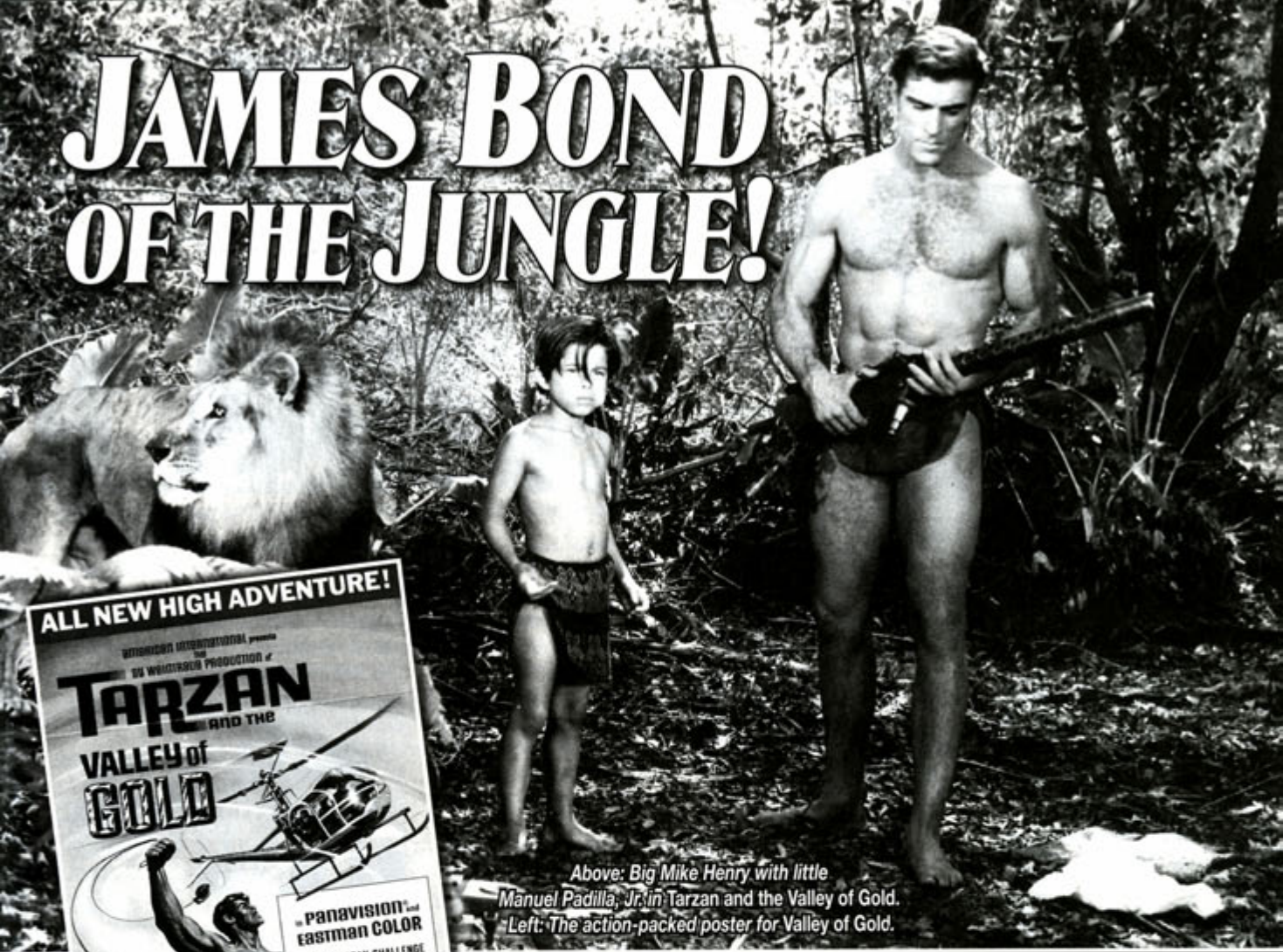


JAMES BOND OF THE JUNGLE!



