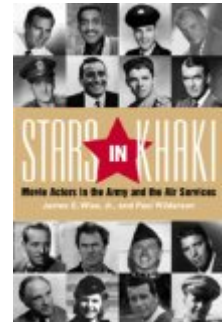


James E. Wise, Paul W. Wilderson. *Stars in Khaki: Movie Actors in the Army and Air Services*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2000. xi + 244 pp. \$24.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-55750-958-1.



Reviewed by Charles C. Kolb

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Hollywood Stars and their Army Service from the Spanish American War to Vietnam

This splendid book is the third and final volume in historian-biographer Wise's trilogy and it makes a fitting companion to its two illustrious predecessors. In 1997 Wise and his co-author Ann Rehill wrote *Stars in Blue: Movie Actors in America's Sea Services* in which film actors who served in the U.S. Navy, Naval Reserve, Coast Guard, or Coast Guard Reserve from 1920 through the Korean War are profiled. Wise and Rehill also authored *Stars in the Corps: Movie Actors in the United States Marines* (1999) which covers the same period but emphasizes Marines in the Pacific Theater of Operations during World War II. Your reviewer had the privilege of reviewing these two prior volumes [1], and is pleased to report that this third volume joins its antecedents by providing the reader with clear, concise, and informative profiles of celebrities who, in this volume, served in the U.S. Army and air services from as early as the Spanish-American War into the Vietnam era.

In *Stars in Blue* we learned about Wayne Morris, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., Henry Fonda, Humphrey Bogart, Paul Newman, Aldo Ray, Ernest Borgnine, Robert Montgomery, Cesar Romero, and dozens of other film stars. With the sequel, *Stars in the Corps*, we discovered the contributions made by more than 30 motion picture stars including Sterling Hayden, Tyrone Power, Steve McQueen, Lee Marvin, Gene Hackman, George C. Scott, Harvey Keitel, Brian Dennehy, Hugh O'Brien, Ed McMahon, and Dale Dye. As in these two volumes, the emphasis in *Stars in Khaki* is on World War II. Many of the men who served in the U.S. Army and air services were already motion picture celebrities -- Jimmy Stewart, Clark Gable, Ronald Reagan, and Elvis Presley -- or were just beginning their careers -- Charlton Heston and Bert Parks -- or, as a result of their military service, would aspire to the acting profession and become stars in their own right -- Audie Murphy, Charles Durning, Jack Warden, and Clint Eastwood.

The senior author, James Wise, is a retired U.S. Navy captain who was a naval aviator and in-

telligence office, and is the author of three other naval books in addition to the trilogy. His co-author, Paul Wilderson is executive editor of Naval Institute Press and holds a doctorate in American history from the University of New Hampshire. Their book contains a preface, acknowledgments, three parts comprising 25 biographies and 100 brief biographies, three appendices, and 78 black-and-white images. The Bibliography lists 99 books and periodicals, nine official records or archives, and nine other sources. A seven-page double column index includes almost exclusively proper nouns.

In "Part 1: Soldiers and Airmen in Combat," 14 stars are documented, 13 are from World War II, while director William "Wild Bill" Wellman served in the Great War. Notable among the men profiled in this section are Charles Durning, Clark Gable, Audie Murphy, Sabu, and Jack Warden. With "Part 2: Staff Personnel, Instructors, and Entertainers," the authors focus on 11 men, profiling stars that include Gene Autry, Clint Eastwood, Glenn Miller, Elvis Presley, and Ronald Reagan. The third section is an alphabetical tabulation of mini-biographies of 100 other film and television stars, beginning with Art Abbot and ending with Efrem Zimbalist, Jr. An appendix is devoted to the actress and comedienne, Martha Raye (1916-1994) a member of the Bob Hope troupe who for more than 30 years entertained GIs in North Africa, Europe, Korea, and Vietnam. Another appendix contains two dozen captioned images of actors and actresses "boosting GI morale." A final appendix tabulates 38 prominent stars who were unable to qualify for military service during World War II (among them were Fred Astaire, Marlon Brando, Gary Cooper, Errol Flynn, Cary Grant, Bob Hope, Peter Lawford, Gregory Peck, George Raft, John Wayne, and Richard Widmark -- most of whom starred in films with military themes).

