

JEFFREY HUNTER
HOLLYWOOD'S MOST HANDSOME ALL-ROUND ACTOR

By Gregor Hauser

In the year 1925 many future Hollywood stars were born: Paul Newman, Rock Hudson, Tony Curtis, Jack Lemmon and Jeffrey Hunter. Even though Jeff probably was as talented as Jack, better looking than Rock, with brighter blue eyes than Paul's, got his first leading role earlier than Tony and had the best qualifications of all, he remained by far the most unknown and most undervalued actor of the five.

The following strives to substantiate how unfair that is.

Jeffrey, born on November 25, was the son of a well off engineer. It was customary in the family to carry over the name of the father to the son. So the offspring also was christened Henry Herman McKinnies (Jr). The family moved four years after his birth from New Orleans to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a big city near Chicago. Ever since his schooldays Henry took an interest in Theatre and Radio and engaged in both fields during the summer months. Henry must have been a committed and popular student, because he was chosen as class spokesman and later as head boy. Moreover, he was a talented football player and co-captain of his team. After he finished Highschool he was pulled out of this intimate environment when he was inducted. There is nothing known of Jeffrey's war experiences, except that he joined the Navy in 1945 and was discharged in 1946.

With a scholarship in his pocket he resumed his studies and graduated from the Northwestern University in Illinois. Shortly after he enrolled at the University of Los Angeles. At both Universities he indulged his hobby: acting. While in a Fraternity production of 'Julius Caesar', interestingly enough he met Charlton Heston - two years his senior.

Hollywood-reality in the early stages of the 50s: look good, be interested in acting, hang out in the vicinity of Hollywood - and the movie contract is yours. Sounds tacky but is a fact.

Henry was courted by Paramount but went under contract with 20th Century Fox. In contrast to training at Universal, where it took years to build gently the potential young talent. Fox didn't have any special training programme for coming young actors. They fit him with a more melodious sounding name and in no time Jeffrey Hunter was big business. In his first active year, 1951, with rapid strides he appeared in four productions and was from the very beginning a favorite of the young female audience who sent sacks full of fanmail to the Studio. That was also the case with the popular movie magazines that saw in Hunter from the very outset a newly favored star. Well bred, intelligent, a clean image with dark, parted hair, the blue eyes and the 6' tall, slender figure, he became instantly the idol for both, teens and their mothers.

Immediately after his arrival in Hollywood, he met the enchanting Barbara Rush, whom he married right away in 1950. Barbara was two years younger than Jeffrey and made her debut in the year other marriage, a small part in 'Molly' (The Goldbergs). Unfortunately, the couple never appeared together in a film until after they were divorced, because Barbara had a contract with another Studio, Universal.

Jeffrey Hunter's debut on screen was 'Call me Mister', a well performed and -directed musical, in which Hunter is listed 7th in the credits as "The Kid". Nevertheless, his next movie made substantially more headlines.

'Fourteen Hours' is a thriller by Henry Hathaway, showing various events around the true story of a young man who wants to throw himself from a multistory building. Jeffrey and Debra Paget play a young couple, who meet amidst the mass of onlookers. Not only is it the first time that Jeff is presented to the audience as a juvenile lead, it is also his first meeting with Debra, with whom he got teamed up five times until 1955. By the way, 'Fourteen Hours' made history as Grace Kelly's screen-debut.

His next appearance marks also the beginning of a partnership. In 'Frogmen' he not only meets the big star of the Studio, Richard Widmark, but also Robert Wagner, who - besides being Jeffrey's healthy competition within Fox - also has several joint appearances with him (seven in total). It is remarkable that this is their only movie in which Jeff's name comes before

Bob's in the credits. Oddly enough Wagner - though less attractive - is actively promoted by the Studio and gets onward the better parts.

Jeff's last movie in 1951 is the uneventful drama 'Take Care of my Little Girl', in which Hunter finds himself listed fifth in the credits among a sheer armada of promising, talented young actors. In the leading parts Jeanne Crain and Dale Robertson present themselves, supported by Mitzi Gaynor, Jean Peters, Jeffrey and George Nader. Beautiful people as far as the eye can see.

