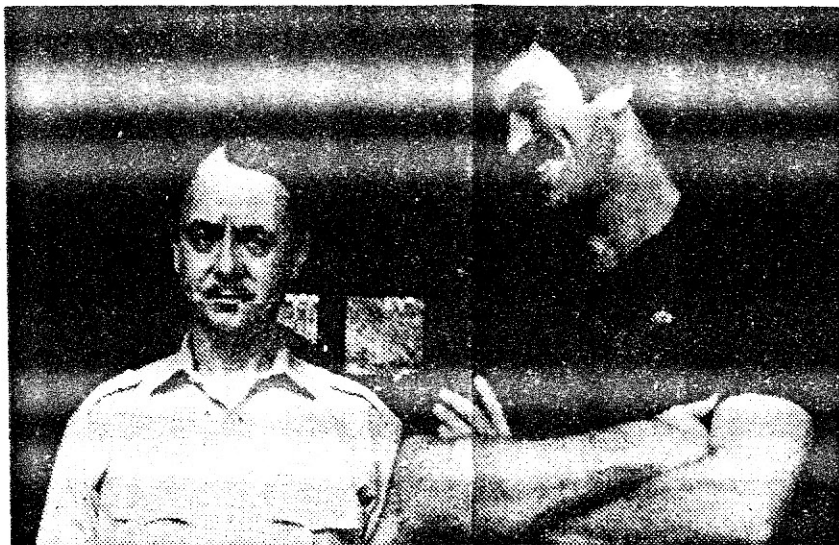


2034

TV: 2 Investigators, Magnum and Geraldo Rivera

By JOHN J. O'CONNOR (re)



John Hillerman and Tom Selleck in "Magnum, P.I." (re)

starts in Southwest Asia as shipments of the drug are followed from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran to Western Europe and the United States. This route has been traced before by television. I remember, for just once instance, a detailed essay several years ago on NBC News' "Weekend" produced by Reuven Frank.

But Mr. Rivera manages to put his inimitable stamp on the new product. Followed by hidden cameras, he is seen making a deal to buy 2,500 kilos of opium — 10 pounds of opium can be turned into one pound of heroin — from a conniving tribal leader in Pakistan. In Rome, he buys morphine on the streets and finds addicts shooting up on the banks of the Tiber. He interviews pushers, users and law-enforcement officers.

Back in the United States, Mr. Rivera goes from New York to San Francisco talking to experts and junkies from varying backgrounds. The main thrust of the piece is that heroin use has reached middle-class levels. The title, "Tracing the Dragon," refers to the practice of smoking the drug, which users think is not as dangerous as injecting. They are deluding themselves.

A typical Rivera caper, however, finds the news star returning to New York's poor Lower East Side, where he once lived, in the rather grand disguise of head bandana, beard and a long bopping cane. The fictional investigators of television — Toma, Baretta and so on — have nothing on Geraldo Rivera, P.I.

In the end, though, this is a serious and important report on drug abuse. Mr. Rivera does get his story on all levels from organized crime to hideous detoxification centers. He names recognizable names in his survey of once and former users of heroin. He dramatizes the facts outrageously at times, but he manages to achieve what he set out to get — a solid impact.

HIS evening's schedule features "Magnum, P.I.," a new series about a private investigator, and Geraldo Rivera, a very public investigator, track-down heroin connections on ABC's "20/20."

Magnum, making his debut on CBS at 8 o'clock, is Tom Magnum, a ex-naval officer, still youngish and in good enough shape to hop in and out of the bathing suit usually reserved for swimming in the sparkling waters of Oahu. Among other things, Magnum oversees security for a large Hawaiian estate. In return, he is to live in the guest house and frolic with the lovely young women who seem constantly passing through in the guise of bikinis.

Living on the estate is Higgins (John Hillerman), the haughty major who refers to his ferocious guard as "good lads." He and Magnum play intense but not unfriendly games of chessmanship. The other regular members of the series are a black helicopter pilot (Roger E. Mosley) and a nightclub owner (Larry Manoth) of whom fought beside Magnum in Vietnam.

The Vietnam motif is central in tonight's premiere. When his closest ally, a Navy lieutenant, is found dead, allegedly because of a drug overdose, Magnum sets off on a scenario that blends the dangerous present with a flashback to his tour of duty in Vietnam. Supporting him along the way, of course, is the dead man's beautiful sister, Pamela Susan Shoop.

The supporting cast includes Fritz Weaver and Robert Loggia, actors of distinction and, therefore, obvious candidates to be playing major roles in the piece. Any student of televi-

sion casting knows that such performers are not likely to accept an inconsequential bit part.

As the centerpiece of a series, the character of Magnum has possibilities. One of his more interesting gimmicks is to operate on instinct or hunches. "Don't ask me why," he keeps saying in the manner of a Norman Mailer hero, "I just knew." This mystical, fatalistic touch is neat. And as played attractively by Tom Selleck, Magnum is still another Burt Reynolds lookalike striving to market the offhand style that has made Mr. Reynolds a star. Incidentally, tonight's installment of "Magnum, P.I." is a two-hour special. The series will begin its regular weekly run next Thursday at 9.

Geraldo Rivera, needless to say, is played by Geraldo Rivera, the most controversial, if not the most irritating, of television journalists. A nearly pure

creature of the medium, Mr. Rivera is a master of theatricality, of going for the jugular in terms of visual content. He clambors over fences, he wades across Asian rivers, he cries, he badgers, he charms — and he usually gets the story and makes sure that the persona of Geraldo Rivera is at least as prominent as the pursued subject.

As a result, the Rivera manner is frequently resented, perhaps envied, by many of his colleagues in the print and electronic press. There are complaints about everything from his feverish ego to his alleged nepotism — tonight's heroin essay was produced by his brother Craig. In fact, when not restrained by either ethics or taste, Mr. Rivera can be singularly infuriating. But when he is on target, as in this heroin survey, he is undeniably impressive.

The report, which takes up the full hour of "20/20" beginning at 10 o'clock,