

From Harry Brand
Director of Publicity
20th Century-Fox Studio
Beverly Hills

B I O G R A P H Y

Of

JEFFREY HUNTER

Six-foot-one Jeffrey Hunter was peacefully pursuing his Master's degree at the University of California by day and rehearsing the key role of "Chris" in the college production at night, when things began to happen.

The play opened on May 7, 1950, and among the people who rushed backstage to see him were two talent scouts — one from Paramount and Miss Malvina Fox of 20th Century-Fox. From then on events moved so swiftly that the handsome 180-pounder never had time to finish the last 15 minutes of his graduate work. Darryl F. Zanuck signed him to a long term 20th Century-Fox contract and he was planed to New York to start his first film romantic lead opposite Debra Paget in "Fourteen Hours."

But it happened deviously. The Paramount scout got to him first, and Jeff went to that studio first to read next day. The following day, Paramount put him under option.

A week later they tested him, and were so pleased they had a long-term contract all ready for the head man to sign as soon as the executive returned to Hollywood. A studio upheaval nixed that, and Zanuck, who heard of Jeff's fine test, signed him without benefit of another and promptly changed his name from Henry H. McKinnies, Jr. to Jeffrey Hunter on June 1st, 1950.

Jeff's apparently overnight career mirrors what the handsome, blue-eyed, dark-haired actor considers the best maxim he's ever heard: "Luck is when preparedness meets opportunity." Preparedness in his chosen profession is what he's had plenty of in the way of experience in high school, college and summer stock plays and in radio.

Born in New Orleans, Louisiana on a November 25th, Jeff hails from a non-theatrical family with the single exception of a distant relative named Eric Walencott Barnes, who, minus his last name, was voted the Broadway actor of the year somewhere in the thirties. Jeff's parents, Henry H. McKinnies, a sales engineer, and his mother, Edith Lois Burgess McKinnies, moved with their only child to Milwaukee, before Jeff was four years old. The McKinnies family are remote descendants of Zachary Taylor, the twelfth president of the United States.

Jeff's parents always encouraged his interests. He graduated from Milwaukee's Richards Street Grade School and Whitefish Bay High school, where, even though football was the big thing in his life, he first became interested in the Children's Theatre, where he made his bow playing a 60-year old man in "Goldilocks and the Three Bears."

Sports had been his main passion since, at the age of 11, he won the state-wide contest held by the Milwaukee Journal for passing, dropping, kicking, punting and place kicking in the juvenile football division. In high school, he became co-captain of the First Suburban Championship Football team. His spoils and theatrical interests never weakened his scholastic pursuits, either. Jeff won the alternating scholarship for his sophomore year at high school, was president of the sophomore class and, as a senior in high school, became president of the student body, and won the radio course scholarship for his freshman year at Northwestern University of Evanston, Illinois.

His first Children's Theatre role was followed by another as the villain in a play called "Emile and the Detectives." Concurrently, he had an opportunity to play bits in a fairy tale show narrated by Ann Ross of Station WTMS-FM. At about the same time, during his high school days, he auditioned for the Children's Theatre of the Air, sponsored by the Wauwatosa School Board, and won some roles on that series.

In the summer of 1942, a company of New York summer stock actors who called themselves the Northport Players came to Milwaukee, and for three consecutive summers Jeff played bellboys, sailors, musicians and other bit roles including the son in "Damask Cheek" with them. His first taste of the professional atmosphere was exciting enough for Jeff to set his sights on a theatrical career, although he thought radio work was his metier.

Jeff made his professional debut with pay (\$12.50 per show) during his senior year at high school, on a program called "Those Who Serve", in which he invariably portrayed G.I.'s.

After his high school graduation in 1945 Jeff went into the U.S. Navy. After completion of a naval radar course at the Radio Technical School, Jeff was assigned to Communications Division, Headquarters of the Ninth Naval District, Great Lakes, Illinois, where he received his discharge in May of 1946.

He entered Northwestern University in the fall of '46, majored in speech and radio and minored in psychology and English. He appeared in two NWU stage productions — one was Ruth Gordon's "Years Ago", in which he played "Captain Absolute". He spent the summer vacation of 1947 with the NWU Theatre summer stock company at Eagles Mere, Pa., where he appeared as a young husband in "Too Many Husbands", in the title role of "The Late George Apley", as a real estate broker in "Payment Deferred", as "Gratiano" in "The Merchant of Venice", and as an old man in "Fata Morgana."

Mainly, however, he concentrated on radio work during his college years with the NWU Radio Workshop and Radio Guild, working summers with the NBC Radio Institute in Chicago. He graduated from NWU on August 26, 1949, and was so determined to prepare himself further for a radio career that he came out to the University of California at Los Angeles to get his Master's degree in radio.

At the same time he appeared in such U.C.L.A. productions as "Gloomy Sunday", in which he played a convict; and Arthur Miller's "All My Sons", in which his performance as "Chris" won him a 20th Century-Fox contract the morning after he finished his final performance.

