HONG KONG

The name promises intrigue, adventure, romance... Australian-born Rod Taylor is just the star—and the man—to find all three, in one of the world's most exotic settings...

by BILL KELSAV

Mate? Just a chess game! Rod often dates France Nuyen—seen as Hoppy in Hong Kong, as well as on these pages—but claims he'll remain a bachelor.

Though fun may look serious for these two, Rod says of marriage: "I'm such a beast about work, I couldn't burden any gentle little girl with it."

The Hong Kong police told us we couldn't photograph the Red border, so I got to know a few of them socially and, after a little talk, conned our way into being taken up." Rod Taylor, star of the new hour-long 20th Century-Fox series Hong Kong on ABC, is the sort of a guy who dislikes being told he can't do anything. His natural reaction seems to be to turn on the charm—of which he has ample (Continued on page 65)

Rod Taylor is Glenn Evans in Hong Kong, as seen on ABC-TV, Wednesday, from 7:30 to 8:30 P.M. EST, for Kaiser Industries and other sponsors.
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measure—and proceed to show you how wrong you can be.

"We were on a train as if we were going to shoot the Hong Kong side," says Rod, "and then I walked across a little narrow railroad bridge, gave a signal behind my back, and the camera swung around to shoot the border. Everybody was very tense. Here were the Red police and the machine guns and the pillboxes. It was a weird atmosphere, and when you're there—when you are actually there—the whole thing seems unbelievable.

"The guards on both sides of the border stand about four feet apart and never speak to each other or smile or nod or anything like that. They just stand there with their machine guns, twenty-four hours a day, watching the border constantly." Rod shakes his head and seems to recall the scene with a slight chill. "It's weird," he says again.

"When I walked up to the border," Rod resumes, "this guy had his machine gun trained on me because I was wearing an American suit. Then, when they saw the camera and caught on to what we were doing, they started jabbering away and another guard ran into the pillbox and came out with his own camera and started taking pictures of me.

"About two minutes after I walked back, a loudspeaker came on, with a woman's voice shouting in Cantonese that Eisenhower had lost face in the Orient and that, if the American movie company thought it could come up and poke fun at them, we were very much mistaken.

"It wasn't till then the Hong Kong police told me there had been some trouble the week before, when a Japanese company had been up there to shoot some scenes. The story came out that the Japanese script girl had shaken her fist in a guard's face and had run away—which was untrue, of course—but the Japanese had been spreading it around and the Commissrs were just waiting for another movie company to show up.

"If I had known about that, we wouldn't have gone up there in the first place. I'm not that brave. I could have been shot!"

If Rod and the location crew were startled, it was mild compared with the surprises they brought to the residents of Hong Kong. "We had to hide the camera—which was untrue, of course—but we couldn't get away with it.

"So, we'd hide the camera in a basket on a car or in a box, and we'd try to hide it anywhere, because thousands of people would come around and take the screws out of the tripod and anything else they could get.

"Then I'd run down one of those crowded little streets, with Bochner in full pursuit, and the people wouldn't know what was going on. We got genuine reactions. Beautiful reactions.

"Bochner would go into a little Hong Kong cafe and stand there, looking stern. The patrons didn't know he wasn't a real policeman and they'd quiet down and watch him. After a minute, he'd say, 'Carry on!' very authoritatively. Then he'd turn around and run out of the place. We'd bound a junk and scared them pretty badly. They thought it was a raid and started throwing their opium pipes overboard.

"If it hadn't been for Rod's penchant for turning a flat 'no' into a positive 'yes', we wouldn't be in America today. His arrival here was not exactly auspicious, despite the fact that he had won the Rola Award for radio acting in his native Australia plus the 'down under' version of the Critics' Circle Award for his work in the theater.

"I had reached the point in my Australian career where I was a fly in a bottle," he explains. "I could go up and I could go down. It was fantastic. I was doing about forty starring roles in movies—I thought I'd work all day in radio, then, at night, I'd be at the theater. I was about as big as I could get in Australia.