Above: Big Mike Henry with little Manuel Padilla, Jr. in *Tarzan and the Valley of Gold*.
Left: The action-packed poster for *Valley of Gold*.



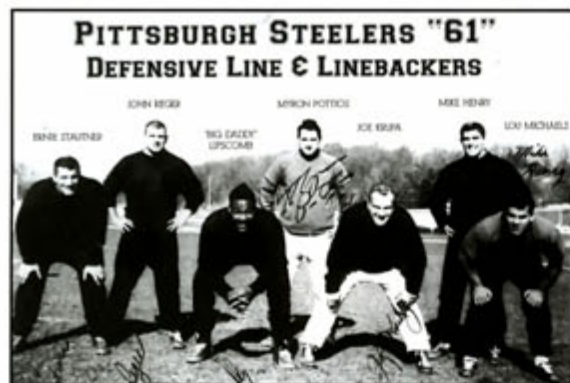
A Swinging Conversation with '60s Tarzan Star **MIKE HENRY**

Article and Interview by ANTHONY PETKOVICH

JAMES BOND AND TARZAN. WHAT COMPARISON COULD one possibly draw between the suave, global-gallivanting, danger-driven British secret agent and the loin clothed, vine-swinging Ape-Man?

Aside from the fact that Bond and Tarzan are super heroes in both literature and film, the fictional characters are each connected with two of the longest-running movie series ever. The Bond titles, of course, began back in 1962 with the iconic Sean Connery starring as 007 in *Dr. No* (note: as many Bond fans well know, we can technically go back to 1954 with *Climax Theatre's* 48-minute TV adaptation—and live broadcast—of Ian Fleming's *Casino Royale*, with American actor Barry Nelson doing the 007 honors). And 47 years later, the Bond series is still going strong, with rough-and-ready Daniel Craig, the first fair-haired Bond (if you exclude Monsieur Nelson, that is) taking up the super-secret-agent torch.

The Tarzan series itself goes back even further than Bond. The Ape-Man premiered on the silent screen in 1918, with Elmo Lincoln playing the jungle hero, while the last Tarzan film, to date, was a 1999 Disney animated feature, simply titled *Tarzan*, with Tony Goldwyn as the voice of the eponymous hero (in 1998, there was also the Brendan Fraser Tarzan spoof, *George of the Jungle*), while actor Travis Fimmel played John Clayton (a.k.a., Tarzan) in the short-lived 2003 TV series *Tarzan* with Sarah Jane Callies as Jane. In turn, going from 1918 to 2003, that adds up to over 80 years of Tarzan! In all fairness, however, Edgar Rice Burroughs had a definite head start over Bond's creator Ian Fleming, as Burroughs began his Tarzan novels in 1912, at least four decades before author Fleming first unleashed his seemingly indestructible British secret agent upon the world in 1953, via the premiere 007 novel *Casino Royale*. ⇨



Top down: Mike Henry (second from right) on the Pittsburgh lineup card. Mike, waiting in the tunnel with the L.A. Rams. Mike, muddled up, during a Rams game.



Above: Mike on guitar in his band, The Ramblers, on TV with Chubby of Chubby's Back Yard.

And since both of their separate inceptions on the big screen, James Bond and Tarzan have inevitably (in-keeping with the changing times) gone through various transformations: 007 segued from the rugged, no-nonsense spy (Sean Connery's legendary rendition), to George Lazenby's one-hit-wonder portrayal, with superlative results, in 1969's excellent *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, to a more comedic rendering (Roger Moore), back to a grittier image (Timothy Dalton), followed by a politically correct edition (Pierce Brosnan), and now, once again, returning to a back-to-basics, tough-as-nails Bond (Daniel Craig).

The surfeit of Tarzans over the decades has also gone through various metamorphoses, but ones far more easily distinguishable from each another than the relatively more complicated Bonds. That is, there have really only been two basic types of movie Tarzans: those who spoke in broken sentences (just a step above the level of grunting) and Tarzans who were distinctly articulate and impressively worldly. The differences were that simple.

But now to the question: Why the contrast and comparison, the "missing link" between 007 and the Ape-Man?