Among the stars who are documented were a number who became officers: General Jimmy Stewart; Majors Clark Gable, Glenn Miller and

Lewis Stone; Lt. Colonel Tim McCoy; Captains Alan Alda, Bert Parks, Ronald Reagan, and Eli Wallach; First Lieutenants Audie Murphy and Gene Raymond; and Second Lieutenant Van Heflin. Some film stars were intelligence officers (Bruce Cabot and Robert Preston), and there were a number of drafted and enlisted men and NCOs, such as Sergeants Dan Blocker (a Korean War veteran), Neville Brand, Broderick Crawford, Melvin Douglas, Steve Forrest, Charlton Heston, and Joe Yule, Jr. (Mickey Rooney's true name), as well as drill instructors (Robert Mitchum and Gordon Scott). In the Army Air Force (AAF) there were instructor pilots (Robert Cummings, George Gobel, and a civilian, Welshman Ray Milland); and pilots Gene Autry (C-47s), Jackie Coogan (gliders), Tim Holt (B-29s), Dan Rowan (P-40s), Jimmy Stewart (B-17s and B-24s, and later B-47s and B-52s), Jack Palance, and Jack Webb. Kris Kristofferson was a helicopter pilot in the Vietnam era. AAF personnel also included bombardiers (such as Cameron Mitchell), navigators (Arthur Franz and Gordon MacRae), and aircrew (Peter Graves and Sabu).

Other motion picture stars included paratroopers (John Derek and Kris Kristofferson), military policemen (Chuck Norris and Rip Torn), radio operators (James Coburn, Steve Forrest, and Walter Matthau), medical corps personnel (Ossie Davis, Gene Wilder, and Eli Wallach), and a combat photographer named Van Heflin. The wounded included: James Arness, Pat Brady, Charles Durning, James Garner, Audie Murphy, and Jack Palance. World War I veterans who were also film stars included Walter Brennan, Robert Burton, Melvin Douglas, and director William Wellman who was in the Lafayette Flying Corps and was credited with three kills. Cowboy star Tim McCoy served in both World War I and II while Gene Raymond was in both World War II and Vietnam. Lewis Stone has the distinction of serving as an Army officer in the Spanish-American War and World Wars I and II. Two men served in both the U.S. Navy and Army during World War II --James Daly and Jack Warden; while George Kennedy

was in the army for 16 years before becoming a film star.

Several stories deserve mention. In 1942, seven months after losing his wife, Carole Lombard, in an tragic TWA DC-3 domestic airplane crash near Las Vegas, the film celebrity Clark Gable at the age of 41 (well past draft age) enlisted in the Army Air Corps. He attended Officers' Candidate School, and was assigned to the 351st Bomb Group in England to make films about aerial gunnery. However, Gable volunteered for combat duty and made five B-17 bombing missions over Germany earning the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal, as well as the notable honor of having the Nazi Air Minister, Hermann Goering, offer a reward for Gable's capture. Attaining the rank of major, Gable was discharged in June 1944. What caused Gable to enlist – grief, a suicidal death wish, patriotism, or a combination of these? This remains a mystery.

The distinguished theater, film, and television actor Charles Durning participated in the D-Day invasion at Normandy, was wounded three times during the European campaign, and barely missed becoming a casualty at the infamous Malmedy Massacre. Audie Murphy (1924-1971), America's most decorated soldier with more than two dozen U.S. medals and honors, was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. He served in six major campaigns: Sicily, Naples, Anzio-Rome, Rhone Valley, Rhineland, and Central Europe. Murphy's well-known story is profiled in the book and film *To Hell and Back* (in which he played himself), and he received a battlefield commission in addition to many foreign military honors from the Allies. Indian born Sabu Dastagir (1924-1963) – know professionally by his first name – was already an established American film star by the late 1930s, became a United States citizen, enlisted in the Army Air Force, and served 40 missions as a ball turret gunner in B-24 Liberators in the Pacific Theater of Operations. He starred in *Elephant Boy* (1937), *Drums* (1938), and *The Thief*

of Baghdad (1940) but his career flagged in the postwar era and beset by personal problem died at the age of 39 of a heart attack. Jack Warden had served in the U.S. Navy from 1938-1941 then joined the Merchant Marine as water tender in the engine room but disliked convoy duty because of Axis aircraft attacks and his location 30 decks below the main deck – this, as he says, ended his "romance with the life of a sailor." He left the Merchant Marine in 1942, joined the army and became a platoon sergeant and parachute jumpmaster in the 101st Airborne. While hospitalized with a leg injury sustained in a jump, Warden read a play written by Clifford Odets and decided to become an actor.

