

IT'S OUTRAGEOUS THAT someone else is playing Illya Kuryakin!" chuckles David McCallum over breakfast at an ocean-front coffee shop near his home in Santa Monica. "When you do something for many years you have a very soft spot in your soul and it can be very easily bruised."

The impish McCallum, now 81, hasn't lost his sense of humour, despite living in California for so many years. "I didn't even know there was a movie coming out. Nobody said anything to me about it and I'd never heard of the two stars!"

"But I'm delighted and I wish them every success," he adds with a cheeky smile about the cinematic remake of his classic series. More than 50 years after *The Man from UNCLE* first aired on TV, a film directed by Guy Ritchie and based on the original is released in the UK this week.

Once again Napoleon Solo and the secretive, sexy Russian, Illya Kuryakin, are fighting international crime. But this time they are played by Henry Cavill and Armie Hammer, instead of the iconic duo of Robert Vaughn and David McCallum who, for four years from 1964 (the UK debut was 1965), made the US series such a phenomenal success.

McCallum is not the slightest bit put out that neither he nor Vaughn, now 82, was offered a

‘It’s outrageous that someone else is playing Illya Kuryakin!’

cameo. "I understand why Robert and I weren't offered roles in it, because I think it would be more of a distraction than anything else."

He has seen the new film, however, at a private screening at Warner Brothers and he was pleasantly surprised.

"Guy Ritchie and his writers have done an excellent job and have produced an exciting, original action movie that pays great tribute to the work Robert Vaughn, Leo G Carroll [head of *UNCLE Mr Waverly*] and myself did back in the 60s," he says. "But at the same time it stays away from what we did and creates something original. Armie Hammer has done a wonderful job as Illya Kuryakin and I've completely fallen in love with Alicia Vikander!"

The TV series, which began in black and white and ran for 105 episodes, spawned eight films and reached such cultural prominence that props, costumes, documents and a video clip are in the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library's exhibit on spies and counterspies.

Originally called *Solo*, it was intended as a star vehicle for Robert Vaughn. The Scottish-born McCallum, who at the time had recently arrived in the US and appeared in *The Great Escape* (1963), had only a small role in the first episode. But his mysterious and enigmatic Illya Kuryakin fired the imagination of viewers and he was elevated to co-star status.

Kuryakin became a pop-culture phenomenon and fans went wild. Everywhere he went, McCallum was mobbed. He once had to be rescued by police from crowds in Central Park, and fans tore apart two floors of Macy's clamouring for a look at him. At his peak he received more fan mail than any other actor in MGM's history.

HE BELIEVES THE show's success had a lot to do with timing. "It came on at a time when there was tremendous anguish with the Vietnam War and concerns about the Cold War," he remembers. "It was a difficult time in America and a story about two agents, one American and one Russian, who seemed to be very friendly and able to work together in spite of all the anguish, caught on with the public. It was very naive and simple and there was a lightness to it."

Unsurprisingly, Guy Ritchie's film makes full use of all the technology available to today's filmmakers. But when the original series was made none of those techniques had been invented. Vaughn and McCallum filmed at the MGM studios and if the show went on location it had to be within 50 miles of the studio otherwise the costs went up and the actors and crew had to be paid more.

"It didn't have computer graphics because they didn't exist!" says McCallum. "I remember being out in the hills in an open-top Austin-Healey with the sound equipment on my lap ▷



NEW RECRUITS
Henry Cavill (Solo) and
Armie Hammer (Kuryakin)
in the film version



Men
U.N.



Why is
Guy Ritchie
trying to replace
David McCallum
and **Robert Vaughn**?

OLD SCHOOL
Robert Vaughn
(Napoleon Solo) and
David McCallum (Ilya
Kuryakin) in the cult
60s TV series

Men from **U.N.C.L.E.**



TV HERO
David McCallum as
chief medical examiner
"Ducky" Mallard in *NCIS*

◁ and a microphone in my hand. Robert drove and he had a switch for a camera that was strapped to the car's hood. We switched the camera on and off we went."