Answer: Because there was one Tarzan in the 1960s who was a curious fusion of both articulate Ape-Man and gallant secret agent. It was film producer Sy Weintraub's new, up-to-date vision of Tarzan. Weintraub was highly intent on cashing

in on the Bond phenomenon peaking at the box office at the time (Connery having just come off of the action-packed *Goldfinger* in 1964, following by the no-holds-barred, blockbuster *Thunderball* in 1965). This new "James Bond of the Jungle" en-



Linebacker Mike Henry had his own Pittsburgh Steelers trading card, a Post Cereals premium giveaway.

visioned by Weintraub was portrayed by none other than the professional football player Mike Henry.

Born on August 15, 1936 in Los Angeles, California (where he was also raised), Henry was a pro football player who moved quite easily from the playing field to the silver screen. His first television appearances came early on; as a teenager. An avid music lover, Henry formed a small quartet called The Ramblers in the early 1950s, which had some success with local L.A. TV stations. The young musician (specializing in lead vocals and guitar) also showed an interest in sports at an early age. And it was after having applied himself assiduously to college football that Henry, at age 22, succeeded in making it to the pros, first playing with the Pittsburgh Steelers (1958-1961), before being traded to the L.A.

Rams (1961-'64). Prior to playing with the Rams, however, he had already secured an acting contract with Warner Brothers and was appearing in minor roles on such hip TV shows as *Surfside 6* and *Hawaiian Eye*.

But, it was when he was under contract with producer Sy Weintraub as the screen's official 14th Tarzan that Henry became a full-time actor, giving up his professional football career. He starred in three Tarzan pictures between 1966 and 1968 (feverishly filmed back-to-back from late 1965 into 1966, then released over a three year period): *Tarzan and the Valley of Gold* (1966), *Tarzan and the Great River* (1967) and *Tarzan and the Jungle Boy* (1968). Ron Ely—who starred in the short-lived *Tarzan* TV series (1966-1968)—succeeded Henry as the Ape-Man, after Henry turned down the television series, having given up the loincloth and ape-call in late 1966.

In his North Hollywood home, the 73-year-old Henry recently spoke with *Filmfax* about his highly memorable role as Tarzan, his four decades of movie and television performances and, of course, his football career, a seven-year stretch which undoubtedly assisted him in landing the Tarzan gig.

While Henry will probably best be known as one of the more popular Tarzans from the '60s, he's also delivered some other superb movie performances over the years. One of his more notable roles is in *The Longest Yard* (1974), director Robert Aldrich's unique cocktail of comedy,

violence and drama. A football version of his classic WWII movie, *The Dirty Dozen* (1968). *The Longest Yard* is not only one of Burt Reynolds' best film roles, but Mike Henry gets to demonstrate his range of acting as a deeply racist, Southern prison guard, a definite 180-degree contrast to his benevolent portrayal of Tarzan. Henry also gives a show-stopping performance as a hell-raising outlaw in the Clint Walker western *More Dead Than Alive* (1968), which also features Vincent Price in one of his most low-key performances, just prior to his equally understated role that same year as sadistic Mathew Hopkins in *Witchfinder General*. Henry is similarly top-rate as a tender-but-tough co-pilot—

alongside the film's heroic head pilot and long-time friend, Charlton Heston—in *Skyscraper* (1972), an unintentionally campy entry in the myriad of star-studded disaster flicks which populated the '70s. Henry was also a member of John Wayne's acting troupe, and appeared in Wayne's only directorial effort, the controversial Vietnam War film *The Green Berets* (1968), as well as alongside the Duke in *Rio Lobo* (1970), the final entry in director Howard Hawks' trilogy of Wayne westerns (the two preceding efforts, of course, being 1959's *Rio Bravo* and 1966's *El Dorado*), as well one of the Duke's final efforts in the western genre.

