

19
Gregory, James LTC OSD PA

From: Mehal, Robert S CDR OSD PA
Sent: Friday, July 08, 2011 10:41 AM
To: Vickers, Michael G HON OSD OUSDI
Cc: Gentile, Philip D COL OSD OUSDI; Lowery, Todd R CIV OSD OUSDI; Weinstein, Douglas E Mr OSD OUSDI
Subject: UBL Movie

Sir, Doug and I are trying to get Mark and Kathryn on your schedule next week. They are in town 15-22 Jul (but you will be TDY 18-22). I included the link and the long version of the article. Vr/Bob

Bin Laden: The Movie

<http://www.google.com/url?sa=X&q=http://www.bostonreview.net/BR36.4/alan_a_stone_bin_laden_movie.php&ct=ga&cad=CACQAhgAIAAoATAFOAVA5-fY8ARIAVAAWABiAmVu&cd=bqkBMhy_paE&usg=AFQjCNEurQvOsuHwwULxGw24XREfDhAiaw>

Boston Review

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Old-fashioned justice was served, not the law on the books, but the law of the Western frontier that has long been cinema's stock and trade. The villain dies with a gun in his hand, and the hero in the white hat, honest and honorable, overcomes impossible odds. The familiar narrative sent people out into the streets waving American flags in triumph and chanting, "U.S.A., U.S.A.," as Americans reportedly first did when our ragtag hockey team upset Soviet professionals in the 1980 Winter Olympics. This is the version of Bin Laden's death that most Americans wanted to hear, having waited for a decade after 9/11 to get the guy who did it.

In the days that followed, we learned that this story was far from the truth, which emerged more slowly and disjointedly. The raid had not been flawless: one of the high-tech choppers had gone down for unexplained reasons and had to be destroyed; the Seals faced almost no armed resistance; Bin Laden himself was not armed, nor did he use his wife as a shield; and two Seals shot him at close range, one bullet hitting him in the head, the other in the chest. Many in the Muslim world thought he died a martyr.

Which version of the story will take its place in popular history? No doubt Hollywood will have something to say about that. Only days after Bin Laden's corpse slid into the Arabian Sea, a Hollywood director, Kathryn Bigelow, announced that a screenplay was underway and the

first actor had been cast. In fact Bigelow and writer Mark Boal had already been working on a screenplay dealing with the search for Bin Laden. Now they had an ending.

Bigelow and Boal have collaborated before—on the screenplay and as co-producers of *The Hurt Locker*, which earned Bigelow an Oscar for direction, the first ever won by a woman. In an emotionally charged Oscar night, Bigelow took Best Picture from her former husband and collaborator James Cameron, whose 3D blockbuster *Avatar* was favored. Bigelow had tried a blockbuster herself, the confusingly titled *K-19: The Widowmaker* (2002), based on a true story about a Soviet atomic submarine that nearly exploded in 1961. When the sub's cooling system was compromised, Soviet officers faced an impossible dilemma: risk deadly radiation or allow a nuclear explosion that would surely lead to the third world war. Bigelow had a \$100 million budget, a first-rate cast, and an interesting idea: ordinary, even politically placed, officers with all the petty interests of self-serving human beings would unexpectedly do the right thing and save the world. According to the Web site Box Office Mojo, the film lost about \$35 million in theaters. So a few years later, while her ex-husband was making one of the most expensive movies in Hollywood history, Bigelow looked for a low-budget project.

Only days after Bin Laden's corpse slid into the Arabian Sea, Kathryn Bigelow announced that a screenplay was underway.

She found Boal, a journalist who had worked for *Playboy* and written about the Iraq War. That tragic, senseless slaughter of Iraqis and the sacrifice of young American lives grinds on under the Petraeus military strategy that asks our troops to bribe their way into the good graces of people whose lives we have ruined. If this were the plot for a Hollywood movie, no one would believe it.

American movie audiences have little interest in films based on the Iraq War. But they do care deeply about the soldiers who have fought there. And Boal's reporting focused on the plight of our soldiers, not the progress of our war. His first screenplay seems to have been based on the work of other reporters who tracked down a series of ghastly murders committed by soldiers returned from Iraq. The message of that film, *In the Valley of Elah* (2007), was that the horror of Iraq was turning our soldiers—our children—into monsters. Boal carefully stayed away from the psychiatric jargon of post-traumatic stress disorder, instead focusing on how the war was destroying the humanity of our soldiers: they had become lost souls, a price too high even in the name of god and country. The film was a succès d'estime mostly because of Tommy Lee Jones's performance as the father of a veteran murdered by other soldiers. It is an important antiwar film.

When Boal connected with Bigelow, he was working on a screenplay about his experience as a journalist embedded with a bomb-defusing squad in Baghdad in 2004. Bigelow—who resists the stereotypes about female directors saving us from the male “gaze” and the Y chromosome's preoccupation with violence—was interested. Her fascination with violence emerged in film school at Columbia, where her student project seems almost prophetic: a fifteen-minute sequence of two men (one apparently Gary Busey) beating each other, while on the soundtrack two semioticians theorize about the endless appetite for violence in films. It is not clear whether Bigelow, whose background is in avant-garde conceptual art, wanted to make a point about violence or whether the film was a kind of conceptual art with images and sounds approaching the same subject via different tracks—the thing itself and the discourse about it. Bigelow moved on to Hollywood and made films that she characterizes as “pushing the medium.” *Near Dark* (1987), about teenage vampires in Oklahoma, became a cult film, and *Point Break* (1991) is an action classic. She also earned the respect of critics and cineastes as one of the serious people in Hollywood.

