

James Stewart, 1908-1997: He Starred in Some of the Best-loved American Movies

The actor was also a war hero and writer of poetry. *Transcript of radio broadcast:*
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VOICE ONE:

I'm Shirley Griffith.

VOICE TWO:

And I'm Rich Kleinfeldt with the VOA Special English program, People in America. Today, we tell the story of actor James Stewart. His movies were loved by people around the world.

(MUSIC)

VOICE ONE:

James Maitland Stewart was born in the small eastern town of Indiana, Pennsylvania

in nineteen-oh-eight. His father had a hardware store that had been owned by the Stewart family since the eighteen fifties.

During high school, Jimmy played football, and acted in plays. He also learned to play the accordion. He took the accordion with him to college at Princeton University, where he joined a musical group called the Triangle Club. Through the club, he met students interested in performing.

Jimmy studied architecture at Princeton. He **Jimmy Stewart** graduated in nineteen thirty-two. Just before graduation, a friend asked him to join an acting group for the summer. Jimmy agreed because he thought it would be a good way to meet girls.

VOICE TWO:

Jimmy Stewart said later that if his friend had not asked him to join the summer theater group, he would never have been an actor. He would have returned home to help his father in the store. Instead, he met a number of good young



actors while performing that summer in Cape Cod, Massachusetts. One was Henry Fonda, who would be a friend throughout his life.

VOICE ONE:

Jimmy Stewart performed in Broadway plays in New York City until the Metro Goldwyn Mayer movie company gave him an acting job. He moved to California in nineteen thirty-five. He acted in more than twenty-four movies over the next six years. He appeared in all kinds of movies: funny ones, sad ones and musical ones. He even sang a song in the movie "Born to Dance. " It is called "Easy to Love":

(MUSIC)

VOICE TWO:

The movie that made Jimmy Stewart a real Hollywood star was "Mister Smith Goes to Washington. " It was released in nineteen thirty-nine.

JIMMY STEWART:

"It's a funny thing about men, you know. They all start life being boys. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if some of these Senators were boys once. And that's why it seemed like a pretty good idea to me to get boys out of crowded cities and stuffy basements for a couple of months out of the year and build their bodies and minds for a man-sized job, because those boys are gonna be behind these desks some of these days."



"Mister Smith Goes to Washington"

VOICE TWO:

The next year, he won an Academy Award for best actor in "The Philadelphia Story. "

The night he won the Academy Award, his father called him on the telephone from Pennsylvania. "I hear you won some kind of an award," Alex Stewart said. "You had better bring it back here and we'll put it in the window of the store. " Jimmy Stewart's Oscar statue stayed in the window of Stewart's hardware store in Indiana, Pennsylvania for twenty-five years.

VOICE ONE:

Jimmy Stewart was already an established and successful actor when World War Two started in Europe. Early in nineteen forty-one, he tried to join the Army. But he was rejected because he did not weigh enough. So he started eating high fat foods and tried again. This time, he was accepted for military service.

The Army put him in the Air Corps because he already knew how to pilot a plane. In nineteen forty-three, he went to Europe as commander of an Air Force bomber group. He flew more than twenty combat missions, leading as many as one thousand planes at a time over Germany. He returned to the United States in nineteen forty-five as a colonel.

VOICE TWO:

Jimmy Stewart won several military awards for excellent performance under very dangerous conditions. He remained in the Air Force Reserve after the war. In nineteen fifty-nine he was made a general. Each year, he took part in two weeks of active military duty. In nineteen sixty-six, he requested combat duty and took part in a bombing strike over Vietnam.

(MUSIC)

VOICE ONE:

After World War Two, Jimmy Stewart returned to Hollywood. He found that his new movies were not as popular as his earlier ones had been. One example was "It's a Wonderful Life." It was released in nineteen forty-six. The movie was not a success at first. But over time it has become one of the best loved American movies.

