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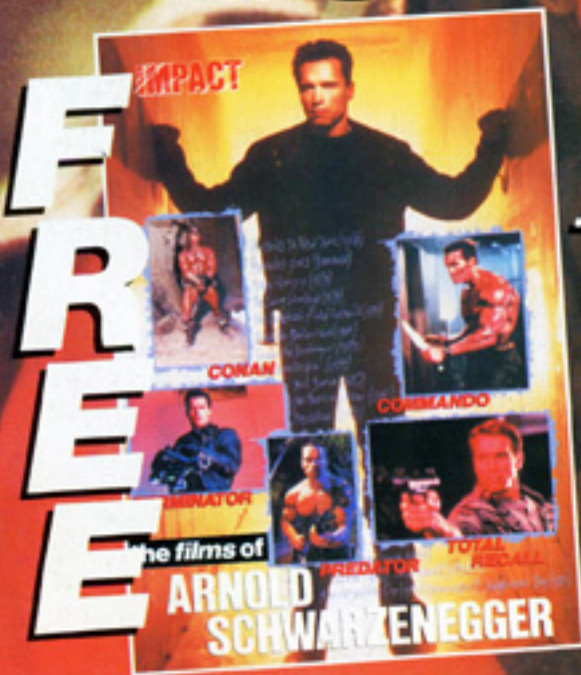
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COMBAT READY

Terry O'Neill talks to
Bey Logan about his role in *Civvies*, the
BBC's new action/drama series.

I remember visiting a small travel agency run by an expatriate Scouser in a seedy corner of the Thai town of Pattaya. The talk turned to martial arts, and I mentioned Terry O'Neill. "Oh, yes," said my host, in his still broad Liverpudlian brogue. "I've heard of him..." And so it was, half way around the world, that I realised that, in Liverpool, anyway, Terry was close to becoming a legend in his own lifetime. O'Neill is famous for being, in real life, what most people get to play in movies. A truly lethal weapon, he's a martial arts master with a body built for budo. His exploits as a tournament competitor, and as Liverpool's most respected doorman, are the stuff of modern folk lore. Not that he's all muscle and no mind. For many years, Terry has edited *Fighting Arts*, the most revered of martial arts monthlies, and has long been sought after as an authority in his field by t.v. and film producers. It's only this year, however, that

O'Neill has finally been given a chance to employ his formidable presence in a screen role worthy of him. Linda LaPlante's BBC series *Civvies* gives the great viewing public a chance to see Terry O'Neill acting and in action.

Considering his long-time friendship with Arnold Schwarzenegger, it's perhaps surprising that Terry hasn't graced the



and also his various adventures in Tinseltown with the likes of Van Damme, Grace Jones, James Caan and, of course!, the Big Man himself!

Bey Logan: Terry, I know nothing about Civvies, other than that it's a BBC series written by Linda LaPlante. Can you tell us the basic premise of the piece?

Terry O'Neill: It's a tale about a group of former parachute regiment guys. It's basically the story of how they make out in



Terry O'Neill and the principal cast of Civvies.

screen sooner. Indeed, he is visible in 'soldiering' roles in both *Conan the Destroyer* and *Red Sonja*. However, he's the last person to throw his (considerable) weight around or demand favours of friends in high places. Despite his association with Linda LaPlante, and her husband Richard, Terry had to face stiff competition when he auditioned for *Civvies*. In our exclusive three part interview, O'Neill discusses the new series,

civilian life. It happens with many people who spend many years in the Forces that they come out and they're at a loose end. Usually they go into some form of security work, which happens in this series. It's a six episode series. Linda, as you know, wrote *Widows* and *Prime Suspect*, which was a BAFTA award winning series, and everyone's waiting to see what *Civvies* will be like, because, though women do figure in it strongly, primarily it's about men,

where both of Linda's best-known works to date have been female-oriented. In this, it's a group of six men, so people are waiting to see if she writes as well for men as she does for women!

Bey Logan: And who is your character in the series?

Terry O'Neill: I play a character called Tony Malone, who was in the Paras with the six main characters. For some reason, which isn't stated, he never got on too well with them. He comes over as a bit of a bully. He then left the Paras and joined the military police, which alienated him still further. That's where we first see him, in a flashback to a scene in Belfast. I'm supposed to have checked out this friendly bar for bombs, and I didn't do too good a job of it, because a bomb goes off and kills a number of young paratroopers, something that Frank Dylan (Jeremy Isaacs) has never forgiven me for. I leave the Paras ahead of him and the other characters, and, when I come into this series, I'm in charge of the security at a salmon farm up in Scotland. Salmon poaching is big business, and we meet up again when this group, led by Frank, has got a job working under me to stop the poaching. I really come in in the third episode.

Bey Logan: The sequence that you're in will probably be highlighted by this really brutal fight scene that I've seen pictures from...



Terry O'Neill gets his kicks against actor Frank Dylan in *Clivvies*.