The following year brings four more parts that show impressively the wide spectrum of his acting skills. Among these is his first real leading part, namely in the southern-states Western 'Lure of the Wilderness'.

Jeff plays the adventurous hero Ben who, during one of his reconnoiter expeditions through the swamp, discovers the beautiful Jean Peters and her father Walter Brennan. Both were hiding for many years in the thicket, because Walter's character is wrongfully wanted by the police for murder. Ben puts all matters straight and conquers Jean's heart. Jeffrey's part also brings along a fair share of humor, namely when he is torn between his mainland bride-to-be (Constance Smith) and his true love Jean Peters, or when he, the greenhorn, wants to pit his strength in a fistfight against the best fighters in town.

While here he plays a lad of about 20, in 'Belles on their Toes', a follow-up of the famous movie 'Cheaper by the Dozen', he plays a young doctor, with whom one of the many daughters (Debra Paget) of the family falls in love. In this movie Jeff is all clever and romantic.

He has a similarly mature part in 'Dreamboat', a movie that gets nonetheless 3,5 of the 5 possible rating points in Motion Picture Guide. Clifton Webb plays a long forgotten silent-movie star, but he is rediscovered through the reprise of his works on television and is driven into funny situations and conflicts by the sudden hullabaloo around his person. Jeffrey plays the ambitious advertising man really heating up the campaign and gets praised for his part: 'Hunter as the advertising man is also good', according to Motion Picture Guide.

The fourth film shows Jeff as a shady character. He plays the son of a killed fireman holding the officer Widmark responsible for his father's death. Because of his relentless hate for the likeable Widmark, he is not accepted by the audience as the hero of this movie. Not until an end full of action Jeff realizes his error. Jeff is convincing in both, the action star as well as the character actor. Although his stern crew cut does not contribute to his good looks, it does accentuate the merciless, revengeful and misguided character he plays.

In 1952 without delay Jeff highlighted in four movies his ascending current and belonged from then on to the young crowd of dashing Hollywood stars between 20 and 30 who, at that time, filled the fan magazines around the world.

As Tony Curtis remarked: "... Jeff Hunter was invariably outgoing and friendly ... we all joined together and got along fine. We would meet in the evenings at Schwab's, go to a Club for a couple of drinks and pick up every girl that we wanted.

There was no rivalry and no envy; at least no one showed it. We all were under contract at Twentieth, Columbia, MGM, Universal and therefore belonged to the elite."

But there was of course Mrs. Hunter (Barbara Rush), who on her part also was shooting one film after another with the most attractive men of that time, such as Hudson, Curtis and Derek. In the long run that couldn't work out well. After four and a half years they divorced and their son grew up seeing his father as often as possible.

The relationship between the couple should have been agreeable, several sources also make mention that Barbara considered a reunion (ultimately their friend Robert Wagner married his Natalie (Wood) twice too).

Jeff's career turned slightly stagnant. The movies he appeared in between 1953-1955 were not bad altogether, especially the Westerns 'Seven Cities of Gold', 'Seven Angry Men' and 'White Feather' - all films of 1955 - are amazing movies, but Jeffrey's part....

In 'Seven Cities', Richard Egan and Anthony Quinn play two commanders of a Spanish army unit in California in the 18th century. Both experience interesting adventures and leave their mark on this, basically very colorful and nice movie (Motion Picture Guide bestows three stars). One of their problems is fighting off attacking Indians under the command of Matuwir (Jeffrey Hunter). Matuwir befriends the Spaniards and his sister falls in love with Egan. When Egan causes her death, Jeffrey's features grow dark and he doesn't leave until Egan surrenders voluntarily. Jeff acts in a downright supporting part and has hardly a chance to stage himself properly. Apart from his regal appearance one can hardly recognize him under the heavy warpaint.

As to why director Robert D. Webb, who made four movies with Jeffrey, expected his favorite star to play in such a part, and why Jeffrey accepted it, is a good question. Probably either they wanted to carry over the concept of their previous movie or Jeffrey's part was initially larger. In any case, the part did him no justice.