"The Rola Award included a sum of money, and I was going to England to get out of the bottle. But then I delayed long enough to do the American movie which was shooting there with Robert Newton—Long John Silver—and everybody said, 'Go to America.'

"So I came to America. All sorts of flattering letters went back and forth before my arrival and, when I got here, M.C.A. was at the airport to meet me. I guess they were expecting a cross between Marlon Brando and Rock Hudson. Then I stepped off the plane in my tight Australian suit and their faces fell, visibly. I thought, Okay, you don't like me. I'll stay."

Rod quickly decided that M.C.A. was too big and too interested in a newcomer, and he went to a smaller agency. Little by little, starting with bit parts, he began to climb again and, this time, there was no cork in the bottle to stop him.

He progressed from minor roles to starring parts on television's Studio One, G.E. Theater, Playhouse 90 and all the major shows. In motion pictures, he followed the same path, beginning with Small Town Affair, working his way to important roles in "The Darkest Hour," "Giant," "Separate Tables" and a number of major productions.

His latest picture, "The Time Machine," in which he stars with Yvette Mimieux, will be a big one. He's currently with another man who wouldn't take no for an answer: "I turned the part down to begin with," Rod recalls. "Then George Pal, the producer-director, called me and said he wasn't making a science-fiction picture. He was making an H. G. Wells picture. He said, 'I've never directed before. There are areas where you can help me and areas where I can be of help to you.'

"He's something of a con artist, too, you know," Rod adds with a grin. "Fortunately so, because it did give me an opportunity to work closely with the director, rather than just coming to work and going home."

Rod was at the point in his career where he had a great deal of prestige within the business, but was only a familiar face to the average movie audience and television viewer. "Studios don't pay stars anything," he explains, "but I think television series do. Before Hong Kong came along, I had to turn down most of the new series because I felt they weren't right for me. I love to work, but I wouldn't do anything that I didn't believe in.

"When I first heard of this series, it intrigued me. I talked with the creator of the show, Bob Buckner, and found our ideas coincided. This was no 'Fugitive in Hong Kong' thing. I felt the character, Glenn Evans could very well be Rod Taylor. I'm not creating a separate screen personality for this. If I got up there on 'The Fugitive and pretend' for thirty-nine weeks, somebody would see through it, or else get awfully sick of it. Either the public buys me, or we're out of luck.

"Now, don't confuse 'screen personality' with character. This character, Glenn Evans, the up-and-coming American correspondent, is a guy who can be charming in a Cary Grant situation, and be just as suave—then take off his coat and slug it out, as Cary Grant wouldn't. He can be a gentleman, and still be tough. He can play it dressed, and sometimes he can be a slob."

"This, I think, is what is going to catch the audience and keep them interested, the injection of contrast. We are not holding to one static situation. There are gentle situations, loving situations, action situations—even sexy situations. Some are played out within four walls. Others are completely out-of-doors. I think we have a good series, a good, solid, exciting show."

Rod has recently moved into a new home above Coldwater Canyon, in the area also favored by Frank Sinatra and Peggy Lee. He's still a bachelor, and has no plans to change that status anytime soon. "I'm enjoying life too much," he admits, "and I'm such a beast about work that I couldn't burden any gentle little girl with it.

"I've been too busy to entertain much yet. I usually keep the group down to one or two people, and when a girl friend or I can persuade to cook dinner for me, Rod possesses such a gracious, persuasive manner that this shouldn't present any serious problem, although he declares, 'I'm not terribly fond of myself. I feel that, to get things done, often I have to face reality. I work very serious about things, especially my work, and sometimes I am probably a bit abrupt and rude. It takes people a while to see that I'm not a rat. Honesty is probably my trouble—some people don't like honesty in others, some do. Apparently there are more who do than he realizes, for it's the audience which makes a star—and audiences at home and in the theater have definitely made a star of Rod Taylor."