We also learn about the "Culver City Commandos" who made or starred in training films for the Army Air Force Special Services in California. Among these commandos were DeForest Kelley from "Star Trek," Arthur Kennedy, Clayton Moore (the "Lone Ranger"), Craig Stevens ("Peter Gunn"), and a fellow named Ronald Reagan – a Reserve Army Officer 1937-1941, called to duty, who would later serve as president of the Screen Actors Guild (1947-1952 and 1959), Governor of California (1966-1974), and President of the United States (1981-1989).

In Part 2 the exploits of pilot Orvon Gene Autry (1907-1998) are recalled, including once flying the "Hump" in Burma. Gene Autry is the only person to be honored with five stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame – one each for radio (his career began in 1928), recording (100 million records), film (dozens of motion pictures commencing in 1934), television (star of his own TV series and the producer of five others), and live performance (rodeo and theater). An astute businessman and legendary figure in American popular culture, Autry also held an interest in the California Angels baseball team. Compelling stories are told about Sammy Davis, Jr. and his determined efforts against racial discrimination and bigotry during his 1942-1945 service in Wyoming.

In the Korean War era Army PFC Clinton Eastwood's swimming enabled him to survive the crash of a Navy AD3E Skyraider crash off the California coast, and we learn why an Army man was aboard a naval aircraft. As the star of a television series (*Rawhide*) and film actor beginning with "spaghetti Westerns" and award-winning performances with now over 50 films to his credit, Eastwood also served as mayor of Carmel, California. During World War II Sergeant Charlton Heston served in the Aleutians in the Army Air Force as a radio operator and gunner in a B-25. Known for his roles in epics such as *The Ten Commandments* (1956), *Ben Hur* (1960), and *Khartoum* (1966), Heston began his career on the stage and in television, and would become president of the Screen Actors Guild (1963-1975), a member of the National Council on the Arts (1966-1972), and president of the National Rifle Association (1998-date).

Originally William Beedle, Jr., Lieutenant William Holden (1918-1981), perhaps best known for his action roles in *Stalag 17* (1953), *The Bridges at Toko-Ri* (1954), *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), and *The Wild Bunch* (1969), was in the Army Air Force making training films from 1942-1945. The adjutant of his unit was Captain Ronald Reagan and a roommate was baseball great Hank Greenberg. Holden's brother Bob, a naval aviator, was killed in the Pacific on 1 January 1944. New Yorker Bert Lancaster (1913-1994), an acrobat and actor recognized for his stellar film roles in *Run Silent, Run Deep* (1958), *From Here to Eternity* (1953), *Elmer Gantry* (1960), *Birdman of Alcatraz* (1962), and *Seven Days in May* (1964), as well as number of swashbucklers, was an Army athletics instructor stateside but he was also in a theater unit that entertained troops in Tunisia and Italy during World War II. The triumphs and tragedies of gifted musicians Major Glenn Miller (1904-1944) and Elvis Presley (1935-1977) are also recounted along with their military service.

This final volume of the trilogy is a fascinating and valuable collection of profiles of motion picture stars and directors who served in the United States Army or associated air services. The stories are compelling and hold the reader's interest, often providing little-known facts and are accompanied by many images never before published. Observant readers may also note that the books' dust jackets and cloth bindings correlate with the service whose motion picture stars are being profiled: Navy blue, Marine Corps green, and Army khaki.

Notes

[1]. Charles C. Kolb, "Review of James E. Wise, Jr. and Anne Collier Rehill, *Stars in the Blue: Movie Actors in America's Sea Services*," H-PCAA-CA, H-Net Reviews, December 1997. URL: <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrevv.cgi?path=12705884375164>.

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