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Actor Tom Cruise repeatedly flew low and fast over the Cascade Range in a Whidbey Island-based U.S. Navy electronic attack jet during filming of the 'Top Gun' sequel.

'Top Gun' sequel includes Pacific Northwest scenery

By TOM BANSE
Northwest News Network

The summer movie blockbuster season has kicked off with the release of a long-delayed sequel to the 1980s hit "Top Gun." And Pacific Northwest moviegoers may recognize some familiar mountain scenery in the background.

"Top Gun: Maverick" brings actor Tom Cruise back to his role as the ace U.S. Navy fighter pilot.

Cruise reportedly insisted on filming the aerial action in real fighter jets and rejected where possible using computer-generated imagery. So, Paramount Pictures struck a production assistance agreement with the Navy to make it so.

A copy, first obtained by the website The War Zone, shows Cruise and company set up shop at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island in Washington state in March 2019. The Navy leased out the Officers' Club on base for the crew to use for catering, brief-

ings and rehearsals. Cast and crew were allowed to bunk at an on-base inn, which provided privacy.

The actors flew eight sorties with a squadron of two-seater jets. While experienced Navy pilots were at the controls, the aerial scenes were filmed to make it appear Cruise or his co-stars (always in the back seat) were actually piloting the powerful attack aircraft in tight formations.

The short residency of the "Top Gun" sequel's cast and crew at the airfield in Oak Harbor was kept hush-hush at the time. Paramount gave the production a code name, "Island Plaza." When the local newspaper sought to confirm rumors of movie star sightings, Mike Welding, public affairs officer for Naval Station Whidbey Island, would answer no questions that included the words "filming" or "Tom Cruise."

But now the results are on-screen for all to see. Naval aviators from the air stations where filming took place actually got an early peek. Naval

Air Station Whidbey Island hosted an advance screening on the base in May.

In the movie, Whidbey Island-based Navy EA-18 Growler jets fly fast and low through the Cascade Mountains, swooping over reservoirs, snow-capped ridges and dodging peaks. In the movie, this climactic footage is presented as the terrain of a hostile, unnamed rogue nation.

But for those around Washington state, this scenery is familiar as the noisy, low-level flight training routes long used by the military in the Northwest.

The executive director of the Washington state film and TV office, formally known as Washington Filmworks, said "Top Gun: Maverick" did not receive any state movie production incentives. Separately, a film liaison for Whidbey and Camano islands said she provided a modest amount of assistance helping the crew find lodging and dining.

Much of the film was shot in Cal-

ifornia, with additional aerial footage captured at the real-life Top Gun strike fighter tactics school at Naval Air Station Fallon in Nevada. The Navy's extensive cooperation in the sequel's filming is expected to give the military a significant boost in recruiting.

"Top Gun: Maverick" is proving to be an early success. As of last week, it holds a 97% ranking on Rotten Tomatoes (and an audience score of 99%). Cruise also received a five minute standing ovation at the film's screening at the Cannes Film Festival.

Kenny Loggins wrote songs for the original "Top Gun" film, which became radio hits, including "Danger Zone" and "Playing with the Boys." Loggins is originally from Everett, Washington. He is not listed in the music credits of the sequel (Lady Gaga is). But "Danger Zone" is included on the soundtrack.

KUOW producer Dyer Oxley contributed to this report.



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