Inevitably there were rumours that he and Vaughn didn't get on, but that was far from the truth, he insists. "Robert and I were the greatest of friends throughout, but as different as chalk and cheese. He went his way and I went my way, but when we came together on the set we were totally amicable. He was very involved in politics and writing a book so he was in his own world much of the time. We don't see each other very often these days, although I called him on November 22, which is his birthday."

IN THE YEARS since *The Man from UNCLE* McCallum has continued to work virtually without a break, appearing in such classic shows as *Colditz*, *The Invisible Man*, *Kidnapped*, and opposite Joanna Lumley in ITV's science-fiction series *Sapphire & Steel*.

He is now getting Illya Kuryakin-type recognition for his role as the medical examiner Dr Donald "Ducky" Mallard in *NCIS*, for which he has become an expert in forensics with an extensive library of books on the subject and has appeared at medical examiner conventions.

A true Renaissance man, he has also just written his first novel, an international thriller called *Once a Crooked Man*, and is a classically trained musician who has released four albums and still plays the oboe. "All in all, I manage to keep busy," he says, with characteristic McCallum understatement. **JOHN HISCOCK**

REMAKES OF TV CLASSICS

DAD'S ARMY Catherine Zeta-Jones plays a journalist sent to report on the Walmington-on-Sea Home Guard. Toby Jones (right) is Captain Mainwaring. Due for release next February.



ALL CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL US broadcaster HBO is believed to have picked up the 1978-90 British drama about the life of a vet in the Yorkshire Dales, with Dominic West reportedly in the frame to star.

KOJAK Vin Diesel is to front a big-screen remake of the 70s US cop drama, which ran for five seasons on CBS in the 1970s and starred Telly Savalas. A 2005 TV remake with Ving Rhames in the lead ran for just one season.

THE FIRST NAPOLEON

Robert Vaughn shot to fame playing Napoleon Solo in the 1960s – but he won't be watching the movie

Robert Vaughn, whose role as Napoleon Solo in *The Man from UNCLE* made him an international star, has no plans to see the new movie, which has Henry Cavill playing his iconic role.

"I live in the country and it's not easy for me to get to movies," explains the actor, who now lives in Ridgefield, Connecticut. "I don't know much about it and I don't know the actors who are in it."

Like David McCallum, Vaughn has fond memories of the show, despite the fact that filming of the pilot episode began on his 31st birthday (22 November 1963), the same day President Kennedy was assassinated. "That was something I'll never forget," he says.

When offered the part, he'd been nominated for a best supporting actor Oscar for his role in *The Young Philadelphians* and had co-starred as one of the Magnificent Seven – he is the last surviving member of the Seven.

But there was no star treatment on *The Man from UNCLE*, he recalls. "Everybody chipped in

'We had a budget of about a hundred dollars'

and did different jobs to help out," he laughs. "I think we had a budget of about a hundred dollars. But it was a wonderful experience and I couldn't wait to get to work every day.

"It turned me from being a working actor into a negotiating actor, which means I could ask for things and was given them, so the quality of everything went up," he says.

Both he and McCallum accumulated a massive fan following, although "David's fans were much younger than mine. He was referred to as the Blond Beatle so his fans were mainly teenagers. Mine were in their 20s!"

He echoes McCallum, and insists that there was never a feud or any rivalry between them and they're still in touch 50 years later. "We always make contact on our birthdays and we last talked on my birthday in November and we'll talk again on his in September."

Immediately after the series finished,



SOLO MISSION
Robert Vaughn lent gravitas to BBC1's *Hustle*

Vaughn's good friend Steve McQueen cast him in *Bullitt*, which consolidated his star power.

He later returned to television in the ITV detective series *The Protectors* and got to know London very well playing the elder statesman, American con artist Albert Stroller in BBC1's *Hustle*, which ran from 2004 to 2012.

He then appeared in *Coronation Street* as Milton Fanshaw, a love interest for Sylvia Goodwin, played by Stephanie Cole. "That was a hoot," he recalls. "Stephanie was great fun –

I had a wonderful time in the UK," he says fondly. "I'm ready to go back again at any time if I'm offered the chance!" **JH**

The Man from UNCLE opens in UK cinemas on Friday 14 August