Fight without pity: the most brutal fight ever screened for British t.v.?

Terry O'Neill: Yes, but it wasn't just a fighting part, though. Originally, Linda wanted me to do the fight choreography for the whole series, and then, as it progressed, she said that she'd like me to audition for a part in it. I'd always been happy with confrontational scenes, I'd done them in other movies, but I thought the acting was going to be difficult, because there were a large number of acting scenes and I was auditioning against some very accomplished television actors. I guess I felt as challenged by that as they were by the physical scenes. I'm used to kicking and punching and they're not! I

actually went down on four different occasions to audition, and on the last casting call Linda suggested to the director that they actually saw me move, so I attacked Jason Isaacs in the offices of the BBC, and obviously that impressed them, because subsequently they phoned me and said "Congratulations! You're in."

Bey Logan: So there's a lot more to your character than just the fight scene...

Terry O'Neill: Oh, yes. Tony Malone is a guy who's basically only interested in himself. When the bomb goes off, Frank Dylan runs back in, heroically, to save

some of these guys, and tries to get me to do the same. I won't have anything to do with it. I look after number one.

Bey Logan: And obviously this tension between you and Dylan escalates as the episode progresses...

Terry O'Neill: Yes. We catch some young poachers and I show that I like to beat people up. I start calling them names and giving them a good seeing-to. Frank Dylan tries to stop me, and I say "Would you like some of this as well?". I've been itching for a fight. It culminates in a one-on-one confrontation, and Linda's mandate for this was that it be the most savage fight ever screened on television.

Bey Logan: Did you choreograph the fight yourself?

Terry O'Neill: No. The B.B.C. decided that, with me taking an acting part, they didn't want me to do that too, and they assigned it to someone else, who did an excellent job. He was the stunt co-ordinator for the series and he did things far beyond my realms, such as motorcycle stunts and crashes and so on. He's a very accomplished man in his field, and his name's Colin Hatcher. When he came to the fight scene, it was never meant to be a KARATE fight, though it is a fight between trained Paras, with me

Terry confers on the *Civvies* set with director Karl Francis.



being a much larger character than Dylan. We never did any rehearsals, which is unlike the movies I've worked on, where you rehearse a lot. For one reason or other, Jason and I never got together until the day of filming. There were the stunt director's ideas and what Linda had originally written, and, at the end of the fight, the director seemed very happy. There's lots of blood. It's quite a savage fight. I'd have liked to have had a little more input into it, but...

Bey Logan: From the stills, it looks like one of the great close-quarters fights, like the one between Sean Connery and Robert Shaw in *From Russia With Love*...

Terry O'Neill: It's a very restricted area that we fight in. There are no weapons. There are obviously restrictions as to what can be shown on television with regard to the levels of violence. There's groin kicks, eye gouging, biting, elbow techniques...

Bey Logan: All the things that can make Saturday nights in Liverpool so memorable!

Terry O'Neill: We had one day to film the fight. We didn't have a lunch break, and the full seven hours were taken to shoot a scene that may take a few minutes on screen.

Bey Logan: Do you think that the series as a whole will become a target for all these do-gooders who come out of the woodwork to criticise violence on television? Will it shock people?

Terry O'Neill: I don't think so. There are far more shocking things on television, on the news, unfortunately. Those are the

real things that shock people, not men fighting. I really do not believe that seeing fight scenes encourages people to go out and really do these things. I've never believed that. *Civvies* is not a series about violence. It's a drama series that works on



several levels. There are several fights in it, and Linda did set down a mandate that that fight be savage, but that's certainly not the main drive of the series. There are other violent things that happen in the Belfast sequences, but they are, sadly, true

to life. It's certainly not a series that will glorify violence in any way.

Bey Logan: How hard did you find the acting scenes in the series?

Terry O'Neill: I'd worked on movies before. I did some fight scenes in *Conan 2* and in *Red Sonja*. I watched Arnold (Schwarzenegger) a lot, preparing for scenes, and run lines back and forward for him, so I was a little bit to that. Linda had helped me, and Terence Stamp, who's one of Richard's friends. One thing that Linda told me to do that stood me in good stead was "Think of what that character would feel like. If you get into the character, it'll come naturally." The director, Karl Francis, wanted me to do that as well. The other guys were very supportive. It was a challenge, but I enjoyed it.

Bey Logan: Have you seen your episode yet?

Terry O'Neill: No. I've seen a rough cut of the first one, but I'll probably watch it just like everybody else. *Civvies* starts on September 22nd. It's on a Tuesday evening slot at 9.30 pm. It's their flagship series for the Autumn.

Bey Logan: So, having had this opportunity to make your British t.v. acting debut, do you have any other projects lined up?

Terry O'Neill: Yes, as a matter of fact there is something, but I'm very reluctant to say anything about it at this time, just in case I jinx it!

(Next month: Terry talks about his adventures in movie-land with Arnold and co. Be here!)