

# New Haven Register

## **Tom Cruise to play local lawyer in film**

Dave Altimari

September 6, 1992

No one would ever confuse 41-year old Walter Bansley with actor Tom Cruise. But later this year, the handsome mega-star will play Bansley – minus the local lawyer's stocky build and slightly graying hair – in "A Few Good Men," an adaptation of a 1986 murder trial against three Marines.

The movie, also starring Jack Nicholson, Demi Moore and Keifer Sutherland, is due out around Christmas – just about the time Bansley will find out whether he passed the Connecticut Bar exam. Bansley wasn't thinking about a Hollywood movie when he went to Guantanamo Bay in Cuba to defend three Marines accused by the U.S. Marine Corps of murdering a fellow infantryman.

Even now, as he sits in his new office in Roger Sullivan's law firm on Main Street, Bansley is amazed that the trial has been made into a movie. There was no publicity at all when the trial occurred, and it wasn't even one of my biggest cases as a Marine attorney," Bansley said.

Bansley is a graduate of Southern Connecticut State University who went into the Marines in 1972. He became a judge advocate, a Marine term for a lawyer, in 1981.

The movie is based on the case surrounding the death of Pvt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class William Alvarado on Guantanamo Bay. Alvarado had written letters to his Congressman complaining about the rigors of the Marine Corps. When the entire 150-member battalion was reprimanded, several of the privates decided to pay back Alvarado by shaving his head, Bansley said.

Early one morning, about 10 privates entered his room, tied his hands and feet with tape and stuffed a stocking in his mouth while they shaved his head. Alvarado choked on the stocking and died.

All 10 were brought up on homicide charges. Seven decided to take dishonorable discharges, Bansley said. Three men pleaded innocent and Bansley was called from Puerto Rico to represent them.

Bansley's defense was that the men were practicing an unwritten Marine form of hazing that accidentally led to the private's death. He also argued the officers were following implied orders from a superior officer who had told them not to hurt Alvarado, but if he happened to fall down the stairs that would be too bad.

The jury found one of the men innocent and the other two guilty, but they were sentenced to only 38 days in jail, which they had already served waiting for the trial.

Prior to the trial, then LtCol Albert Grey, who later became the commander of the Marine Corps, flew to Cuba and told all officers that the Corps had no unwritten hazing policies, according to court testimony. Bansley charged Grey with obstruction of justice, but that charge was dropped, and with it went Bansley's hopes for promotion.

"Nobody sitting on any promotion board would have taken kindly to me charging the next commander with obstruction," Bansley said. "It was basically political suicide, but I had decided I was going to be a lawyer, and not suck up to the system."

The story was made into a play called, "A Few Good Men" by Aaron Surkin. Its success led to the movie being directed by Rob Reiner. Bansley was contacted by Castle Rock Entertainment representatives last October to be a consultant to the movie. He was originally offered the part of Cruise's father in the movie, but that was later rescinded.

Bansley – who only recently retired from the Marine Corps – said his superiors made it clear they didn't want him involved in the movie because of its unfavorable portrayal of the Corps.

Bansley was given a copy of the script and made minor technical changes. He met some of the actors – including Cruise – much to the delight of his teen-age daughters.

The movie script follows the real-life case with the exceptions that the trial takes place in Washington, D.C., instead of Cuba and that Demi Moore, who plays a Marine investigator, has been added to be Cruise's love interest.

"I had a hard time explaining to my wife they added her to the story and there was no other woman in real life," Bansley said.

Moving to Connecticut was a big decision for Bansley, his wife, JoAnn, and their five children ranging from 5 to 16 years old. He had been stationed at Camp Pendleton the past few years and had several offers to join California law firms. But Bansley, who grew up in Brooklyn, N.Y., drinking YooHoo (his kids give him a case of the chocolate drink every Christmas) and following the Yankees, decided it was time to come back East. About the same time, Branford lawyer Roger Sullivan placed an ad in the Connecticut Law Tribune for a new associate. Sullivan had just seen the play "A Few Good Men" in Harford when he received Bansley's resume in the mail. "I was impressed by his courage to stand up to the system for what he believed in, and I thought it would be interesting to meet him," Sullivan said. The two met Memorial Day and Bansley was hired. He is serving as a legal assistant until he passes the state bar.

Bansley is more anxious about the bar results than the release of the movie. He has never seen the play and doesn't have a burning desire to see the movie.

"Once in a while I hear from someone involved in the case, but I've gotten rid of most of my files," Bansley said. "I'm more concerned about starting private practice and taking care of my family."