

From Army Officer to Movie Consultant

Melissa Davlin - The Times-News

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U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer Richard "Monty" Gonzales never fancied a Hollywood career.



But now, the Hollister native can add "movie consultant" to his resume.

Gonzales worked with director Paul Greengrass and actor Matt Damon in the upcoming action thriller "Green Zone." The film, which portrays the 2003 search for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, is based loosely on Gonzales and his team's experience.

Gonzales led Mobile Exploitation Team Alpha, a crew of 15 to 22 people, depending on their task.

"Our sole mission was to search for evidence of WMDs or WMD programs," Gonzales said by telephone this week. "Obviously, we didn't find anything. But it wasn't for lack of effort."

When asked in 2007 to help with "Green Zone," Gonzales made it clear that he wouldn't participate in a film that compromised his beliefs. He was leery of signing on, he said, after seeing so many biased, one-sided Hollywood projects.

"I wouldn't have had any part to do with that," he said.

After being assured the movie was apolitical, Gonzales got to work. Besides Gonzales, the film used 150 Iraq veterans and servicemen as extras. Gonzales filmed a cameo, but isn't sure whether the scene made the final cut.

Damon couldn't be reached for comment this week but told CBS in a 2008 interview that he felt honored to work so closely with service members.

"You know, I'm supposed to be leading these guys, and they're all, you know, most of them are combat veterans and they're out of Iraq and Afghanistan and so, uh, it's hard to give someone like that orders," Damon said on set in Morocco. "It's a little humbling."

Damon plays Roy Miller, a character loosely based on Gonzales.

Before signing on to the film, Gonzales promised himself he would stick to three principles. He would try to ensure that all of his colleagues were portrayed honorably, that no one would be embarrassed by the portrayal and that he would advise the movie makers to be as accurate as possible.

While committed to accuracy, Gonzales also understood the need to strike a balance between nitpicking details and making progress with the movie.

"I learned along the way that you had to pick your fights," Gonzales said. "They could stop the train and fix some things, but they couldn't stop it to fix everything." He also had to trust that the movie would stay accurate through the editing process.

His dedication to the men and women he served with extends beyond the movie. This spring, Gonzales is retiring to pursue a career in charity. After his retirement ceremony in March, he will move to New Mexico to serve on the board of directors for Support the Heroes, an organization that provides financial support for severely wounded veterans and their families.

Gonzales, who joined the military in 1988, lives in Lawton, Okla., and is stationed at Fort Sill, Okla. His parents, Patty and Billy Gonzales of Hollister, said they get a kick out of their son rubbing elbows with A-listers.

"It's awesome," Patty said.

"Green Zone" is tentatively set to be released in August.

"It's great," Richard Gonzales said. "I'm not just saying that."
