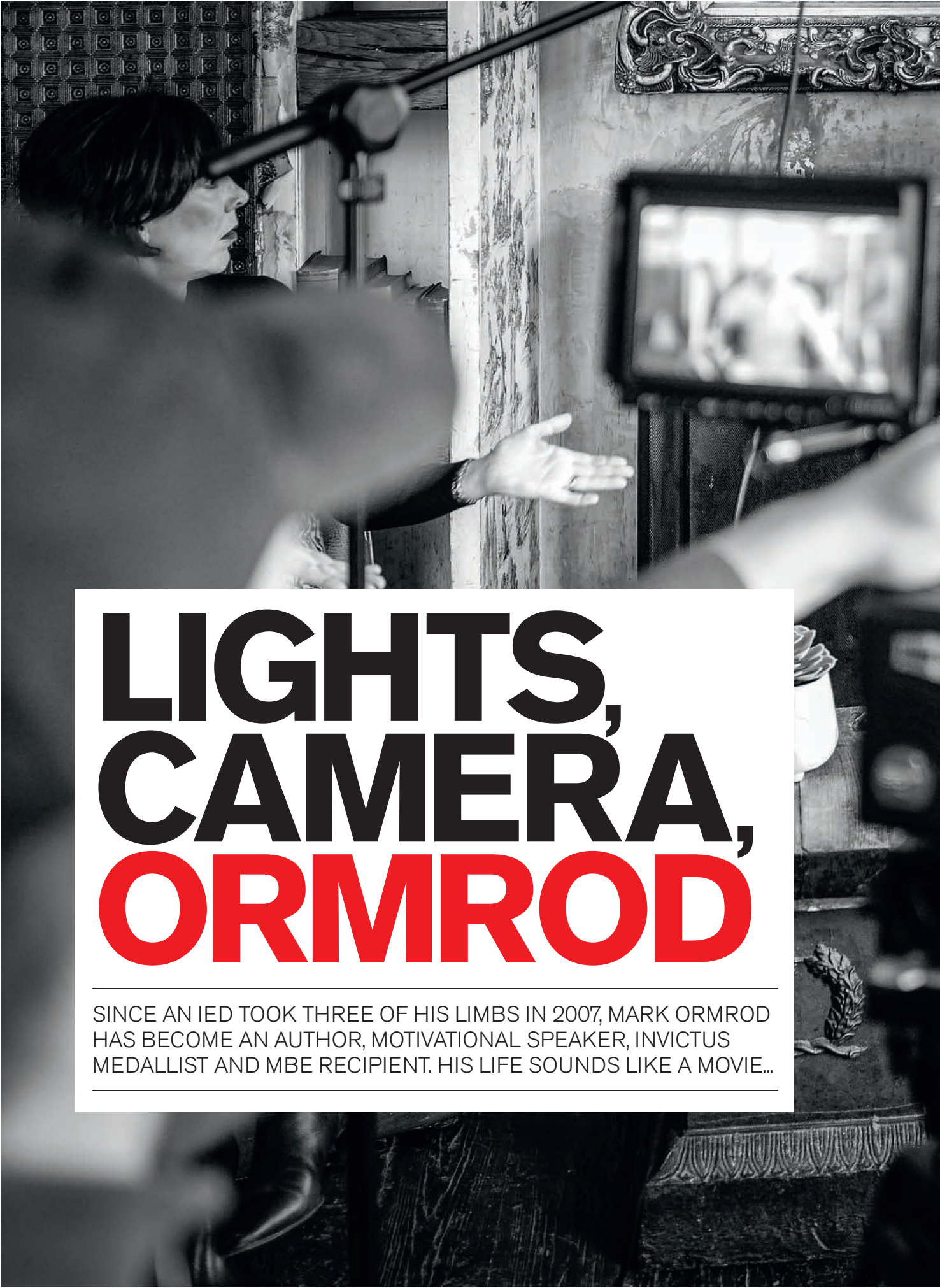




LIGHTS, CAMERA, ORMROD

SINCE AN IED TOOK THREE OF HIS LIMBS IN 2007, MARK ORMROD HAS BECOME AN AUTHOR, MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER, INVICTUS MEDALLIST AND MBE RECIPIENT. HIS LIFE SOUNDS LIKE A MOVIE...



