

*Dangerous Assignment*  
Ryan Ellett

*Dangerous Assignment*, with Brian Donlevy in the lead role of Steve Mitchell, was developed by NBC during the summer of 1949 at a cost of \$15,000. Other shows developed as part of this new programming blitz by the network included *Dragnet* at a cost of \$34,000, *Richard Diamond* at \$51,000, and *Four Star Playhouse* at \$60,000. Seven episodes were broadcast that summer, from July 9 to August 20, 1949. When no sponsor stepped forward the show left the airwaves for six months.

Originally scheduled to replace Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis' program at 10:00 in early February 1950, *Dangerous Assignment* instead took Dave Garroway's slot at 10:30 with Garroway pushed back to 11:30 while *Night Beat* claimed the 10:00 time. Sustained initially, in the spring of 1950 General Mills signed to take sponsorship of the show beginning May 10 as part of a large bundle sale with NBC.

In September 1950 it was announced in the trades that Donlevy had formed a production company – New Colony, Inc. – to bring *Dangerous Assignment* to television. He purchased the video rights from writer Bob Ryfe, who was also the package owner, and signed Ryf to script the visual version in addition to continuing his radio responsibilities. While Donlevy funded the start-up himself, he had an understanding with radio sponsor General Mills that the cereal manufacturer would take over production costs if the initial results were satisfactory.

When *Dangerous Assignment* was once again looking for a sponsor in 1951 NBC advertised to potential backers that it had a gross weekly cost of \$4,117, in comparison to \$1,823 for *Hollywood Love Story* and \$8,820 per half hour of Tallulah Bankhead's *The Big Show*.

*Dangerous Assignment* ran until July 1953 on radio and could be found in syndication on various television stations throughout the 1950s and even into the early 1960s. An Australian-based version was produced in 1954.

In addition to Donlevy as lead character Steve Mitchell, his boss The Commissioner was played by Herb Butterfield and the Commissioner's secretary, Ruth, was played by Betty Moran. Under the authority of a never-named federal spy agency, every week secret agent Steve Mitchell was off to an exotic locale to solve an international mystery. Interestingly, destinations in U.S.-allied countries were regularly identified, from Italy to France to Norway, while Communist-bloc nations were not, usually referred to as simply a Balkan or Eastern European country. Old-time radio author John Dunning found the episodes "predictable" but audiences found the series if not ground-breaking at least enjoyable enough to afford it more than three years on the airwaves.

The head writer was Bob Ryf with Adrian Gendot frequently attributed as co-writer. Bill Cairn directed and Robert Armbruster provided music for most of the run.