

# Stuntman, Eluding Guards, Walks a Tightrope Between Trade Center Towers

By GRACE LICHTENSTEIN

Combining the cunning of a second-story man with the nerve of an Evel Knievel, a French high-wire artist sneaked past guards at the World Trade Center, ran a cable between the tops of its twin towers and tightrope-walked across it yesterday morning.

Hundreds of spectators created a traffic jam shortly after 7:15 A.M. in the streets 1,350 feet below as they watched the black-clad figure outlined against the gray morning sky tiptoeing back and forth across the meticulously rigged 131-foot cable.

Finally, after perhaps 45 minutes of knee bends and other stunts, Philippe Petit, balancing pole in hand, turned himself over to waiting policemen.

"If I see three oranges, I have to juggle. And if I see two towers, I have to walk," the professional stuntman explained afterward in heavily accented English, punctuating his sentences with a Gallic "bon!"

Mr. Petit was arrested by policemen of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and booked for disorderly conduct and criminal trespass.

But his performing days in New York apparently are not over. Late yesterday afternoon, the slight, blond man, wearing black ballet shoes, was released from custody at the direction of Richard H. Kuh, the Manhattan District Attorney.

## Free Performance Due

Mr. Kuh, with the consultation of Parks Commissioner Edwin Weisl Jr., made a deal with Mr. Petit to drop the charges in exchange for a free aerial performance in a city park "for the children of the city." No date or place has been announced yet.

The day was an extraordinary climax to three months of scheming by Mr. Petit, a native of Nemours, France, who will be 25 years old next Tuesday, and three accomplices.

In talking with reporters, the tightrope walker repeatedly insisted that his feat was done not for money or publicity, but simply because the 110-story towers were there.

"When I see two towers, I just want to put my wire across, bon!" he said, adding that he had pulled off similar stunts between the towers of the Sydney Harbor Bridge in Australia in 1973 and the spires of Notre Dame in Paris in 1971.

However, two men who said they were friends of Mr. Petit's did make the rounds of news offices shortly after the event offering to sell exclusive photos taken from the tower roof.

## 200 Planning Trips

Mr. Petit, a street artist who lives off contributions from spectators at his frequent pantomimi and acrobatic acts, said he had made more than 200 trips to the Trade Center buildings over the last three months to plot the feat.

Three days ago, he and four others, masquerading as construction workers wearing hard hats, began taking their cable, rope, guy lines and other equipment to the uppermost floors of the still-unfinished North Tower.

According to one friend, they loaded their material unimpeded on a freight elevator, stored it just shy of the roof and moved unchallenged through the buildings. Two accomplices then stationed themselves on the roof of the South Tower.

Late Tuesday night, according to Mr. Petit, they set up shop on the north tower roof. With a five foot crossbow, they shot an arrow carrying a hemp cord across to the southtower. They passed heavier lines until they were able to lay a galvanized steel cable across the gap.

Once the main cable was



Philippe Petit walking across a cable between towers of World Trade Center. On leaving wire, he was arrested.



Mr. Petit was examined at hospital and later freed

strung, the men laid guy lines from the cable to the roof to minimize swaying. At one end the cable was wound around a steel stanchion on the roof. At the other, a winch was set up to regulate the tension.

Mr. Petit said he had hesitated about taking the initial steps because there was a stiff breeze. But as soon as he was on his way, he added, "I

couldn't help laughing—it was so beautiful."

Not long past dawn, Mr. Petit was ready to walk. And walk he did, to the amazement and cheers of office workers, construction men and police officers alike.

"After the first crossing I look at the people and that was fantastic," Mr. Petit said. "New York wake up and what

did they discover? There was a high walker on the twin towers. I was not scared because it was a precise thing. I was dying of happiness."

He was finally brought in by a policeman who shouted, "Get off there or I'll come out and we'll both go down."

As he was led away, street-level spectators booed the police while construction workers

tried to shake Mr. Petit's handcuffed hand. He was taken first to Beekman Downtown Hospital, where he was examined and given breakfast.

Later, he was booked at the Ericsson Place station house and kept in the Men's House of Detention for several hours before arraignment.

At a news conference in the Criminal Court Building, Mr.

Kuh announced the impending dismissal of charges and suggested that security by the Port Authority, which runs the World Trade Center, was not as "keen" as it should be.

Mr. Petit happily signed an autograph for a policeman, inscribing his name alongside a drawing of the two towers.

Mr. Petit insisted, "I have no ambitions." But, when asked

if he had any dreams, he undoubtedly thought about a French high-wire artist of the last century, Blondin, who had crossed from New York State to Canada in a most unorthodox way.

"I have a dream," Mr. Petit said. "Niagara Falls. I would like to cross the falls but, who knows? For that I need permission."

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