JIMMY STEWART:

"Can't you understand what's happening here? Don't you see what's happening? Potter isn't selling. Potter's buying! And why? Because we're panicky and he's not. That's why. He's pickin' up some bargain. Now, we can get through this thing all right. We've, we've got to stick together, though. We've got to have faith in each other."



"It's a Wonderful Life"

VOICE ONE:

Jimmy Stewart said in later years that "It's a Wonderful Life" was the movie he liked best. It tells the story of a small town man who feels the world would have been better if he had never lived. An angel comes to him and shows him that this is not true. The movie celebrated values like loyalty and love of family.

(MUSIC)

VOICE TWO:

Jimmy Stewart decided to play other kinds of parts after what seemed to be the failure of "It's a Wonderful Life. " He was a reporter in "Call Northside Seven Seven Seven" the next year. He was a suspicious head of a school in the murder

movie "Rope" in nineteen forty-eight. In the nineteen fifties, he appeared in many western movies such as "Winchester Seventy-Three" and "Broken Arrow. "

VOICE ONE:

Jimmy Stewart enjoyed his greatest popularity in the nineteen fifties. In nineteen fifty-nine, he won awards from the Venice Film Festival, the New York film critics and the Film Daily writers. The awards honored him for his performance in the movie "Anatomy of a Murder. " He was the defense attorney for an army officer accused of murder. He was nominated for an Academy Award for that movie. He was also nominated for an Academy Award for playing a man who has an imaginary rabbit friend, in the movie "Harvey. "

Jimmy Stewart is well known for his work with the famous director of mystery movies, Alfred Hitchcock. These movies included "The Man Who Knew Too Much," "Rear Window" and "Vertigo. " Mister Stewart also played real heroes in several movies. He was band leader Glenn Miller in "The Glenn Miller Story. " And he was pilot Charles Lindbergh in "The Spirit of Saint Louis. "

VOICE TWO:

Jimmy Stewart appeared in fewer films in the nineteen sixties. He was a senator in the Old West in "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance." In "The Shootist" he was a doctor in a small town. He also appeared on television. But his two television shows were not successful.

Mister Stewart began experiencing health problems as he aged. He had heart disease, skin cancer and hearing loss. But he found time to travel. And he published a book of poetry in nineteen eighty-nine. It sold more than three hundred thousand copies.

VOICE ONE:

In nineteen eighty, Jimmy Stewart was honored by the American Film Institute with an award for his lifetime work. Three years later, he received a Kennedy Center Honor for his work. And in nineteen eighty-five, President Ronald Reagan gave him the nation's highest civilian award, the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

People who knew Jimmy Stewart did not praise him just because he was a good actor and a war hero. They said Jimmy Stewart was one of the nicest people they had ever met. He was a man who lived by the values he was taught as a child in that small town in Pennsylvania.

He went back to Indiana, Pennsylvania, in nineteen eighty-three, for his seventieth birthday. The town held a huge celebration in his honor. President Reagan sent planes to fly over the court house. Parades were held. And a statue of him was placed in the town center.

VOICE TWO:

Jimmy Stewart married Gloria Hatrick McLean in nineteen forty-nine. She had two sons from an earlier marriage. Jimmy raised them as his own. One of the boys was killed during the Vietnam War while serving in the Marine Corps. Jimmy and Gloria also had twin daughters.

Gloria Stewart died in nineteen ninety-four. Friends said Jimmy Stewart was never the same after that. They said he withdrew into his house because he did not know what to do without her. His health got worse. He died on July the second, nineteen ninety-seven.

VOICE ONE:

Jimmy Stewart's daughter Kelly Harcourt spoke at his funeral in Beverly Hills. She reminded mourners of the message of her father's favorite movie, "It's a Wonderful Life:" No man is poor who has friends.

"Here's to our father," she said, "the richest man in town."

(MUSIC)

VOICE TWO:

This Special English program was written by Nancy Steinbach and produced by Lawan Davis. I'm Rich Kleinfeldt.

VOICE ONE:

And I'm Shirley Griffith. Join us again next week at this time for another People in America program on VOA.