
DANGER MAN

HE'S A REAL-LIFE DANGER MAN
(D.106)

Every time a scriptwriter evolves some new thrill-a-minute hazard in the "DANGER MAN" series, he is providing Frank Maher with a face-to-face encounter with real-life danger.

The 6'2", tapering-figured, steel-muscled Frank, a Londoner of American-Irish extraction, is not only the man who arranges the "Danger Man" fights and high-speed thrills, but takes part in them as well.

The one thing he doesn't have to do, except occasionally when on second unit work while the star is busy in the studios, is to double for Patrick McGoohan himself. TV's John Drake does his own stunts. But Frank doubles for other artists in some of the more exacting jousts with the star - good actor though he may be, a man inexperienced in screen fights can be a menace to his co-player. Frank also frequently portrays one or other of the villains.

To date, the good-looking Frank Maher's reward (apart from salary) for his "Danger Man" work totals a broken nose, a couple of broken bones in his neck and a rich assortment of cuts, grazes and bruises.

He doesn't worry. He's used to danger. He went straight from school into the Army and volunteered for the Parachute Regiment - not because he was looking for thrills, he says, but because it meant extra pay of 2/6d. a day.

He survived being dropped on dangerous missions, and faced a peacetime career as a professional footballer. He had been a schoolboy international.

He became a stunt double by chance.

"I was standing in Regent-St. with a buddy, looking in a shop window," he explains. "A fellow came along, tapped me on the shoulder, and asked me if I'd ever thought of working in movies. Then he gave me his card and told me to look him up at the studios if I was interested. He was looking for men like me for 'Caesar and Cleopatra' - the British production which Gabriel Pascal was making.

"There didn't seem to be anything to lose, so I went along to the studios. The offer was genuine. I made my movie debut as Centurian No. 47 which, for the most part, meant crashing off a mole into the sea."

From then onwards, Frank had three careers to keep him busy. He became a professional footballer. He also became a stuntman. And he developed into an actor as well.

The football career came to an end when he was playing centre forward for Crystal Palace, went up for a high ball (and scored!) and encountered the equally elevated opposing goal-keeper and centre-half. Frank hit terra firma with one leg doubled under him, which meant a cracked bone and no more football for a long enough period to make him decide to concentrate on his other two jobs.

His acting roles have included an air-gunner in "A Matter of Life and Death," the Army Sergeant in "Saturday Night and Sunday Morning", the deck officer with Tab Hunter in "Saturday Island," a secret agent in "Children of the Damned" and more bits and pieces and stunt-doubling chores than he can count. It's the exception rather than the rule for him to get through any part without meeting a nasty death, ranging from being shot and strangled, stabbed and drowned.

He had his nose smashed in "Danger Man" when he wasn't even in shot. He was standing beside the camera while the actor who was supposed to be attacking him with a bottle was in semi-close-up.

"The other chap," he says, "swung the bottle, and it broke in his hand. He was left holding the neck. The rest of it shot past the camera and got me full in the face."

He came close to breaking his neck while on location in Wales for another "Danger Man" episode. He was on a mountain ledge and had to make a spectacular leap. The rock was damp from the spray of a waterfall, and he skidded, fell 21 feet, dislocated his neck and went around in a plaster cast for the next three weeks.

On that same location, he had to drive a car at 50 miles-an-hour along a narrow mountain track, with a 200-foot sheer drop

on one side and at no point more than a couple of feet to spare. The two-mile dicing with danger had to be repeated half-a-dozen times, and on each occasion he had to reverse all the way back along the track. His most hair-raising moment was when he saw a goat standing in the centre of the track. He couldn't swerve, couldn't stop. But the goat made a spectacular leap to safety which Frank envies to this day!

One of his oddest jobs in "Danger Man" was to "double" for a sack of potatoes! The sack of spuds was supposed to be in a runaway car which had to speed across a mountain field, shoot past the camera and between a hut and a slab of rock, through a fence, then through a hedge before coming to a halt.

No car could do that on its own. So Frank was done up in a sack to look like the potatoes, propped up in the driving seat, given a couple of small eye-holes to see through, and had to drive with his arms inside the sack and with only a few inches of manouevrability.

Just try driving that away!

You might try, also, to make a spectacular leap through a window, head-first and upside-down. Frank had to do this when filming the interior scenes for a shot which had already taken place outdoors showing a pole-jumper making the window leap.

"Just how to do it was something I couldn't work out for sometime," he admits. "We tried it three times. Then I fixed up a low rostrum to give me the impetus, ran, jumped and twisted in mid-air."

The stunt worked at a cost of a fractured small bone of his nose and powdered glass in his eyes.

Straight fisticuffs, leaping through glass, over walls and from cliffs are all child's play to Frank Maher compared with some of his spectacular feats in the cause of turning "Danger Man" into one of the most exciting shows on television!