Mark became the first triple amputee to survive the conflict in Afghanistan when he was blown up serving with the Royal Marines on Christmas Eve 2007



"He was so charismatic, everybody was locked into his enthusiasm," say husband-and-wife film team Lynn and David Coleman

Mark Ormrod is perhaps one of Blesma's most recognisable Members. He became the first triple amputee to survive the conflict in Afghanistan when he was blown up while on a foot patrol in Helmand with the Royal Marines on Christmas Eve 2007. The father of three, who lost both his legs as well as his right arm in the blast, was told he wouldn't walk again but defied the odds to do just that to receive his operational medal a year later.

What has followed since has been just as impressive: Mark is now a celebrated author and motivational speaker, a tireless charity fundraiser, has won Invictus Games medals and has been awarded an MBE. As a Blesma Member he has taken part in Making Generation R, recorded an episode of *The Resilience Sessions* podcast, and given up his time to fundraise for the Association.

Part of Mark's life story has already been told in his acclaimed biography *Man Down*, and he has lost count of the number of times people have told him his experiences would 'make a good film'. Now, that looks like it is finally about to happen thanks to husband-and-wife film production team

Lynn and David Coleman (above) – even if they were initially met with indifference from Mark.

"I must admit, I was perhaps a bit rude to David and Lynn at first because when they started emailing me, I just ignored them," says Mark. "I'd heard it all before, and a lot of people were promising me stuff that would lead to nothing. But then the chief executive of The Royal Marines Charity got in touch and said: 'Can you please reply because this is legit?' I did, and things went from there."

The producers have a background in the City – David in banking, Lynn at Lloyds of London – and came to see the film as a commercial and development opportunity for their company, DAL Productions.

AN INCREDIBLE STORY

"When we picked up Mark's book we thought his was an incredible story," says David. "Then we saw him doing a presentation, and he was just so charismatic. Everybody was locked into his enthusiasm. His is a unique tale, and the way he lives his life is remarkable. We thought it would be exciting to share that with the wider

world. With our commercial knowledge and financial background, we thought there could be a synergy."

They have been working with Mark to develop the concept ever since. "We are excited about making Mark's story into a movie, although we keep joking that it's going to be five hours long because he keeps doing amazing things," says David.

The duo have since added renowned producer Paul Forrest (above right) to the team to bring discipline to the story. With such an unusual narrative – battlefield action, life-threatening injury, medical dramas, recovery, setbacks, and a journey towards a new life, this is no small job.

"I've helped the guys get their heads around what needs to be done to turn this into a film," says Paul. "When I first met Mark, I realised this was a story that was going to be brutally honest and very difficult to tell. It needs to be regarded as authentic by Mark's peers. It's not just a battlefield drama, it's also a medical drama in which you need authenticity."

"And we need the film to progress through many different stages of Mark's life and rehabilitation. We don't want



“When I first met Mark, I realised this was a story that was going to be brutally honest and difficult to tell,” says film producer Paul Forrest

a sudden transition from Mark losing his limbs to him suddenly moving around really well. We want to communicate some of the dark things that Mark had to think about. There will be discomfort. It’s not a straight curve where everything just gets better all the time.”

THE SECRET SAUCE

Visual effects and cinematic trickery will play a part in conveying Mark’s physique on camera; but some top-grade acting will also be required from a performer who can portray Mark during his time in *The Marines* as well as living as a triple amputee.

“We will be working with a movement expert, who can coach the actor about how Mark moves,” says Paul, “and we will shoot a lot of the footage with a careful balance of object tracking and green screen. You can also frame shots in a certain way so you might not need effects. It’s all about putting the right team of creative people together.”

Funding isn’t easy for any film, and even those that aren’t ‘big budget’ are still very expensive. “It’s all about getting investors in,” says Paul. “We’ve had a lot of interest.

One of the early investors is a US Marine, and he understands the domain we’re operating in. He feels that Mark’s is a story that should be told because too much of what you see in this genre is ‘shoot ‘em up’. This is a story about a catastrophic set of events that changed someone’s life, and the lives of those around him, forever.”

