

Biography for Wayne Morris

Biography for Wayne Morris (I) Birth name Bert DeWayne Morris Minibiography American actor who had early success as a sunny juvenile, but whose career declined following World War II, in which he was a highly-decorated hero. A native of Los Angeles, Morris played football at Los Angeles City College, then worked as a forest ranger. Returning to school, he studied acting at Los Angeles Junior College and at the acclaimed Pasadena Playhouse. A Warner Bros. talent scout spotted him at the Playhouse and he signed with the studio in 1936. Blond and open-faced, he was a perfect type for boy-next-door parts and within a year had made a success in the title role of *Kid Galahad* (1937). While filming *Flight Angels* (1940), Morris became interested in flying and became a pilot. With war in the wind, he joined the Naval Reserve and became a Navy flier in 1942, leaving his film career behind for the duration of the war. Assigned to the carrier *Essex* in the Pacific, Morris shot down seven Japanese planes and contributed to the sinking of five ships. He was awarded four Distinguished Flying Crosses and two Air Medals. Following the war, Morris returned to films, but his nearly four-year absence had cost him his burgeoning stardom. He continued to top line movies, but the pictures, for the most part, sank in quality. Losing his boyish looks but not demeanor, Morris spent most of the Fifties in low-budget Westerns. A wonderful performance as a weakling in Stanley Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* (1957) might have given impetus to a new career as a character actor, had Morris lived. However, he suffered a massive heart attack while visiting aboard the aircraft carrier *Bon Homme Richard* in San Francisco Bay and was pronounced dead after being transported to Oakland Naval Hospital in Oakland, California. He was 45. His last film was not released until two years after his death. IMDb mini-biography by Jim Beaver <jumblejim@prodigy.net> Mini biography Wayne Morris, the last of the B-Western stars, was born Bert DeWayne Morris, Jr. on February 17, 1914 in Los Angeles, Calif. His 1953-54 movie series that began with "Star of Texas" (1953) and ended with "Two Guns and a Badge" (1954) was the last of the low-budget westerns that had been a staple of the film industry for half-a-century. After graduating from Los Angeles High School, where he distinguished himself as a cheerleader, he matriculated in acting at Los Angeles City College before receiving a scholarship to attend the Pasadena Playhouse. After a screen-test, Morris won a Warner Bros.' contract and debuted in "China Clipper" (1936) in a bit part. He was not in bit parts for long, as the studio cast him in the title role in the Bette Davis picture "Kid Galahad" (1937), an A-list boxing movie that co-starred Humphrey Bogart. Also that year, Morris was cast in his first Western, "Beyond the Law," as the second lead. The year 1939 would be a crucial one for Morris, as Warners did not pick up his contract. He had initially appeared in support of his "Kid Galahad" co-star Humphrey Bogart in the infamous stinker "The Return of Doctor X" (1939), with Bogart in the title role, which the soon-to-be great star Bogie categorized as the worst role he ever played. Morris' future at Warners seemed dim. Republic Studios, created from the merger of the major minor Monogram Studios and other smaller independents, was searching for a replacement for John Wayne in its "Three Mesquiteers" series. Morris campaigned for the role, but Warners offered him another contract, which he accepted. He rapidly made seven pictures in a row, including "Flight Angels" with Ronald Reagan's wife, Jane Wyman, and second-tier star Dennis Morgan. For his role, Morris learned how to fly. With the clouds of war darkening over European skies, becoming a pilot proved to be a momentous development in Morris' life. In 1941, Warners cast Morris in his second Western, playing Cole Younger's younger brother Bob in "Bad Men of Missouri." Although Westerns would prove to be the genre that made his career, the movies would have to wait. Morris had been commissioned a reserve officer in the U.S. Navy. Morris was trained as a military pilot, and after a year as a flight instructor, he eventually went into combat in the Pacific theater as a F6F Hellcat pilot stationed on the carrier *Essex*. Morris' combat record included 57 missions and seven kills, qualifying him as an ace. Three of his planes were so badly damaged by enemy fire during his combat duty that they were dumped into the seas as "unfit for duty." Morris returned to Warners after the cessation of hostilities, but the studio did not use him for a year. When it did, it was on a loan-out to 20th Century-Fox for "The Deep Valley" (1947). Also that year, he appeared as the second lead, in support of future president Ronald Reagan, in Warners' "The Voice of the Turtle." Eventually, Warners began utilizing Morris as a supporting player in action pictures. He was promoted to Cole Younger in the 1949 Western "The Younger Brothers,"

but he did not return to the genre until 1951, when he was loaned out to Columbia for "Stage to Tucson." That same year, he made "Sierra Passage" and "Yellowfin" for Monogram Pictures. The association proved fruitful as in 1952, as the Republic Pictures subsidiary cast Morris in the Western camel-opera "Desert Pursuit," in which a purloined heroine was vamoosed by the baddies on the back of a camel. In December 1952, Morris was cast by Republic's Allied Artists subsidiary in his first, and ironically, his last B-Western series, starting with "Star of Texas" (1953). Five more pictures followed the initial film: "The Marksman" (1953), "The Fighting Lawman" (1953), "Texas Badman" (1953), "The Desperado" (1954), and "Two Guns and a Badge" (1954). "The Desperado" (1954), which clocked in at an unusually long 82 minutes for a B-picture-series entry, arguably is the best of the lot. The other movies typically ran between an hour and the standard 68 to 69 minutes of the average programmer. "Two Guns and a Badge," which had a September 12, 1954 release date, generally is considered the last B-Western that Hollywood produced. Morris returned to his old studio Warners to play second fiddle to Randolph Scott in "Riding Shotgun" (1954), then returned to Gower Gulch to appear in Republic-Monogram-Allied Artists owner William Broidy's "Port of Hell" (1954) in support of Dane Clark. For Broidy's Allied Artists subsidiary, he appeared in the last of the Bomba the Jungle Boy Series, "Lord of the Jungle" (1955), and made "Cross Channel" (1955) and "The Green Buddha" (1955) for his more prestigious Republic Pictures. Meanwhile, Morris found time to make an independent cheapie in which his cowboy used a bow and arrow rather than a six-shooter, "The Lonesome Trail" (1955), which was released on a state's rights basis. He then expatriated himself to England for two films: Cy Enfield's "The Master Plan" (1955), and the pre-Hammer Films horror-meister Terence Fisher's "The Galignite Gang." (1956). His most prestigious role of the latter part of his career occurred in this period. He was cast as the cowardly Lieutenant Roget in Stanley Kubrick's first masterpiece, "Paths of Glory" (1957), in support of Kirk Douglas. It was his last great film, and almost his penultimate picture, as he also made Hubert Confield's "Plunder Road" (1957) in this period, an action picture which was distributed by 20th Century-Fox. He would make only one more film in his career. Morris began steady work in TV Westerns and shot a pilot for a proposed Western TV series, "They Went Thataway." His new TV career was cut short when he died unexpectedly of a heart attack at the age of 45 on September 14, 1959. Morris had been a guest of his World War II commander and was watching aerial maneuvers on an aircraft carrier when he died. An undistinguished low-budget Western, "Buffalo Gun," which he had made for the obscure Globe in 1958 and was released in 1961, was his last picture. It was not a fitting epitaph for the actor and war hero. It is better to look to his entombment in Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors for a measure of the man's full worth.