of the pilots’ bodies covered with baby oil. Paramount executives were aghast and considered firing Scott for what they considered such an extravagant expenditure on a minor plot point.



The “flat spin” that Maverick flies into was, in fact, performed by aerobatic pilot Art Scholl in a Pitts S-2 biplane with cameras mounted on it. Like Maverick in the movie, Scholl wasn’t able to recover from the spin and crashed his plane into the Pacific Ocean near Carlsbad, California. Neither he nor his plane was recovered. The film is dedicated to his memory.



Test audiences complained that there weren’t enough romantic scenes between Maverick and Charlie. Five months after filming had wrapped, McGillis — who had lost 16 pounds and had cut her hair — and Cruise — who had grown his hair out for “The Color of Money” — were flown to Chicago, where a scene in an elevator and a lovemaking scene were filmed.