But in real life, Henry proved to be one of the most unaffected movie stars in the business, a very spiritual, and modest person, as well as one of the screen's kindest of Tarzans. Extremely generous, too. For example, Henry doesn't believe that actors should sell autographs. He strongly feels that performers should return their public's support by showing them due appreciation—and if this appreciation is in the form of a free autograph, so be it. Henry's lovely wife Cheryl, also a former star, was inordinately helpful in facilitating the following interview, as was Tony Doria, who introduced us. ➔



Top: Posters from three Tarzan films that Mike Henry starred in for producer Sy Weintraub. Above: Muscular Mike, in the flesh.



Above: Mike (center) as one of the bad guards in Robert Aldrich's prison football film, *The Longest Yard*, starring Burt Reynolds (left) in one of his most memorable roles.

FAX: How did you get into the acting profession?

HENRY: Actually, I was working as an extra even before I got into professional football. While I played with the Steelers, I also worked during the off-season as an extra in Hollywood. A lady saw me on the set one day, and suggested that I meet with the casting people at Warner Bros. So I took a test, and they liked it enough to put me under contract for seven years, with

six-month options.

So I was in a quandary: I didn't know whether to play for the Steelers or stay at Warners. Early in my acting career, I did a lot of television series



Mike Henry in his well-dressed Tarzan/007 persona is ambushed at a bull fighting arena in *Tarzan and the City of Gold*.



like *Surfside 6* and *Hawaiian Eye*. I guess I was doing something right because they kept hiring me. (laughs) And that's when I met Sy Weintraub, when I was playing with the Rams.

FAX: Tell us about that meeting.

HENRY: Sy was a Rams fan, so he came to the Coliseum to see us play, and he saw my picture in the football program. So he called me and asked if I'd come and talk to him. During our meeting he told me he owned the rights to Tarzan and asked if I'd do a screen test for the part. So I did a test with a child actor, Manuel Padilla, Jr., who was going to play the boy in the upcoming movie. He was also in the show with Ron Ely. Anyway, I took the test, and afterwards Sy asked me, "Will you sign on to do a Tarzan movie or two?" "I'd be honored to," I told him. I said that because I wanted to get out of football gracefully. I didn't want them to put my clothes in the parking lot and say, "See ya later, Mikel!" (laughs) So I signed on to do the Tarzan pictures, and that ended my football career.

FAX: In the filmbook, *Tarzan of the Movies*, there's a chapter on you titled "Body by Michelangelo," which is an obvious reference to your impressive physique. What did your workout consist of back then?

HENRY: When I played football, I was lifting weights, but when it came to doing Tarzan, I wanted to be really cut and trim and sculptured. I didn't lift any weights, but I did calisthenics. I did the same routine every day to get in better shape—rather than upping the

number of repetitions, I cut down on the time, so I was doing things faster, and it gave me a more sculptured look. I wanted my version of Tarzan to look like that to make it more believable when I did athletic things in those movies. I think the movies speak for themselves—I did all of my own stunts.

FAX: Did you volunteer to do your own stunts or were you expected to do them?

HENRY: Both. (laughs) Either I volunteered or there wasn't any movie.



To maintain his muscle tone and physical stamina, Mike Henry works out on location during one of his Tarzan films.

FAX: English director Robert Day helmed the first two Tarzan movies you starred in.

HENRY: He was great. He would have directed the third one, too, but he produced it instead.

FAX: Did you like the notion that your version of Tarzan leaned more toward a James Bond type of character?

HENRY: At the time, it just seemed right to portray the character like that because of the whole James Bond mania taking place. It also gave Tarzan more dimension. He wasn't just an animal, but could speak articulately in complete sentences without an accent.

FAX: Where did they film your three Tarzan movies?

HENRY: We filmed the first one in Mexico and the second two in Brazil.

FAX: Did you study Burroughs' Tarzan books before doing the part?

HENRY: No. I just did my own version.



From top left: Mike Henry was playing for the L.A. Rams when producer Sy Weintraub saw his photo on a Rams' playbill and approached Mike with an opportunity to star in a series of new Tarzan films, such as *Tarzan and the City of Gold*.



During his fight with a gunman in the stands of the bullfighting arena, Henry uses his Tarzan strength to hurl a giant Coca-Cola bottle down upon his assailant, crushing him.



