CPYRGHT

CPYRGHT

CPYRGHT

Bill Smith, of the Laredo cast, is said to be probably the first CIA agent who ever became actor.

The Man From 'Laredo'

By Rona Barrett

CPYRGHT

CAN four fellows who look like football players find happiness together in Laredo?

That will be the question to be solved this fall by the producers of Universal and NBC's new 90-minute color Western titled, of course, "Laredo."

Laredo, in essence, is a remake of "The Three Musketeers."

One of the four principals is Bill Smith. It is not his physical (he stands 6 feet 2) or his facial qualities that amaze you, but the fact that he's probably the first CIA agent who ever became an actor.

He was wearing a rust-colored sports jacket that he had dug out of an old suitcase from his Air Force days in Germany. We were having lunch in a Sunset Strip cafe. Three "Laredos" were already in the can but production on the series had been stopped so network nabobs could examine the show and suggest changes, of which there was already a pageful.

One major change will be to dress the four more distinctly and give each a somewhat different personality. For while Neville Brand, who plays one of them, looks mean enough to kill you with his grin and Peter Brown

has a certain kind of handsomeness that can sidetrack you, and 6 feet 5 Phil Carey eats potato chips, there was a certain sameness about their parts.

How did a secret agent become an actor?

"It was an accident. I was working as a teaching assistant at U.C.L.A. in Russian Lit. But I couldn't work for the Government any longer because I had married a girl who wasn't a resident of this country. When you work for any branch of the secret Government service, you cannot be married to an alien.

WHEN I was in Germany I met Michele. She was French. We fell in love, got married and, bingo! four years of working for the Government was over.

"Anyway, they were doing this movie and they needed a guy to speak Russian and one of my other professors told me about it and said I should look into the situation because it could mean extra money, and that's how it all began.

"Actually, it's kind of funny because my first big job was in Phil Carey's series 'Asphalt Jungle.' He's been a big booster of mine through the years. Every

few weeks he'd phone to see how I was and what I was up to.

"It's kind of interesting that all the guys who worked on 'Asphalt' are now working for NBC this year. Jack Warden is doing 'Wackiest Ship in the Army' and Arch Johnson is in 'Camp Runamuck.'"

How does a young man become a secret agent?

"I was flunking out of Glendale College. I was a sort of hot rod fiend. Actually, too young to understand at the time the importance of a college education. I tried to escape the wrath of my parents so I joined the Air Force. I really wanted to become a Marine, but I was 17 and they wouldn't take me. I figured the Air Force was the next best branch of the service.

"I was gung ho for the service in those days. That's why I think I did such a good job as a drill instructor. I've changed since. I had what you'd call youthful patriotism. All my buddies were fighting in Korea and I wanted to do the same. I did things by the book, which is not always best. There's no place for compassion in instruction.

FOR 13 weeks people get to hate you. It's easier to get things

accomplished that way. I learned to divorce myself from the 65 men I was in charge of. I never learned anybody's first name, never spoke to anyone unless it was to reprimand. I never studied anyone unless they had a problem.

"After nine months they sent me to language school. When I entered the service they gave me an aptitude test. Somehow I came out high in languages. The following 14 months I spent eight hours a day studying Russian at Syracuse. And for three months from 8 till 4 every day I did nothing but speak Russian.

"Ninety per cent of the people in the program were professors or people getting their doctorates. I was the youngest in the class, 18, and out of 150 people finished the course fourth."