The previous movie is 'White Feather'. Here too Jeffrey plays the son of a chief, but his part delivers much more. Jeffrey is the second (and not the fourth) main character and the actual tragic hero of the movie. He embodies the freedom-loving, noble and brave Indian Little Dog, who would never comply voluntarily with the life in a reservation. That leads to some beautiful, wildly romantic scenes that, for a Hollywood movie of that time, gives quite a credible impression of the life of Indians. At the end Jeffrey becomes, in a long, delightfully performed part, the martyr, and thus anticipates his most famous future role.

Jeffrey has the right type of proud bearing, physical stature and also the transformable face to make Little Dog one of the most memorable Indian characters of the 50s Westerns Robert Wagner is playing the leading part even though Jeffrey's acting far outshines Wagner's. His Josh Tanner tells the story and is a reincarnation of James Stewart's Pat (Jefford) in 'The Broken Arrow'. Debra Paget plays again the Indian girl and marries the leading character. Except that 'Beautiful Day' becomes 'Rising Day' and this time she is allowed to stay alive.

No film whatsoever had to be ashamed of being associated with 'The Broken Arrow'. The director of this classic movie, Delmer Davis, personally wrote the screenplay for 'White Feather'. So this Western, that up to that point was held in the highest regard, became the Hunter-movie. (MOTION PICTURE GUIDE gives it three points). However, 'White Feather' was not necessarily an advantage to his career, because now he was somehow classified for the part of the 'exotic'.

'Seven Angry Men' is an interesting movie. Yet again it shows Jeffrey in a subordinate part; and for the last time at the side of Debra. It deals with the life of the historic figure, the Abolitionist John Brown wanting to push through in the mid 19th Century the liberation of slaves with witty sermons and force of arms. Eventually he is hanged. The movie belongs for a great part to Raymond Massey, who is specialized in expressive historical figures. Jeffrey plays his brave son, who in the end remains as the only one of the seven heirs of Brown at the side of his father. This time Jeffrey leaves martyrdom to someone else. Brown forbids his son to free him from jail and advances bravely to the gallows.

In the previous years Jeffrey played two leading parts as hero in lower quality films. About 'The Princess of the Nile', produced by Harmon Jones in 1954, The Encyclopedia of the International Film wrote: "miserable script; horror, barbarity, eroticism in a silly portrayal". No one was really surprised.

In 1956 Jeffrey overcame this dry spell of his career in an impressive fashion. Although he officially was under contract with Fox until 1958, the conditions at the time loosened, the studio-system dissolved and actors had the chance to work for other studios as well.

So in 1956 Jeffrey played in four films for four different studios, each time in a supporting role. Not only did he succeed with perceptive stagecraft to steal the show from the first leading stars - but also in the same breath he did establish himself as a character actor. Moreover, he was readmitted into the circle of the dreamfactory's leading stars.

In 'The Proud Ones', an entertaining Western (Motion Picture Guide, 3 stars) with Robert Ryan as the standard sheriff, Jeffrey shines as a young man looking for his father's murderer and believes to have found him in the person of the sheriff. Together they free the town of blackguards and Ryan can finally disperse all of Jeffrey's suspicion. His part is of similar nature as the one in 'Red Skies of Montana', but is more sympathetic and has plot-wise more substance. The music of this Webb-movie is relatively unknown. It is written by the proficient Western-music composer, Lionel Newman.

The Walt Disney production 'The Great Locomotive Chase' over the years developed commercially as the second successful movie with Jeffrey. One can see him here for the first time in a 'grown-up part'. The **northern-states** agent Fess Parker robs in the American Civil War 'The General', the fastest locomotive of America. Hunter plays the train conductor taken by surprise. He goes with the second fastest locomotive after Parker and recaptures the in his care entrusted 'General'. Parker and Hunter repeat their parts in 1961 in a Walt Disney TV production.

Jeffrey's most successful, at the same time best known and best movie is definitively John Ford's 'The Searchers'. The so very appropriate original title 'The Searchers', ranks as probably the best Western in history and breaks all superlatives (Motion Picture Guide gives five points, a star in the Encyclopedia of int. Film, Hembus awards this film exclusively with 4 points on their 3-point-scale. It tells the story of John Wayne and it tells the story of Jeffrey Hunter. And it gives an account of the perennial Odyssey when both are looking for their joint relative Debbie (Natalie Wood - one year before she married Bob Wagner). Jeffrey is Martin, a half-bred, and since childhood living with the humane Edwards. He is a youngster, maybe 18 years of age, awkward, a weakling who crouches when spoken to and weeps unrestrained when under pressure. But his loyalty towards his family makes him brave.

