

# ★ CHAPTER 1 ★

## CENSORING JAMES BOND

**I**t was just one little line of dialogue—one little joke—that the Pentagon wanted to delete. So what's the big deal? It's only a movie. But the screenwriter was upset. He wanted to keep the line in the script.

Bruce Feirstein had written the first draft of the screenplay for the new James Bond film *Tomorrow Never Dies* in his apartment in Santa Monica, California, and now, in the spring of 1997, he was working on the final draft at the film company's production offices in London. This was his second Bond film—he'd already written *Goldeneye*, which had come out two years earlier, and would go on to pen a third, *The World Is Not Enough*, two years later.

The navy was willing to let the producers of *Tomorrow Never Dies* use some of its ships and helicopter, but Phil Strub, the head of the Pentagon's film liaison office, wanted something in return—he wanted the offending line of dialogue removed. So the producers came to Feirstein to plead the Pentagon's case.

The line could embarrass the new American ambassador to Vietnam, they told him. The line could damage the newly reestablished relations between America and Vietnam, they said. It could spark an international crisis, they said.

"Yeah, but it's a good line," Feirstein told the producers. "I really wish we could use it. Are you sure?" Yeah, the producers said. Phil Strub at the Pentagon wanted it out.

The offending line of dialogue poked fun at America's only military defeat, but Strub and the Pentagon don't have much of a sense of humor about the Vietnam War. In the original draft of his script, Feirstein had James Bond, to be played for the first time by Pierce Brosnan, getting ready to parachute into the waters off Vietnam. A rogue CIA agent, to be played by Joe Don Baker, warns Bond to be careful not to be captured.

"You know what will happen," the agent tells Bond. "It will be war, and maybe this time we'll win."

That's the line that had to go, but Feirstein didn't understand at first. What's the big deal? It's just a little joke, he told them. But the producers told him it was a big deal—to the Pentagon. The producers told him that Strub was worried that the line could be misinterpreted by the Vietnamese—that perhaps they would see it as a veiled threat by the U.S. military, which, after all, was cooperating with the film's production. And this, in turn, could embarrass the new U.S. ambassador to Vietnam, Pete Peterson, a former POW who only two weeks earlier had arrived in Hanoi to become the first American ambassador to Vietnam in decades.

Feirstein finally relented after it was clear that the producers were not going to let him keep the line in the movie. "Did the film rise or fall on this line?" he asks. "No. It was just a joke. So why not take it out?"

In the end, Strub was happy, the producers were happy, and the U.S. ambassador to Vietnam was happy. But the American moviegoing audience never knew that *Tomorrow Never Dies* had been edited by the Pentagon for political reasons.

And this wasn't the first time that the producers of a James Bond film had come to Feirstein to ask him to change a Bond script for political reasons. In November of 1994, while he was working on the final draft of *Goldeneye* at the film's production offices in Leavesden Studios north of London, the producers asked him to change the nationality of one of the villains.

Feirstein had been brought onto the project late in the game to rewrite another writer's script. Strub had a problem with the first version, which portrayed an American admiral as a dupe who unwittingly allows a seductive member of the Russian mafia to steal his identification badge, which then allows her to steal a top secret space weapon dubbed "Goldeneye."

The producers wanted the Pentagon to provide three helicopters and fifty Marines for two or three days of shooting in Puerto Rico for the climactic scene in which the Marines come to Bond's rescue, albeit rather

belatedly. Strub told the producers that the Pentagon would be happy to help out. Any movie that has Marines coming to the rescue is a good movie, as far as the Pentagon is concerned. But there was just one little problem. If the producers wanted the Pentagon's assistance, they would have to change the nationality of the American admiral who is duped by the villain.

The producers could have said no. They could have rented helicopters and hired extras to portray the Marines. But that would have cost more money. They would have to paint the helicopters and hire the pilots and rent the uniforms and rehearse the extras. Using real Marines and real military helicopters was much easier and much cheaper. So they agreed to accept Strub's terms, changing the nationality of the admiral in exchange for access to the military's equipment and manpower. They were, in effect, taking a bribe to change their film.

After the deal was done, Strub wrote a thank-you letter to Tom Pevsner, executive producer of *Goldeneye*.

"We appreciate your changing the identity of the U.S. admiral to a foreign officer," Strub said in the letter, dated January 20, 1995.

In an interview at his office in the Pentagon, Strub says: "We couldn't have a film in which a [U.S.] navy admiral reveals secrets. So we said, 'Make him another navy.' They made him a French admiral, and the navy cooperated."

But changing the identity of the admiral to a French officer created a new problem. The producers, it turned out, also needed the cooperation of the French navy to make the film and the French didn't want one of their admirals being portrayed as a dupe either.

"I got a note from one of the line producers that we had to make certain changes to accommodate the French government," Feirstein recalls. "The female villain needed to steal an admiral's identification card to get on a frigate to steal a helicopter. The frigate was in Monte Carlo. By the time I got on, there was no American admiral. I came on the last draft, and we were not sure who was going to lend us the boat. And when the French lent us the boat, they wanted to make sure that the French military was in no way made to look bad. When they lend you the toys, they want some say in how the toys are used."

So the admiral, whose nationality had started out as an American, only to be changed to French, is now a Canadian.

And in the film itself, if you look closely, you can see that the

admiral's identification card now has a Canadian maple leaf on it. Which was just fine with the Pentagon and the French admiralty, and just fine with the producers, too, because they didn't need anything from the Canadian navy.



ASSISTANT TO THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
1400 DEFENSE PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-1400



January 20, 1995

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Mr. Tom Pevsner  
Executive Producer, "GoldenEye"  
Eon Productions, LTD  
Leavesden Airfield, Hill Farm Avenue  
Herts WD2 7RR  
United Kingdom

Dear Mr. Pevsner:

The Department of Defense is pleased to approve U.S. military assistance in the production of the feature motion picture "GoldenEye." The assistance consists largely of providing fifty Marines and three National Guard UH-1H helicopters for one to (two) days of filming in Puerto Rico. The scene, to be filmed in early February of this year, depicts the Marines coming to James Bond's rescue, albeit rather belatedly.

We appreciate your changing the identity of the U.S. admiral to a foreign officer, and your including dialogue recognition identifying the Marines. The Department of Defense Project Officer is First Lieutenant Dustin Salem, Deputy Director, Marine Corps Public Affairs Office, Los Angeles, with whom you are already acquainted. Lieutenant Salem will assist you in completing the legal requirements of our association, principally the production assistance agreement.

We wish you success in production and look forward to screening the production upon its release to the general public. If I can be of further assistance, please don't hesitate to let me know.

Sincerely,

Philip M. Strub  
Special Assistant for Audiovisual

CC:  
HQMC-PA  
NGB-PA

Phil Strub's letter to the executive producer of *Goldeneye*, January 20, 1995.