Jeff's appearance in "All My Sons" led to something more important even than his Zanuck contract, for the day he made his Paramount test — in a scene from the same play — he met beautiful brown-eyed Barbara Rush, then a Paramount newcomer, on the test stage. They dated quietly throughout Jeff's appearances in "Fourteen Hours" and "Call Me Mister", became engaged while he was playing the Campus Casanova in "Take Care Of My Little Girl". When Jeff was set to go on location to Norfolk, Virginia and the Virgin Islands for his fourth film, "The Frogmen", and Barbara was already on location at Sedona, Arizona with her own fourth film, "Devil's Canyon", they decided, via long distance telephone, on an elopement. They were married at St. Christopher's Church, Boulder City, Nevada on Friday night, December first, 1950, and spent a two-day honeymoon at Las Vegas, before both returned to their respective film locations.

Jeff's ambitions are to be a credit to his profession and to get that Master's degree as soon as he can get time off from his film chores to write his Master's thesis.

The character he'd most like to portray is "Thomas Jefferson" in Sidney Kingsley's "The Patriot", although he admits he'll have to wait another 35 years before he's old enough to play that role on the screen.

The best advice he's ever had and would give an aspiring player is: "Be natural, sincere and honest on and off the screen and stage or radio. A good acting job must come from the mind and heart." The single acting experience which taught him most was "All My Sons", because the director taught him never to lie down on the job for an instant; taught him, too, that concentration is one of acting's most important tools.

Asked what he'd do if out of pictures, Jeff promptly replies: "radio acting and ski instruction." Skiing and swimming are his favorite sports, and his favorite recreation is diving for abalone off the Palos Verdes coast.

The only job he ever held aside from acting was as a "hasher" during his freshman year at Northwestern University. He has been broke at times, but hasn't a sob story to his name, admitting his parents helped him out whenever he really needed help.

Aside from making pictures, which he enjoys so thoroughly he calls his chores "a wonderful combination of work plus well-paid recreation", Jeff likes to relax by drawing portrait sketches and playing the piano.

He says he earned his first dollar in a penny-pitching concession in a backyard carnival.

As to any handicaps he had to overcome, he says: "I'm happy that the only obstacles I've had to overcome have been transient inferiority complexes caused by the facts that I couldn't play college football and didn't see any battle duty (both due to a broken arch-bone suffered in a high school football accident); a shyness with women; and a baritone radio voice when I longed to be a basso."

His favorite childhood memory was seeing the Grand Canyon for

the first time.

His favorite possession was his Phi Delta Theta fraternity pin until he got his wedding ring.

His most embarrassing moment came when he forgot the words to a beautiful cantata written by the music director of Milwaukee's public schools — while performing before a crowded high school auditorium.

He hasn't any phobias; and his greatest disappointment came when the Northwestern football team failed to make the Big Ten in 1949.

He believes in hunches — ever since he passed a dime slot machine at Sun Valley, Idaho, on an impulse reached into his pocket, felt one dime, went back and put it in, walked away with the jackpot — eight dollars worth of dimes.

His pet aversion — drivers who honk their horns and lean out of their windows and yell.

He plays golf, tennis, enjoys ice skating, tumbling, skiing and swimming.

His favorite superstition is throwing spilled salt over his left shoulder.

His favorite authors include Thomas Wolf, Joseph Conrad, Ring Lardner, Shellabarger. Poe, Stevenson and T.S. Elliott.

His favorite music is that of modern Americans like Ferde Grofe, Aaron Copland, and scenario music, which he collects. His album collection includes light classical, classical, but mainly scores of movies. One of his favorite albums is 20th Century-Fox Music Director Alfred Newman's score for "Captain From Castile." He has most of Newman's recorded scores, and hopes some day to meet the composer-conductor.

Blue and red are his favorite colors; roast beef and salad and meat balls and spaghetti are his favorite feeds.

His favorite play: "All My Sons" — "natch", he says.

His favorite role was the "father" in "Years Ago."

His favorite films — too many to list.

His favorite vacation was skiing in the Rockies.

His nickname is "Hank".

His pet is a fox terrier named "Buddy".

He's handy around the house when it isn't a specialist's project. He and his bride live in a Westwood apartment, won't take on a house until they can afford one.

He sleeps at least eight hours a night.

VITAL STATISTICS

REAL NAME: Henry H. McKinnies, Jr.

BIRTHPLACE: New Orleans, La.

BIRTHDATE: November 25th

MOTHER: Edith Lois Burgess McKinnies

FATHER: Henry Herman McKinnies, sales engineer,
Milwaukee

EDUCATION: Richards St. Grade School, Milwaukee
Whitefish Bay High School, Milwaukee
Northwestern University,
graduated August 1949

University of California, L.A. Branch,
graduate work

SERVICE RECORD:

U.S. Navy, May 1945 to 1946
Radio Technical School (naval radar)
Communications Section, 9th Naval District,
Great Lakes, Illinois

WEIGHT: 180 pounds
HEIGHT: 6 ft, 1 inch
EYES: Blue
HAIR: Dark Brown
MARRIED: Barbara Rush, December 1st, 1950
at Boulder City, Nev.
CHILDREN: Son, Christopher, born August 29, 1952
in Santa Monica, Calif.

PICTURE RECORD

1950

FOURTEEN HOURS
CALL ME MISTER
TAKE CARE OF MY LITTLE GIRL

1951

FROGMEN
RED SKIES OF MONTANA
BELLES ON THEIR TOES
LURE OF THE WILDERNESS

1952

DREAM BOAT
C.S. Forester's SAILOR OF THE KING