When little Debbie is abducted, he and his grief-stricken uncle Ethan (Duke Wayne) are the only ones who actually undergo the hardship of the long search. In the five-year duration (of the search) Martin becomes a man. He still is a little clumsy, for instance with women, but the look in his eyes is increasingly maturing and in the end he takes charge and wins over the adamant Wayne. (The Duke wants to shoot Debbie on the spot, because meanwhile she evolved too much into an Indian).

Jeffrey is downright magnificent in his part. He is completely taken up with his impersonation of the naive, neurotic youngster, and one is getting the impression, that he has been studying 'Method Acting' with James Dean.

Not until one compares this part with other ones he played (e.g. the modest Jesus, or his many sympathetic war heroes), one learns about the enormous versatility of this actor, for Martin is not Jeffrey's showpiece but a distinct contrast to his rather reserved image. In addition, Hunter looks shamelessly handsome, presents himself well and shows a dashing face with a three-day-beard.

For the critics names like Ford or Wayne were too overwhelming as to occupy themselves in detail with Hunter's performance. Nonetheless: for the audience identifying itself through the story with Martin, Jeffrey's star qualities ultimately became visible again.

Jeffrey plays the very opposite of Martin in his next film. In 'A Kiss before Dying' - by critics of repute considered as undervalued - he plays a pipe smoking College Professor of at least 30 years old, who thoughtfully follows events.

This Gerd Oswald movie, which once again brings together Jeff and Bob Wagner, takes a special place in Jeffrey's film work. Finally, 30 years later the story was turned successfully into a film again under the same title. And being the original certainly does any movie credit.

From this point on Jeffrey's most prosperous period leads the way.

Until 1961 he filmed with most of Hollywood's elite directors and switched skillfully between A-movies and first-rate, but lower budget films. This way he could maintain his star status. At the same time he was able to test his strength in some unconventional parts in movies of refinement.

Before giving an overview of Jeffrey's big productions of these years, it should be mentioned that in 1957 he married for the second time. He married (the divorced) Joan Bartlett. She brought a son into the marriage and gave Jeffrey two more sons. As a family of five they lived until their divorce in 1967, in Santa Monica. Joan's looks might have agreed with the high standards Jeffrey maintained since Barbara Rush. Joan had been a model after all. According to family tradition they christened their first son Henry McKinnies (III).

After the "The Searchers" Jeff worked two more times with John Ford, who was known for repeatedly working with the same actors. Obviously the 'king of the Western' took a liking to Jeff, because he was admitted, like Wayne, Fonda and Stewart, into the circle of his favorite stars.

Sergeant Rutledge must have been an extraordinary experience for Jeffrey. For the first time he has a starring role in a rather standard type part, while another actor, Woody Strode, has the more challenging role acting-wise but is disadvantaged credit-wise. Upside-down world.

Nonetheless, Jeffrey carries out his task well. He plays a committed cavalry lieutenant maintaining a good relationship with the 'Buffalo Soldiers', the name of a unit consisting of black soldiers only (that is also the original title of the movie). When Sergeant Rutledge is unjustly charged with rape and murder, Jeffrey tries everything to get him out of trouble, in which he finally succeeds.

Ford and his team handle this delicate subject with sensitivity and the movie really is fascinating, even if most critics consider it a less important Ford movie (Motion Picture Guide remains neutral and gives 3.5 stars).

For me this movie is a successful blend of both fields in which Hunter was active in those days. Sgt. Rutledge is a perfect blend of an A-movie and the first class, lower budget film. In fact definitely an A-movie, but one that tells smoothly, without much digression an unusual, complex story, and is carried by the story.

The Encyclopedia of the International Film recognizes this film as especially worth seeing (star): "John Ford tackles this 'contribution to the racial question' within the framework of an intelligently set up, and visually to the utmost perfection driven Western".

