

Jeffrey Hunter, Film Actor, Is Dead

HOLLYWOOD, May 27 (AP)—Jeffrey Hunter, best known for his role of Jesus in the 1961 motion picture "King of Kings," died today after brain surgery. He was 43 years old.

Mr. Hunter had been active in recent years in roles on television and in movies made in Europe. The police said he was found unconscious yesterday at his home, with a swollen right eye. He underwent the surgery at Valley Hospital last night.

Began Career in 1951

Although there was some variety in the roles Jeffrey Hunter portrayed, he usually left the impression of the serious, tall, dark-haired, clean-cut American youth he played in a brief romantic interlude with Debra Paget in "Fourteen Hours," in which he made his debut in 1951.

The more than 30 feature films he made since then included roles as Western heroes, junior executives, soldiers, sailors, a newspaperman, and Jesus.

"King of Kings," produced by Samuel Bronston, was more a pageant than an attempt at

biography. Mr. Hunter's simple enactment was dignified and was treated respectfully by the critics.

In essaying that role, an assignment avoided by most actors because of religious scruples or barriers, he was personifying a drive toward acting that dated back to childhood. Mr. Hunter, whose real name was Henry H. McKinnies, Jr., was born in New Orleans on Nov. 25, 1925, the only child of a sales engineer. The family moved to Milwaukee when the boy was 4.

He began serious acting stints on radio while he was a student at Whitefish Bay High School outside Milwaukee. He performed on radio there in his senior year. He subsequently appeared in summer stock and radio in Chicago. After a stint in the Navy in 1945-46, he entered Northwestern University, graduating in 1949. A scholarship took him to U.C.L.A. Later a talent scout signed him after seeing him in Arthur Miller's "All My Sons."

Not until 1956, when he was featured as a tough cowboy, in John Ford's "The Searchers,"

did the aspiring actor feel he had made the grade.

"I was told I had really arrived," he once quipped, "because they gave me almost as much ammunition as they gave John Wayne."

A dedicated performer who

carefully studied his roles, Mr. Hunter was perhaps best known for his portrayals of Frank James in the 1957 "The True Story of Jesse James;" as an American raised by Japanese Nisei in the 1960 war drama, "Hell to Eternity;" as the newspaper reporter nephew of Spencer Tracy in the 1957 "The Last Hurrah," and as a son of John Brown in the 1955 "Seven Angry Men."



Natalie Wood, John Wayne and Jeffrey Hunter were the stars of John Ford's 1956 western *The Searchers*.



Included in the all-star cast of *King of Kings* (1961) were Jeffrey Hunter as Jesus and Siobhan McKenna as Mary.