The film, explains Paul, has a unique funding model. He will not take payment until the investors have been paid and certain charities have got the percentages that they’ve been promised. “This was one of the ways we showed Mark we weren’t trying to catch him out,” says Paul.

After a screenwriter and production team have come together, the next step is casting and actually making the film. “Filmmaking requires a big collection of freelancers,” explains Paul. “We are hoping to shoot the Middle East scenes in either Jordan or Morocco. In an ideal world, we’ll be shooting at the beginning of 2022 and maybe looking at a Christmas 2022 release. This is actually a Christmas film because Mark was injured on Christmas Eve.”

As for casting Mark, Lynn says that “we need an actor who thinks: ‘this is going to

be a great role for me’, and who takes on board how Mark would like to see the role being portrayed. That’s the secret sauce.” The man himself is “100% involved with the process” of casting, says Paul. “We’ve got some ideas and we are going to run them all past him. He will be very connected with the final choices. He is not going to be an associate producer in name only – we’re using this experience as a method of skills transfer to get him up to speed on what producers do.

“He will be actively involved and taking on responsibility, so he’ll have a new skill set that he can work with beyond this film.”

There is a lot of hard work ahead for everybody involved but, for Paul, the sky’s the limit. “For an actor, playing somebody with a disability is hard to do well,” he says. “This role will be a tough one to pull off because of the mental and physical challenges that Mark has faced over the years, and not least because of his enduring charisma.”

Like everything else in Mark Ormrod’s life, however, you wouldn’t bet against something remarkable happening. The red carpet awaits...

“We need to leave now, before we get mobbed!”

SHOCK, TEARS, LAUGHTER... MARK ENVISAGES THE END RESULT BEING A ROLLERCOASTER RIDE OF A FILM – IN MUCH THE SAME WAY THAT HIS IS A ROLLERCOASTER RIDE OF A LIFE

The film has been born from your book, *Man Down*. What was it like writing that? I enjoyed it. The experience was cathartic – talking and telling stories. But it took 10 months, which was a lot longer than I thought it would take. I had a ghost writer to help me, and by the time we'd finished I was burned out and didn't even read the book! I eventually read it 10 years later. I would change one or two things about it now, but when we wrote it I was still serving. The feedback has been really positive, though. It's something I'm proud of, but the book isn't the half of it.

The real story starts when I finished serving, went to America and got rehab and mentoring. That's when my life really started to take a new turn.

What's it like being an associate producer on a film about your life?

I'm excited about the whole thing. We are hitting the ground running after Covid, and I've already learned so much about filmmaking. It blows me away how much is actually involved in making a film. It takes hundreds of people in so many different areas; from writing the screenplay to putting up the scaffolding

for the sets. I've learned about all the work that goes on behind the scenes.

What is your key role?

I'm going to be irritating everyone! I'm fortunate to be involved as an associate producer, so I'll be there from the very beginning, putting my two pence in and making sure the film is as authentic as it possibly can be.

What are your hopes for the film? Is it about getting across a certain message?

I'm hoping for three Oscars and 15 BAFTAs! Just joking! I'd like the feedback to be similar to the book's. People would email me to say how much it meant to them. I want to open people's eyes, so there will be shock, people will think: 'God, that's awful', people will be welling up, others will be covering their eyes but then also laughing at all the dark humour. I want it to be a rollercoaster ride but for it to end on a high.

Who would you like to play you?

We need an actor who can play someone quite young because I was 24 when I was injured. Actors like Jack Reynor from *Transformers*, Jack O'Connell and Kit Harington are great examples. I'd also like some big-name cameos.

How odd will it be to see your life being played out by someone else?

I think by the time we finish filming it will feel normal to me, but sitting in a cinema watching it with a crowd of people will be special. I want it to be like the Bruce Lee scene where he's watching his first film, and at the end it goes quiet and he says: "We need to leave now, before we get mobbed!" – with everyone in shock because it's so good. That would be nice.

“I WANT TO OPEN PEOPLE'S EYES BUT END ON A HIGH. SITTING IN A CINEMA WATCHING IT WITH A CROWD OF PEOPLE WILL BE SPECIAL”





As an associate producer on the film, Mark fully intends to be heavily involved in the project right from the very start