FAX: One of the many great scenes in your first Tarzan movie, *Tarzan and the Valley of Gold*, has you killing a guy with a giant Coca Cola bottle in an empty bullfighting arena.

HENRY: There must be some kind of symbolism there, with Tarzan killing a guy with a giant Coca Cola bottle. I'm still trying to figure it out. (laughs) But in the scene, there was no way to nail the villain other than getting him with the giant Coca Cola bottle. I had a gun, but I didn't shoot him with it.

FAX: What was one of the more dangerous stunts you experienced on your three Tarzan pictures?

HENRY: The most dangerous stunt I did was in *Tarzan and the Valley of Gold* when they put me inside an army tank to shoot at the bad guys. The special effects people put this explosive in the cannon of the tank, but it backfired into the cab and burned all the hair off my chest. (laughs) I got out of the cab as quickly as I could in order to save the hair on my chest—literally.

FAX: Did any similar close calls ever occur?

HENRY: In one scene in *Valley of Gold*, they had me run through a series of explosives. They told me where to run, but if I didn't run fast enough, I could be blown up. It was all about timing, it was dangerous.

I also remember when we were shooting a scene which appeared toward the beginning of *Valley of Gold*, there was a leopard in a cage with a chain around his neck, and I had to bring him out of the cage, but he wouldn't come out. I was yanking on the chain trying to get him out of the cage, when someone shot him with a pellet gun over my shoulder, and the leopard just went wild, leaping right over my shoulder. People were screaming, but I held onto the chain, and the leopard ran around me a couple of times before I calmed him down. He was pretty fierce, though.

FAX: Didn't they have animal trainers on the set?

HENRY: Yes, and the animal trainers were great. It was the ones who weren't trainers who were handling the animals which is when we got into trouble. The Rafill Family were the trainers, and they were very well respected.

I also recall in *Tarzan and the Valley of Gold*, we were working in a little Mexican town called Chilpancingo, and outside that town was an enormous cave, and the producers decided to shoot a couple scenes inside the cave. So they moved the whole company to inside the cave, including the animals: the lions, and the leopards, what have you. So they had to bring the generator into the cave, too. But when they turned the generator on, it smoked up the whole cave, and made the lion pass out, so they couldn't get him out of the cave. We had to wait for the lion to revive, and even then (laughs), he was wobbling all over the place—swaggering like he was John Wayne.

FAX: Let's talk a little about working with Jan Murray in *Tarzan and the Great River*.

HENRY: I just stayed in the background around Jan in some scenes and let him do his thing. He was a great comedian. A great guy, too. I really liked him.

FAX: What about Manuel Padilla, Jr.?

HENRY: He was another great guy. He was there with his father during the movie.

FAX: You worked with Rafer Johnson in *Great River* and *Tarzan and the Jungle Boy*, where he played a villain both times.



Henry seemed to have a natural rapport with the animals used in the Tarzan films, even when off-camera.

Top: Mike prepares to fight with Rafer Johnson in a scene from *Tarzan and the Great River*. Above: Another shot of Mike and Rafer's fight scene.

HENRY: Rafer was a 1960 Decathlon Olympic champion. We got along great. His brother Eddie Johnson was in *Jungle Boy*, too.
FAX: Did Rafer and you choreograph the fight sequences between your characters?
HENRY: Rafer and I did coordinate our fight scenes, and I coordinated pretty much all of the other ones I did on that Tarzan film and the previous two.

FAX: You gave a karate chop to one villain in *Valley of Gold*.

HENRY: That was just my idea, to make it look a bit more spectacular, even though I didn't take any karate classes. It was really just a spontaneous thing I did at the last minute.

