

123Movies (4K) Top Gun Maverick (2022) Online On HQ Movies 28 MAY 2022

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In Australia, Thursday's debut was \$1.5M for a \$2.5M total including previews. This is Cruise's biggest opening day ever Down Under. Germany debuted to \$1.6M for a \$2.5M cume with previews. Brazil likewise has cumed \$2.5M so far while Mexico is at \$2.1M.



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New markets added today on the pic that's co-financed and co-produced by Skydance, include the UK, Spain and Japan. Overall, the movie is on track to be Cruise's top opening of all time internationally – as well as domestically.

Awareness is through the roof on *Maverick*, and a shoutout is deserved for the Paramount marketing team. The promotional campaign has very likely been visible from space. The film screened for exhibition in Las Vegas (where cheers and sniffles were audible from the audience) and then world premiered in San Diego with Cruise arriving via helicopter on the deck of the USS Midway. From there, the team traveled to Mexico City and then on to Cannes where the film was greeted with a flyover and Cruise was feted by the festival with an honorary Palme d'Or and a sustained standing ovation. The next day, the *Top Gun* crew was in London for the Royal Film Performance and in Japan the Yokohama Osanbashi Pier featured a fireworks display ahead of the premiere in IMAX, all of which was livestreamed into four additional IMAX theaters around the country.

The good news is that *Top Gun 2* is expected to play more like one of the *Mission: Impossible* films than the rest of his recent output, and there is the strong possibility of a career best opening (currently held by *War of the Worlds* at \$64.9 million, though that would have been higher had it not had a Wednesday opening). It looks likely to clear \$100 million over the long weekend, which would make it at least a top eight opener for the holiday frame. Factor in the killer reviews and Cruise's extensive overseas promo tour, and the \$170 million budget doesn't look like it will be hard to recoup even with the biggest international market out of play.

Also going wide this weekend is the animated feature *The Bob's Burgers Movie* from 20th Century Studios, based on the acclaimed irreverent sitcom *Bob's Burgers* about a family that runs a burger joint. The show has a cult following that has stuck with it through 12 seasons and counting, and even if it largely plays to the devoted it could still be a relatively successful counter-programmer. The strong reviews (92% on RT) indicate that the film has the potential to draw in new fans, and as theatrical comedies and family films are in short supply there is reason to be optimistic that the film will expand from its core fanbase. With a 3400+ theater count, the studio is certainly expecting to preach beyond the choir, and they're citing a weekend prediction of \$10-14 million.

The DoD has been working with Hollywood for nearly a century, going back to 1927 Oscar-winner *Wings* – the *Top Gun* of its day. Each service – army, navy, air force, marines, coast guard – has its own entertainment liaison office in Los Angeles, in addition to the Pentagon's own office, headed by Glen Roberts, who was 17 when *Top Gun* came out and names it as an influence. He spent 25 years in the air force, although, like many others, he never made it into the cockpit of an F-14.

Roberts says his mission is to “project and protect the image of our armed forces”. Currently they work on about 130 entertainment projects a year, he says – a dozen or so scripted movies, plus television shows, video games and scores of documentaries. “Productions love us because we provide authenticity and credibility. And also, they get substantial cost savings.”

But there are also conditions about how the military is depicted. “We want to make sure that the productions that we support match our core values,” says Roberts. Applicants must submit their entire script for approval, and accept any changes required. But red lines include

showing classified or sensitive information, going against US law and government policy, basic human dignity (such as depicting real-life injured or deceased military members), and inaccuracy: "If the script says he's an air force pilot and he's flying an F-18. Well, that's a navy aeroplane." It's more an art than a science, Roberts says, but he denies that the DoD plays any kind of proactive role in the process: "The film-makers are the creatives. We're not the creative force ... our job is to support them, really, not to push an agenda on to their story."

Some film-makers have become very good at playing the military game. Top Gun producer Jerry Bruckheimer has collaborated with the DoD on movies including Black Hawk Down, Armageddon and Pearl Harbor. Bruckheimer's former collaborator Michael Bay has gone even further, not just in overtly military-themed movies but also with his exhaustingly militaristic Transformers franchise. Bay once boasted of having "a direct line to the Pentagon". Roberts' predecessor, Phil Strub, admitted in 2009 that the DoD would make recommendations to Bay. "We might say, 'Hey, you've never shown an X, Y or a Z.' We'll send them information, talk about its role. Or they'll come back to us and say, 'We'd like to have a C-17. Or what about an aircraft carrier and some F-18s?'" As such, Bay's Transformers movies became an extended showreel for US military might – aimed at children.

The same could be said of superhero movies. We've become accustomed, anaesthetised even, to seeing military personnel and machinery in the Marvel universe, for instance. The very first image of the first Iron Man is of Tony Stark riding through Afghanistan with a convoy of army Hummers, rocking out to AC/DC. And like so many Marvel superheroes, he operates in a semi-official capacity, teaming up with military sidekicks such as his buddy Rhodey, and fighting alongside US forces as part of the quasi-military Avengers.

Iron Man and Iron Man 2 were made with DoD cooperation, as were many other Marvel movies, until the relationship reportedly soured over The Avengers depicting the US military launching a nuclear strike on New York. Captain America, whose comic-book origins as a propaganda tool for the military were satirised in The First Avenger, began to take a more critical stance towards his government in subsequent Marvel movies, such as Winter Soldier. But fences were mended with Captain Marvel, focused on Brie Larson's exemplary air force pilot. The collaboration was so deep, the air force even launched a tie-in recruitment campaign targeted at women, with the slogan "every hero has an origin story".

Military involvement now goes far beyond simply action movies. Other recent recipients of DoD assistance include reality TV cooking shows, Pitch Perfect 3 (in which, for some reason, the a capella girl group go on a tour of military bases, even performing onstage in camouflage) and the climate-change satire Don't Look Up!

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According to one estimate, the DoD has collaborated on 2,500 movies over the decades, and its involvement is not quite as transparent as claimed. In his 2004 book Operation Hollywood, the journalist David Robb detailed how "the Pentagon has been telling film-makers what to say – and what not to say – for decades", listing examples from Tomorrow Never Dies to Star Trek IV to Lassie. In 2012, the British journalist Tom Secker, who runs the Spy Culture website, began filing freedom of information requests for

DoD-Hollywood communications, and has amassed tens of thousands of pages of documentation, including annotated drafts of film scripts, to back up such claims. "They might claim they're relatively open about this, but they're not," says Secker. They're open in as much as that they have an involvement in Hollywood, but they've never ever voluntarily published a set of their own script notes. And they've done everything they can to try to cover them up."

Secker has too many examples to list. In the original Iron Man script submitted to the Pentagon, for example, Tony Stark was against the arms dealers, including his own father, complaining that "the technology I'm trying to save lives with is being twisted into some truly destructive weapons". In the eventual film, Stark becomes an arms dealer to the US military. In the 2014 version of Godzilla, a Japanese character's reference to his grandfather surviving Hiroshima was excised: "If this is an apology or questioning of the decision to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki, that will be a showstopper for us," say the Pentagon's notes. Instead, Godzilla, a monster inspired by US atomic bombing, is revived by a nuclear weapon and wades into battle alongside US military ships and jets.

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