Jonathan Olley / Summit Entertainment

Today Bigelow is so famous that the Museum of Modern Art recently announced a retrospective. In that announcement a discerning anonymous critic writes of Bigelow, “Her characters, often operating in an arena of adrenaline, straddle the line between superhero and heartbreakingly

human." There can be no better description of The Hurt Locker's Sergeant William James, played by Jeremy Renner. (Here in Cambridge, one cannot help but wonder how Boal and Bigelow chose that name for their protagonist.) Psychologists have many good explanations for cowardice but almost none for courage, and thus Sergeant James is a psychological mystery. Bigelow has always been interested in warriors, and Sergeant James may be her most intriguing, someone who cannot be compassed in the standard categories.

The Hurt Locker is a series of incidents involving a three-man team tasked with dismantling improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in and around Baghdad at the height of the insurgency. There is no orienting description of the military situation, geography of the city, or reasons for the war: the audience is left to supply its own. The film begins with the line, "war is a drug," so the subject, it seems, is addiction. The first scene appears to be filmed by a bystander using a smart phone—it has that kind of grainy quality and amateurish framing. We slowly realize we are watching a robotic device that has been dispatched to detonate what may be a bomb. The weapons of choice for insurgents in Iraq, IEDs are primitive devices that can nonetheless inflict considerable damage, allowing an unknown killer to retaliate against high-tech American weapons and soldiers. The robot gets stuck in rubble and comes to a halt; that image alone might be a metaphor for the Iraq War. Sergeant Matthew Thompson (Guy Pearce), head of the bomb squad, dons his protective armor and waddles toward the IED. The suspense mounts not with the subtle manipulation of Hitchcock but with heart-in-your-throat terror. The robot does not work, the armor offers no protection, and Thompson's team—Sergeant JT Sanborn (Anthony Mackie) and Specialist Owen Eldridge (Brian Geraghty)—watch their friend killed as the bomb explodes. They are stunned, as we are. Bigelow makes us believe that what we are seeing is real.

The Hurt Locker thus begins as a story of ineptitude and futility. These are not invincible soldiers like John Wayne. In every scene of soldiers risking their lives to defuse bombs, Iraqi civilians look on without sympathy or concern, their apathetic silence proclaiming the hollowness of this war. The insurgents who planted the bomb may even be there among the onlookers hoping to see a slaughter. The American troops recognize this disdain, and they fear that every Iraqi civilian—man or woman or child—may be a suicide bomber. The mutual hatred and contempt are palpable.

Bigelow shows a quality that many directors lack: compassion enough to make all her characters human.

Thompson's death leaves his men shaken to the core. Sanborn, a career soldier who does everything by the book, desperately tries to find safety in the words of his Army instruction manuals. He is almost immobilized by fear. For Eldridge the sergeant's death is the trauma that pushes him over the edge. Alarm bells keep going off in his brain; the slightest noise startles him. He can no longer trust his own senses to sort out the dangers he faces, nor can his fellow soldiers trust him.

Sergeant James leads these two men—one shaken and one broken. He is an existential antihero who believes in nothing but his project, like the doctor in Camus's *The Plague*. While Sanborn and Eldridge do their work reluctantly, filled with dread that each struggles to control in his own way, James seems to relish the work defusing roadside IEDs, explosives planted in the entrails of dead bodies, suicide vests chained to unwilling victims, booby-trapped cars. Faced with these dangers, James shows no sign of reluctance. If he did not always succeed we might think him reckless.

James's project has destroyed his ability to connect with his wife and children. Although he has what might be called episodes of human feeling in which he seems to care about people, he is incapable of real connection. When his rotation in Iraq is over, we see him lost in the supermarket. At the film's end, he is deplaning in Afghanistan.

But it is neither patriotism nor addiction that takes him back to war. Sergeant James has found his vocation. He is one of those rare workmen who enjoys his craft above all else. The opening line suggests that Bigelow and Boal want us to think we are watching someone addicted to the rush of adrenaline. But their Sergeant James cannot be reduced to an addict. His life, like ours, is a moral adventure, and everything he does, good or bad, is more than a reflexive habit; it is a measure of who he is. And he is, as the anonymous critic would have it, heartbreakingly human.

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(703) 697-4162

20
Gregory, James LTC OSD PA

From: Mehal, Robert S CDR OSD PA
Sent: Friday, July 08, 2011 11:05 AM
To: Lapan, David COL OSD PA; Martin, Jeremy COL OSD PA
Cc: James, Darryn C CAPT OSD PA; Turner, James Mr OSD PA; Parker, Tamara LTC OSD PA; Gregory, James LTC OSD PA; Robbins, Elizabeth L LTC OSD PA
Subject: FW: UBL Movie

Col Lapan, FYI/SA. Boal and Bigelow are scheduled to meet with DepCIA on the 15th and I am trying to get them on Dr Vickers schedule - will work to include Phil in that meeting as well.

