



By BOB KOLOSOSKI

The summer of '62 was hot and the "dog days" started early in July. I was trying to enjoy my summer vacation from high school, but the heat was melting my enthusiasm. I had tried to persuade some of my friends that an afternoon at the local air conditioned movie palace was the perfect way to beat the summertime blues. However, my buddies felt that the Humbolt Park pool was the solution to the torrid-zone weather we were experiencing. I'm no Johnny Weissmuller, in fact I can't swim a stroke, so the thought of death by drowning that afternoon prompted me to bid farewell to the gang and head for home.

I located the *Daily News* and quickly opened it to the movie listings. My keen eye spotted John Wayne in "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance" at the Congress Theatre on Milwaukee Avenue. John Ford was the director and the Duke was the star so I felt that I was in store for a great western. I knew that I could make it to the Congress in about twenty minutes on my trusty Schwinn and save twenty five cents bus fare. My ride up California to Milwaukee was speedy and uneventful. I parked my bike, paid the fifty cent admission fee, entered the theatre and headed for the center of the main floor. Soon the lights went dim and the curtain began to rise. The projector shot its concentrated beam of light to the screen beginning the first of two cartoons and a trailer previewing coming attractions and finally the Paramount mountain and the

feature film.

I paid to see John Wayne, but co-star Jimmy Stewart held my attention for the entire film. I remember how bewildered I was watching him as if for the very first time. I knew that I had seen some of his films before, but I had no idea that he was a major star. Even the light haired wig he wore to make him look younger didn't diminish the intensity of his performance. I was impressed. I left the theatre curious about Mr. Stewart and decided to stop at the local library branch to see if I could find any books on him. Well, in 1962, there wasn't much of a movie section in any library and I struck out that day. However, since that hot summer day, I have read a lot about Jimmy Stewart and have seen most of his seventy-seven movies.

I discovered that I like James Stewart as an actor and as a fellow human being.

One of the first things I learned about Stewart was the fact that he studied architecture at Princeton University. Since I had aspirations to become an architect, it thrilled me to think that James Stewart almost became a great American architect. *American* is the key word because, above all, Jimmy Stewart is a great American. He grew up in the small town of Indiana, Pennsylvania where his father owned the local hardware store. When Jimmy was nine years old his father joined the army to fight in the First World War. His mother played the organ at the church the Stewart family attended every Sunday. He attended

Mercersburg academy in preparation for Princeton and, by his own account, had a very normal and happy childhood.

Shortly after WWI, a barn-storming pilot stopped near Indiana and charged \$15 for a fifteen minute ride in the clouds. The young Stewart couldn't resist and with his father's permission he spent his modest savings to experience a quarter hour of flight.

Twenty years later Captain James Stewart would be leading his bomber group over the skies of Europe during World War II. He was an established movie star in 1941 but was determined to join the army because he was certain that America was going to enter the war raging in Europe.

He had purchased a Stinson 105 airplane and logged more than 400 hours of flying time to prepare for his entry into the army air corps. He was rejected on his first try because he was ten pounds shy of the 140 pound minimum requirement. Stewart went to a weight expert and was able to gain the weight necessary to be accepted on March 22, 1941.

By the end of the year he had earned the rank of lieutenant and when he arrived in Europe in 1943, he was the Captain of his own Flying Fortress. He flew in over thirty bombing missions and at the war's end he was a full colonel. After the war he stayed in the Air Force Reserve and in 1957 was promoted to the rank of brigadier general. He retired from the reserve in 1968, but continued to tour bases and give talks to the men on duty.

The more I read about Jimmy Stewart, the more I liked him. He was a combat veteran who refused to use his war record to advance his career. He was a soft-spoken man whose word was "as good as gold." He was a hard-working man who put in a good day's work and he was well-respected by his fellow actors. He was a shrewd businessman. In 1950, he signed a contract with Universal to star in two films and be paid a percentage of the profits rather than a straight salary. It was



a great deal for Stewart because both films, "Winchester '73" and "Harvey," were financial successes. He continued with this type of arrangement with other studios and eventually other actors followed in his footsteps. His movie career has had some ups and downs, but Stewart has consistently turned in a good performance.

In marriage too, he has been successful. He married Gloria Hatrick McLean in 1949, and this year they celebrated their forty-first year of marriage. The one tragic note to Jimmy's personal life was the death of his adopted son Ronald, who was killed in action in Vietnam in 1971.

Since I first saw "Liberty Valance," I've made it a point to see every Jimmy Stewart movie at the theatre or on TV.

The first time I saw "It's a Wonderful Life" was about twelve years ago around Christmas. I was unhappy with my job and not in a very good Christmas mood. This may sound hoaky but the movie, and Stewart's performance in particular, gave me a renewed spirit of hope for the future.

FILM CLIPS

It was a wonderful experience for me and one I often reflect on if things start to get me down; there's a little George Bailey in all of us.

The westerns he made with Anthony Mann in the 1950's still hold up today as solid entertainment. He made four films with Alfred Hitchcock in the director's chair and two of them — "Rear Window" and "Vertigo" — are considered classics. Both of these films were made in the mid-1950's when Stewart's popularity was at its peak. In fact, in 1955 he was the number one male star in the country — a remarkable feat considering that directly after WWII his career took a nose-dive.

The first movie he made upon his return to civilian life was "It's a Wonderful Life" — a great film but a box office loser. Next came "Magic Town" — poison at the box office. "On Our Merry Way" failed to sell tickets and Hitchcock's "Rope" was only a mild success. "You Gotta Stay Happy" didn't make the producers happy and "Malaya" came and went without much fanfare. Then, in 1950, Stewart made "Broken Arrow" and "Winchester '73" and his career began to take off. He was nominated for an Oscar for his role in "Harvey."

His portrayals of tough western anti-heroes in his six Anthony Mann westerns gave new life to his career and dismissed his image as a light comic actor and all around nice guy. He took chances with his career and it paid off.

The last good movie Stewart was in was "The Shootist" in which John Wayne was the star — it was also Wayne's last movie. Wayne played an ailing gunman and Stewart the doctor who informs the killer that he is losing his fight with cancer. The scenes with the two old pros are poignant and played with sincerity.

Stewart has done a few things since then, but nothing earth-shattering. His movie career has virtually ended, but he continues to receive honors and last year I had a



chance to meet him in person. He was in town to sign copies of his little book of poetry. I went to Marshall Field's at noon — Jimmy was to start at one-o'clock — and was pleasantly surprised to find hundreds of people already in line. This was a crowd of people from every age group and nationality. It looked like a United Nations assembly.

When James Stewart finally came in, jaws dropped and the crowd moved forward to see him better. Cameras clicked everywhere and it took the attendants a few minutes to organize the line up to Mr. Stewart. There was excitement in the air.

He was tall and thin and looked just like Jimmy Stewart.

The line wound around the entire lower level and I knew it would take quite a while to get up to him, but there was no turning back. As I edged up closer, I began to formulate what I was going to say to him. The words swirled in my head and I began to develop a slight case of nerves. When I finally stepped up in front of him, all I could get out was "I love your movies." He looked at me and replied, "Well, thank you." It was a great day for me. I had met a movie star, a war hero, and a great American . . . all rolled up in one: James Stewart.