But getting back to Rafer and Eddie, there was a scene in *Jungle Boy* where there was a stack of lumber next to a waterway, and Eddie was supposed to come down to the pile of lumber with a torch to burn it. And when he hit the stack of lumber, the lumber went up in flames—unfortunately so did Eddie. He was quick, though, and jumped right into the water. So, after that incident, we nicknamed Eddie “the Wick.” (laughs)

There was also a pretty rough stunt in *Jungle Boy* toward the beginning of the picture where Eddie was competing with Rafer to be head of their tribe; they were not



Mike Henry poses with Sharon Tate and a large feline friend in this publicity photo for *Tarzan and the City of Gold*. The photo was taken before Tate decided to turn down the role, which later was filled by Nancy Kovack.

only real-life brothers, but they also played brothers in the movie. Eddie was the good brother in *Jungle Boy* and Rafer was the evil one. Anyhow, at the beginning of the film, the two brothers are competing by means of an obstacle course to see who will take over their dying father's position as leader of the tribe. And the last obstacle they have to undertake is jumping over a bed of spikes. Well, first Rafer jumps over the

spikes and then it was Eddie's turn. But just before Eddie is set to go, Rafer's evil character, who's on the finishing side of the bed of spikes, pours water over his head to supposedly cool off. But the water also lands on the ground and obviously moistens it, with Rafer's character intending to have his brother lose footing once he lands on the other side of the spikes, and fall back onto the lethal spikes.

Anyhow, Eddie was running from one direction toward the spikes, and my character Tarzan sees what the evil brother is up to, so I try to cut off Eddie, and I run at him from a side angle and stop him by bringing him down with a pretty heavy-duty tackle. I fell on my back when I grabbed Eddie, who wasn't an athlete. So I took the brunt of the fall. And that didn't feel too good, either. (laughs)

FAX: There's a publicity picture of you with the late Sharon Tate, who was supposed to co-star in 1966's

Valley of Gold. Why didn't she appear in the film?

HENRY: She was a very pleasant gal. I think it was her agent, however, who decided that the film might not be a good vehicle for her. So she gracefully bowed out of the project, and Nancy Kovack wound up playing the main female. (Note: Tate went on to star in Roman Polanski's 1966 horror romp, *The Fearless Vampire Killers*, and shortly thereafter wedded the Polish director, only to meet her gruesome death at the hands of the Manson cult in 1969.)

FAX: You ultimately quit the Tarzan movies and turned down the TV series, as well.

HENRY: They asked me to do the TV series, but I turned it down. If the producers had treated me better during the three Tarzan movies I did, I think I would have gone ahead and done the series. They



Above: Mike plays with one of the trained chimps. Left: However, Mike's chin was badly bitten by a less friendly chimp during *Tarzan and the Great River*.

thought they were doing what they should do, and I thought I was doing what I should do. So I went my way and they went theirs and that was okay.

Besides, I didn't want to be typecast. Tarzan is a character that goes back to World War I, and I knew I was going to be associated with Tarzan because of the three films that I did in that genre, and I really wanted to broaden my career. Sy Weintraub, however, was always good to me. But the producers always tried to cut corners and do things to save money—at the cost of my safety, more or less.

FAX: You were, in fact, also badly bitten by a chimp in one of the three Tarzan movies.

HENRY: That's right. I was bitten by the chimp in the second movie, *Tarzan and the Great River*. In one scene, they had me running up to the chimp and picking him up. Well, when I went to pick him up, he got scared and lashed out at me and



Mike befriends some of his supporting players aboard ship.

really bit me something fierce on the chin. I had to knock him off of me, and when I turned to get something to stop the bleeding, the script lady saw me and immediately fainted (laughs) upon seeing all of this blood gushing out of my chin. Anyhow, they took me to the hospital, dropped me off, and before I knew it—they left! That would have been fine, too, if most of the doctors and nurses in the hospital spoke English. But they didn't. They spoke Portuguese. And I didn't speak a word of Portuguese. (laughs) So, I'm sure I looked quite interesting with blood gushing from my chin as I tried to explain to them in broken English, "Me Tarzan...monkey bite... (pointing to chin) here...me Tarzan...you fix...!" (laughs)

Well, they did eventually take care of me, and it took 20 stitches to fully patch up the monkey bite. (Note: a different chimp was used in later sequences in the movie). I got pretty sick from that bite, too. Chimps carry a lot of diseases, and I got a bad fever from that wound and ended up sick in bed. I had to take gamma-globulin shots every six hours, around the clock, for ten days. As a result, they had to stop shooting for a couple of weeks until my chin healed and I no longer was suffering from fever.