Of the three Ford-parts the least important was in 'The Last Hurrah' (1958), a movie completely dominated by Spencer Tracy. Jeffrey is seen as the idealistic as well as ambitious nephew of Mayor Skeffington - played by Tracy, already a legend by this point in his life. Both are closely connected. The movie receives favorable reviews (Motion Picture Guide 3.5 points) and Jeff has second billing, but no critic wants to comment on the achievements of the young star.

A second director engaging Jeffrey at least twice in his much spoken of productions, was Nicholas Ray, the celebrated creator of 'Johnny Guitar' (1954) and 'Rebel without a Cause' (1955).

In '56 the unconventional Ray planned another film version of the James-brothers' story, that so far had been glorified as the most romanticized 'Robin Hoods of the Wild West'. The style was supposed to be progressive, laurels were distributed in advance. As leading stars the most ideal combination Fox had to offer was chosen: Robert Wagner as Jesse and Jeffrey Hunter as the older Frank.

Although the characters were well founded and worked out skilfully, the producers - as was often the case - couldn't make friends with an overly daring project. Ray had to re-record the movie and distanced himself immediately from the traditional Western. What remained was a good cast, Jeff's new chance in an A-Western and the impression he apparently made on Ray.

Five years later Ray started an even more ambitious project. He filmed the life story of Jesus Christ. At that time - Hollywood-glamour was still considered as fashionable - a more than difficult venture. As a matter of fact, the life of Jesus was rediscovered as a movie subject at a much later period. Certainly 'King of Kings' was a pioneer, a trigger of this type of picturization of the bible. And in each of these film versions the project stands or falls with its lead.

And the first man to be entrusted with the probably most difficult task an actor can assign himself to, namely playing Jesus, was Jeffrey Hunter. In an interview he refers to some interesting aspects of his Jesus-part: "I was warned not to do it, actors who play Jesus are supposed to have a hard time getting other roles to follow, but I felt this was a myth. After all, how can you be type-cast as Christ? There just aren't that many Jesus roles around. If it affected my career at all I think it helped it."....

Asked whether the rumors were true that he had really abstained from smoking, drinking and naughty language while filming 'King of Kings', he smiled somewhat embarrassed: "to a certain degree I did" he answered, "you try to get the feel

of any role, but it's much more difficult in the case of Jesus Christ because everyone has their own personal image of Him. It's a role you take on, knowing that no matter how you play it, you are going to disappoint many". Jeffrey didn't disappoint the critics with his intuition concerning the part: "The performer of Christ succeeds in his task with a physiognomic and physical mixture of naturalness and diffidence." The Encyclopedia of the International Film: 'Jeffrey Hunter was a radiant Jesus'.

Countless bible movies were made over the years, but seldom there was any better than this one. The Time critic expressed a rather absurd opinion: he thought Hunter looked too much a fanmag coverboy and gave the movie the snide subtitle: 'I was a teenage Jesus'.

Jeffrey was at the time 35 years old and over the age of Jesus when he died. Physically he tried to adjust to the looks of the prevailing image one had of Jesus. He wore long, brown hair and a beard, appeared considerably emaciated and less muscular.

Any sign that could point to a sex symbol or a Hollywood star was avoided. The movie was one of the largest productions of the year and many famous names were part of the crew. Screenwriter Philip Yordan, composer Miklos Rozsa, the actors Robert Ryan (John) and Rip Torn (Judas), to name a few.

The movie never made a pompous or intrusive impression. Ray designed the movie almost in episodes. Throughout the movie there were several central figures whose stories were told.

There was King Herod, who toppled his father from the throne. There was John the Baptist, who christened Jesus and entrusted his first disciples to him. And the Roman captain Lucius (Ron Randall) who knew Jesus already as a child and stood later at his cross. And of course the rebel Barabbas, who was released in Jesus' place. They all were central figures in the 169-minute movie. Because of this, Jeffrey was not so often visible and his appearances were thus the more impressive.

They also economized on scenes in which Jeffrey's face was directly confronted with the camera. They liked to operate with shadow or the rear view of Jesus. This way the character gained the necessary unapproachable and mystical quality. From the life of Jesus some few scenes are selected and adjusted. We meet Jeffrey approximately a half hour after the movie begins while John is baptizing him. Of course there are some outstanding moments, such as when the stranger in the white robe - accompanied by monumental film music - slowly raises his head and John loses himself in the depths of the most sparkling blue eyes that ever existed in Hollywood.

