

# Magnum's forceful sidekick

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**B**ULLETS WHIZZING OVER his head, shells bursting all around, North Koreans charging, his position with fixed bayonets—all the horrifying memories of a Korean War veteran? Not quite. "Nothing as colorful as that. I was stationed two hours from my hometown. Spent the entire war there. Up to that point I was bored my entire life," relates the man known to millions of TV viewers as Jonathan Higgins—actor John Hillerman. (TCL)

On the set of "Magnum, P.I." Hillerman portrays the urbane, witty, British veteran of World War II, the pure sophisticate laced with sarcasm. He's a man capable of aiding a friend when others wouldn't and capable of making him suffer when the mood suits him. Higgins is a joy, a character we can all love for his streaks of sentimental benevolence and delicious wickedness.

"If you asked me if I was fated to play one character for the rest of my life, I'd hope it would be one like Jonathan. Bright and witty and charming, and most important, not too nice. A decent sort underneath it all, but not too sweet," Hillerman grins haughtily as he speaks.

One of the most frequent mistakes made about the man concerns

his origins. He gets loads of mail from people in Great Britain telling him what a credit he is to England. He writes back to them hoping he doesn't disappoint when he tells them he's "just a hick from Texas."

It could be that he plays his role so well, the stiff-upper-lip Britisher who can't understand the shenanigans of the cocky Magnum—a role he has just received a Golden Globe Award for. "I originally wanted to be a stage actor and when I came to New York you couldn't exist on Broadway with a regional accent, so I went to speech school. The biggest jolt I

ever received was when I heard myself on a tape recorder for the first time. It took me a year to lose the accent. Now it's the vogue. Everybody's trying to put on a Texas accent, wear cowboy boots and shirts," he says.

But all that doesn't matter now. "Magnum" is playing to 40 foreign markets and is one of the top shows right here in the States. Tom Selleck, the show's star, has been catapulted into the limelight and the fine supporting cast of the CBS show has made the leap just as successfully.

"I won't pretend that I'm not enjoying it," Hillerman says. "The starving actor syndrome that I went through should be avoided. I don't believe in unnecessary pain and suffering. Now we work six days a week, which I find ludicrous since they say we are on location. I wouldn't mind doing more, but for the most part I'm used quite a bit."

Not only in "Magnum" will Hillerman's visage be appearing. He will be seen as columnist Charles Knickerbocker in the "Little Gloria" blockbuster scheduled for the fall season, and in another show named "Tales of the Brass Monkey."

It's been said that he loves fine wines and practical jokes. Not true. He doesn't drink wine and he doesn't think practical jokes are funny. It's also been said that he loves fine art and caviar and hates exercise. All true. "One of my most expensive habits

is caviar, and exercise is boring," he says. "In the one episode where I had to do all that exercising, Tom loved it. He's riding and smirking in the Ferrari and I'm running behind. They love to do those things to me in the script."

Hillerman hopes to establish his own production company. "After 'Magnum' is over I'd like the opportunity to star in my own vehicle. If Ted Knight can have his own television show, surely I can," said the man who originally wanted to be a stage actor.

What about that? "On the stage it's all very big and you can fake it," he says. "They may not admit it, but it's true. You can't fake it for the camera, it's got to be real. The camera doesn't allow you to fake it. And besides, I'm not an actor who needs an audience to boost me up. I get very turned on by a camera lens. It's a wonderful audience of one that doesn't cough in the middle of a line."



John Hillerman

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