Later on, the producers got to thinking about the whole incident, and they were afraid that I was going to sue them. And I did sue them. During the course of the three movies, I also suffered from bouts of food poisoning and dysentery. And while we were shooting my last Tarzan movie, *Tarzan and the Jungle Boy*, I contracted an ear infection, as well as a viral infection of my liver. I don't mind talking about the lawsuit, but I guess all there really is to say is that we amicably settled the whole thing out of court.



Tarzan and the Jungle Boy was Mike's favorite film.



Above: Lobby card scene from Tarzan and the Valley of Gold featuring Don Megowan (right) as one of the heavies.

FAX: Which is your favorite of the three Tarzan movies?

HENRY: I think the last one: *Tarzan and the Jungle Boy*, because I think we got back to the original Tarzan feel and away from the James Bond thing, which didn't work for a lot of people. I dubbed every one of those movies, by the way, because they didn't want to spend the money on sound; they just wanted to keep shooting. Every single line in those shows was post-dubbed. I kind of liked doing that, actually. The crew was made up of really nice guys, but they were kind of noisy—another reason why they dubbed the movies. Some of the crewmembers were also working as actors, and they were quite good.

FAX: Don Megowan was good as one of the heavies in *Tarzan and the Valley of Gold*.

HENRY: Don was a football player at U.S.C. before me, and you're right, he was a good heavy—a very good heavy.

FAX: Rumor has it that you were, at one point, up for the role of Batman on the famous '60s TV series.

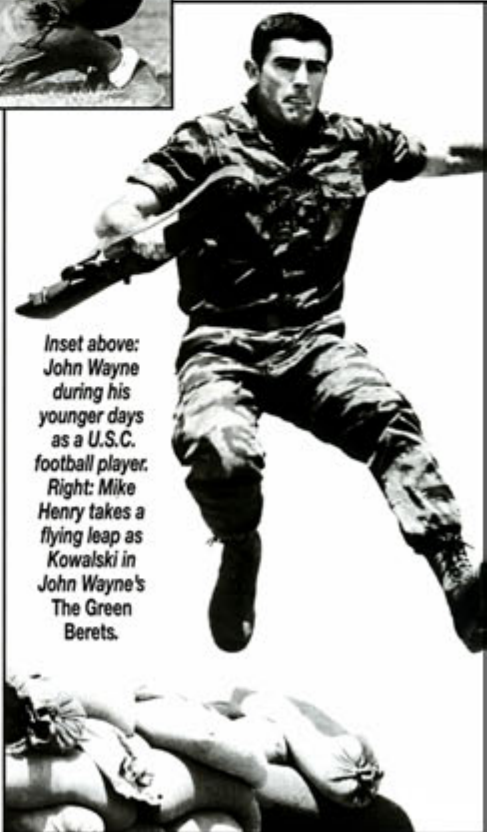
HENRY: I've read that before in other articles, but it really was just that—a rumor. I never did any screen tests for the *Batman* TV series, nor did I have any discussions with the show's producers.

FAX: One of the first films you did after leaving the Tarzan movies was John Wayne's Vietnam War film *The Green Berets*. How did you get involved in that particular project?

HENRY: John went U.S.C. and played ball there in his younger days. So he was always sympathetic to guys from U.S.C. who played football. So he called me in for an interview, and when I got to meet him, we talked about football and he eventually came around to ask-



Inset above: John Wayne during his younger days as a U.S.C. football player. Right: Mike Henry takes a flying leap as Kowalski in John Wayne's *The Green Berets*.



ing me, "How would you feel about playing the part of Kowalski in *The Green Berets*?" And I said, "I'd be happy to play any part in *The Green Berets*." So he interviewed me, and I wound up playing the part of Kowalski. Duke, of course, would eventually direct and produce the movie, as well as star in it.

**-CONTINUED
NEXT ISSUE-**

Be here next time as Mike Henry continues his amazing life story!