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Germany now would welcome Cruise production



By Scott Roxborough
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The German Defense Ministry is scrambling to qualify its stance on the Tom Cruise World War Two thriller "Valkyrie," saying Thursday that, despite reports to the contrary, it has no opposition to the film shooting in Germany.

News reports earlier this week had started officials would ban "Valkyrie" from shooting at German military sites because of star Cruise's belief in Scientology.

The ministry now says that, while it hasn't received an official request from "Valkyrie" producers United Artists to shoot in the country, it would "look agreeably" upon any such application.

The film, slated for a 2008 release, tells the true story of Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg (Cruise), the leader of a failed German military plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler in 1944. The film's title comes from Operation Valkyrie, the plot's code name.

The producers have expressed interest in shooting at the Bendlerblock memorial in Berlin. It is the actual location where Stauffenberg and his fellow conspirators hatched the plot to assassinate Hitler with a bomb hidden in a briefcase. It also is where Stauffenberg and the other plotters were executed after the attempt failed.

Now a memorial site, the Bendlerblock also houses part of the Defense Ministry.

The Defense Ministry said Thursday that it wasn't even responsible for approving film shoots at Bendlerblock because they are only tenants on the land. The location is under the authority of Germany's Finance Ministry, a Defense Ministry spokesman said.

The source of the "Valkyrie" controversy seems to have stemmed from a posting on the Web site of conservative German member of parliament Antje Blumenthal. Blumenthal posted a statement Friday claiming that Defense Minister Franz-Josef Jung had pledged to her that Cruise would not get permission to shoot because of the purported danger posed by his Scientology.

Blumenthal is a cult expert for the conservative CDU/CSU party and a longtime opponent of Scientology.

The German government does not recognize Scientology as a religion and sees it instead as a dangerous cult, which brainwashes and exploits its members. Scientology is under official observation by Germany authorities as a potentially threat to German democracy, putting the organization on par with neo-Nazi groups.

Germany's film industry, however, has embraced the "Valkyrie" project.

The heads of Studio Babelsberg, Christoph Fisser and Carl Woebcken, on Thursday praised "Valkyrie" as one of the "too few examples of military opposition to Hitler's regime."

Fisser and Woebcken are in negotiations with United Artists to join the project as co-producers. If UA executives reach a deal, "Valkyrie" could begin shooting at Babelsberg next month.

"The assassination attempt against Hitler is hardly known outside Germany," Fisser said. "We should therefore be delighted and welcome this wonderful opportunity to improve the image of our country."

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