

Sean's in the Army Now

Forget tension on the set—the hardest part was marching like a Yank

By **BOB STRAUSS**
Special to the Daily News

You'll never hear Mark Harmon, Sean Connery's co-star in the suspense thriller "The Presidio," which opened Friday, characterize Connery as a loser. As Harmon tells it, he had to fight the charismatic veteran for every scene they shared.

"I'm highly competitive, that's without question," the bearded, bald-and-proud-of-it Connery explained over a satellite link from Spain, where he maintains a home and is currently working in Steven Spielberg's third "Indiana Jones" adventure, portraying Indy's long-lost father. "Anybody who's played golf or tennis or poker with me will attest to that. But I don't consider myself competitive in terms of acting. In actual fact, I'm perfectly happy to give any scene to anybody who can take it. If you feel that the other guy's competing, you're better off saying nothing and doing something. Maybe that also gave Mark an edge."

Any tension that developed between the two actors only enhanced their on-screen relationship. In "The Presidio," Connery plays a career provost marshal at the sprawling San Francisco Army installation who

must team up with Harmon's civilian police detective — a hot-headed former subordinate who not only once beat up a (guilty) officer, but has the (reciprocated) hots for the older man's daughter, played by Meg Ryan.

The two tough guys' personalities and methods clash as they unravel a murder-smuggling conspiracy, but there's little doubt that they'll develop a grudging respect for one another by story's end.

Or much doubt that Connery, the picture of ramrod military fitness at age 57, can handle himself in a dangerous situation. Though no longer the lightning-fast karate chopper of such early Bond outings as "From Russia with Love" and "Goldfinger," nor the athletic he-man seen in '70s action classics like "Zardoz," "The Wind and the Lion" and "The Man Who Would Be King," he's still nobody to mess with.

Even when he's all thumbs. One of the funniest, most exciting sequences in "The Presidio" involves Connery taking on a belligerent drunk twice his size and half his age. Using a technique that involves jabbing one's thumbs into an opponent's pressure points, Connery is soon towering over his moaning adversary without having worked up a sweat.

"It's authentic," he said of the thumb-fighting display. "Like any martial art, you have to work up to it, but it's all in the strength of the thumb, the position and how it's delivered with the full weight of the body behind it. And it can do indeterminate damage. The chap who taught us was very slight, no more than 110 pounds wet, but at any moment he could reduce the 300-pound stunt man to his knees. Obviously, you have to know where to hit the person... and I don't profess to be an expert."

According to Connery, beating up people with your thumbs is a cinch compared to marching like an American soldier. For the opening parade sequence, he had to unlearn everything he remembered from his three-year stint in the Royal Navy. "We walked and saluted entirely differently," he explained. "I was 16 when I joined the navy, so I was quite conditioned to march like a British sailor. Also, American soldiers seem to take very small steps for so many big guys."

Connery's own service career ended when he was invalidated out at age 19 — with ulcers. Yes, that cinematic paragon of masculine self-confidence admits he has nerves like anybody else. "You don't get ulcers unless you have some kind of angst," he said. "Maybe during the ensuing years I've found ways to give them instead of having them myself. But there's no question, confidence only comes out of experience, work application and being able to learn something from whatever happens to you. Anybody who was oozing with confidence from the time they were a kid I would find highly suspect."

Born Thomas Connery, his own


Stu Bykofsky is on vacation.

impooverished childhood in the Edinburgh slums had a mixed effect on his sense of self-worth. Though it supplied him with few skills and a meager education (he left school at 13), it also gave him a street survivor's hustle and resilience. Early jobs ranged from coffin polisher to lifeguard, a variety of experiences that, coupled with a now long-gone mass of curly black hair, contributed to Connery's eventual acting success.

Discovered competing in the 1950 Mr. Universe contest, he was offered a part in the chorus of the London production of "South Pacific." From there he went on to larger theatrical roles, then made both his television (the British version of "Requiem for a Heavyweight") and film ("No Road Back") bows in 1956.

But it wasn't until a dozen years after leaving the navy that Connery's career was secured, when he landed the coveted role of Ian Fleming's suave and deadly secret agent, James Bond, in the 1962 movie, "Dr. No." Bond brought Connery superstar status through five sequels over the next nine years, but it also restricted him creatively.

To be honest, Connery hasn't exactly done everything in his power to put the Bond question to rest. Twelve years after his "final" 007 outing, 1971's "Diamonds Are Forever," he reactivated his license to make a killing in the teasingly titled **See CONNERY Page 48**



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