Col Martin, Please feel free to forward to Mr Wilson at your discretion - he has personally been involved with this project.

Vr/Bob
CDR Bob Mehal
OASD(PA)
703-697-4162

Bin Laden: The Movie

<http://www.google.com/url?sa=X&q=http://www.bostonreview.net/BR36.4/alan_a_stone_bin_laden_movie.php&ct=ga&cad=CACQAhgAIAAoATAFOAVA5-fY8ARIAVAAWABiAmVu&cd=bqkBMhy_paE&usg=AFQjCNEurQvOsuHwwULxGw24XREfDhAiw>

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Commander Bob Mehal
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1400 Defense Pentagon (Rm 2D961)
Washington, DC 20301-1400
(703) 697-4162

21
Mehal, Robert S CDR OSD PA

From: mark (b)(6)
Sent: Friday, July 08, 2011 11:34 AM
To: Mehal, Robert S CDR OSD PA
Subject: Re: Vickers Scheduling this week

Standing by
Thanks.
Sent via BlackBerry by AT&T

-----Original Message-----

From: "Mehal, Robert S CDR OSD PA" <Robert.Mehal@osd.mil>
Date: Fri, 8 Jul 2011 11:12:07
To: 'mark (b)(6)' <mark (b)(6)>
Subject: RE: Vickers Scheduling this week

Mark, We're working it. Probably won't have anything more definite until next week... but I think we may be able to make it work. Resp, Bob

Commander Bob Mehal
Public Affairs Officer
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Washington, DC 20301-1400
(703) 697-4162

-----Original Message-----

From: mark (b)(6) [mailto:mark (b)(6)]
Sent: Friday, July 08, 2011 10:51 AM
To: Mehal, Robert S CDR OSD PA
Subject: Re: Vickers Scheduling this week

Would 1pm work
- or 5pm?

We have a Langley meeting with acting DCIA at 3pm.

Sent via BlackBerry by AT&T

-----Original Message-----

From: "Mehal, Robert S CDR OSD PA" <Robert.Mehal@osd.mil>
Date: Fri, 8 Jul 2011 10:17:21
To: 'Mark Boal' <mark (b)(6)>
Subject: RE: Vickers Scheduling this week

Mark, The only day the Boss might be available is Friday 15th, but I think his schedule may only be open in the afternoon. What time are your meetings on Friday?

He is out of the office the entire next week, so this may be the only opportunity for a while. Also, don't see an issue with including Kathryn in the meeting.

Let me know soonest, because once folks find out he is going to be here on Friday his schedule will fill up quickly.

Resp,
Bob

Commander Bob Mehal
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-----Original Message-----

From: Mark Boal [mailto:mark(b)(6)]
Sent: Thursday, July 07, 2011 5:32 PM
To: Mehal, Robert S CDR OSD PA
Subject: Re: Vickers Scheduling this week

Bob,
Good afternoon.

During our previous attempt to schedule a meeting, you'd asked when I'd be back in town. I now have an answer: July 15- July 22.

Please let me know if anything in that span works for Dr. Vickers. Apart from scheduled meetings on the afternoon of 15 July, I am open to anytime.

Last, Kathryn Bigelow, who directed Hurt Locker and is directing this film, will also be in D.C. in that timeframe. I wonder if you agree that it would be advisable for her to join the meeting?

As always, Bob, Thanks very much for your work on this. Looking forward to talkin and seeing you soon.

Best,

Mark

Sent from my iPhone

On Jun 28, 2011, at 2:24 PM, "Mehal, Robert S CDR OSD PA" <Robert.Mehal@osd.mil> wrote:

> Mark, Bad news from the schedulers. Dr Vickers mtg that we were hoping would be cancelled tomorrow afternoon is going to happen. So, at this point there is not a 30 minute window between now and Friday night - I don't know how he does it.

>

> Are you planning to come back to town anytime soon?

>

> Resp,

> Bob

>

> Commander Bob Mehal

> Public Affairs Officer

> Defense Press Operations

> 1400 Defense Pentagon (Rm 2D961)

> Washington, DC 20301-1400

> (703) 697-4162

>

>

> -----Original Message-----

> From: mark(b)(6) [mailto:mark(b)(6)]

> Sent: Monday, June 27, 2011 6:29 PM

> To: Mehal, Robert S CDR OSD PA

> Subject: Re: Vickers Scheduling this week

> Yes, I am available Wednesday

> Thank you for navigating this thru

> Mark

> -----Original Message-----

> From: Mehal, Robert S CDR OSD PA

> To: mb User

> Subject: Vickers Scheduling this week

> Sent: Jun 27, 2011 6:05 PM

> Mark, We are trying to shift around Dr Vickers schedule to try and find a window for you to speak with him. I will know better tomorrow, but if we can, would you be available Wed afternoon?

> Resp,

> Bob

> Commander Bob Mehal

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