

As I walked on to Stage A of M.G.M. Studios at Elstree, Rod Taylor lobbed two hand grenades in my direction and did his best to scythe me in half with a long burst from a machine gun. A nice guy, Mr. Taylor, even if he does have a warped sense of humour.

The grenades failed to explode and the bullets were fortunately blanks, but at least I had a clear picture of what to expect of his latest film, *Dark Of The Sun*.

Rod Taylor, a chunky, amiable Aussie, limped across to greet me and in colourful terms expressed discontent with the hardships endured on the film. In the last scene he had apparently sprained his knee for the fourth time.

We went to watch the rushes of a scene of which the star was particularly proud. A savage, gouging, tearing, kneeling fight to the death, in which Rod and Peter Carsten studiously ignore all previous Hollywood fight clichés and revert to the level of animals.

Not a roundhouse swing or Karate chop in sight. And finally, after breaking nearly every bone in his opponent's body, the Australian despatches his enemy with a dagger.

"That," said the hefty hunk of humanity sitting beside me, "is how people really fight. I sure as hell hope the Censor doesn't cut it out. As it is we long ago gave up any hope of avoiding an X Certificate."

Fred Hakim, co-producer of the film, sitting on my other side, did not seem so happy. Returning to the set in Rod's Rolls-Royce, the producer confided that the star had done most of the fight scene himself and they had some difficulty in preventing him from doing even the downright dangerous stunts. In fact Rod was only limping because he had jumped off a building into a moving jeep and missed his footing.

"I wish that the guy would realise that if an injury puts him out of the movie, a whole lot of other people are going to be out of work," sighed the producer.

Rod Taylor's wholehearted enthusiasm, however, is typical of his complete

involvement with the business of film making. Don't let that happy-go-lucky exterior fool you into believing that he is merely a disciple of the bent elbow and the pay check at the end of the month.

"Once," he told me, as we sat talking on the set, "I was only conscious of making a name as an actor. But in the last three years I've become more deeply dedicated and very much more aware of my duty to the public.

"That's why I'm doing films like this one. Good, old-fashioned entertainment. It's a big, open air drama that's going to transport people without them hearing any messages. I believe if you're going to do an action picture it's no good having people sitting around all the time.

"It's funny, though, because of all the films I've done I really did love making *Young Cassidy* most of all. But since people didn't want to see Sean O'Casey on the screen that's O.K. with me. I'll wipe it off, because it didn't entertain.

# man of action

## A PETER HOWELL INTERVIEW

Photoplay [Britain] August 1967

"Yet, it taught me something. I no longer believe in pictures where you have a ball all to yourself and don't care whether audiences like it or not.

"And I no longer have any yearning for Olivier-type roles. If I can combine a challenging role that is also entertaining, that's what I'm looking for. A little bit for me, a little bit for the audience. I think that's fair.

"I feel that films like *A Man For All Seasons* cater only for a limited audience. My duty is to entertain the world, not just the Academy Awards nominations committee."

Would it worry you if you never won an Oscar?

"No, absolutely not. If I had the respect of my fellow actors it would be enough, and anyway, I think there is far more involved than an actor merely giving the best performance of the year. How can Paul Scofield stand up and say 'Well, my performance was much better than yours, Dickie,' to Burton who gave such a marvellous performance in *Virginia Woolf*? There have to be other considerations, too.

"As for me, I hate to sound arty-crafty, or phoney, but I am in the business to entertain. I love the work I do and they give me a lot of money."

## Strong feelings

Rod, you seem to feel very strongly about what makes the film industry tick . . .

"I do, I feel terribly strongly about it. I feel most strong, probably, about guys who ask immense salaries and try to break the industry. And I carry this out in practice by taking a percentage rather than a huge salary. If we don't have a good film, I lose, too.

"After all, this whole business is a co-operative thing. We wouldn't be sitting here now, but for the industry. All the critics would be writing the lost and found columns instead of blasting movies and telling people not to go and see them. You know, if people took their advice, the critics would end up writing cookery columns."

The actor was called in front of the cameras again to play a scene on a jeep that is driven through an inferno of blazing gasoline. He peeled his shirt off, and the make-up man sprayed perspiration on him.

After the scene he came back and replaced the shirt. "I've had this shirt off and on in the film so much it's a wonder I haven't caught pneumonia. Quite apart from that, though, I don't think I've ever had to work so hard on a film. I haven't been out at all lately; I get home and I'm so tired I just sit and drink. It's no way to keep in shape, even for an Australian.

"It's just as well Mary (his wife) isn't here. We've been through hell to keep this thing on the screen and if she'd been around I would have been snapping her head off. She's understanding of my profession, but there is a limit."

Taylor's last film, *Chuka*, which he produced himself, also had plenty of problems. "I tried to put an anti-cliche Western on the screen," he commented, "but only managed about seventy per cent of it, because of a change in the studio policy half way through. About three quarters of a million dollars was cut off the budget, and I ended up paying a lot of bills myself." In his next film, *Heroes Are Not Always Dead*, for Universal, Rod finds himself involved with the black market in Paris just after the war.

Did this mean that the sophisticated Rod Taylor of *Hotel* would not be seen on the screen for a while?

His Aussie drawl became slightly more perceptible, as he considered the question and replied: "I think maybe not. I must say that even though *Hotel* was a good, old-fashioned entertainment picture, I still felt rather uncomfortable walking about being sophisticated in it. I think audiences find me most attractive of all as the wild, tough kind of guy who is tough with men and tender with women."

Maybe he would like to fill the gap left by Bogart and Flynn?

"I'd like that," said Mr. Taylor. "I'd like that fine." And with that he took his shirt off for the next scene. . . .