The encounter was an illumination for The Baptist.

Jeffrey was definitively a radiant Jesus. However, from the last supper on one sees a distinct 'humanization' and eclipsing of his features. Fear of death brings Jesus back from his celestial appearance to the brutal reality. On the way of the Cross, the martyr is tormented and already looks more dead than alive.

Jeffrey doesn't need much make-up for this scene. He succeeds with a well aimed but unobtrusive facial expressiveness. Like Jeffs acting, so is the whole movie: down to earth yet at the same time exciting. In the original version the narrator Orson Welles introduces the individual episodes. Almost all of Jeffrey's dialogues consist of passages from the Bible. Accordingly the Sermon on the Mount is his longest scene.

Of course this movie can only be seen as an attempt of telling the story of the 'King of Kings'. Whatever one thinks of this production, Jeffs portrayal definitively leaves an impression. In retrospect, the part had no beneficial influence on his career. He was at the pinnacle of his fame, but more challenging offers of the kind were not forthcoming. The Jesus-image presumably was disadvantageous and Jeff had to resort to offers of Television or second ranking movies.

Let's go back to Jeffrey's cinematography toward the end of the 50s for a moment. For the sake of completeness two more A-movies in which he participated should be mentioned. Both belong to the considerable amount of war movies in which he dies a heroic death.

'In Love and War' (1958) by Philip Dunne, Jeff is again together with Robert Wagner. It revolves around a fiction story of three young Americans between 'home and the front, women and the enemy, love and war' (Encyclopedia of the International Film). One scene with Hunter stands out in memory. It's the one in which he, shortly before his enlistment, wakes up at the side of his wife drenched in sweat, shaken by a nightmare. A very credible portrait of a principally strong man in times of maximum strain.

His appearance in the well-known 'The Longest Day' presents him as the fearless lieutenant, losing his life with deliberate heroism at Omaha Beach. According to the motto: Only the good die young. That was an overview of Jeffrey's days as a great Hollywood star.

The Encyclopedia of the International Film mentions as his most significant parts those in 'The Searchers', 'Sgt. Rutledge' and 'King of Kings'. For the Jeffrey Hunter fan many of his lesser-known movies are just as pleasing.

Between 1957 and 1961 he appears in a total of seven movies, which fall in the category of 'first class B-pictures', where neither technical effort nor big names count. The thing is to rather stage-manage an ingenious story into an entertaining one.

There were the following profitable parts: 'Gun for a Coward'. A son of a rancher unjustly scorned as a coward proves to be the only virtuous Westerner of three brothers. For the part of Bless, Jeff gets appreciative criticism in MOTION PICTURE GUIDE: "Hunter gives an interesting and completely authentic performance" (2.5 points).

'No Down Payment' (1957). He plays the husband of Patricia Owens. They live with other young couples in a new housing estate in Los Angeles. This is a type of soap opera of the 50s that follows several story lines. One of the stars is Barbara Rush - two years after their divorce - and the only time they work together. Which indicates that they possibly remained on friendly terms (MOTION PICTURE GUIDE 2.5 points).

'Count Five and Die' (1958) "An allied espionage defense center in London misleads the Germans with a forthcoming invasion in Holland. Spy movie that balances the invented World War-story between thriller and drama." (The Encyclopedia of the International Film). Again Jeffrey dies. (MOTION PICTURE GUIDE 2.5 points)

'Hell to Eternity' (1960). As an American soldier who was raised by a loving Japanese family, Jeffrey is torn by inner-conflict during WW2.

'Key Witness' (1960) Jeffrey in ultimate Glenn Ford style. A basically gentle family man seeing his loved ones threatened by a gang of felons. As the story progresses he becomes a heroic daredevil. MOTION PICTURE GUIDE writes: "some nice performances...well played." (2.5 points)

'Man Trap' (1961). "Efficiently directed, repulsive gangster movie". That is a matter of taste. Still, one sees Jeffrey in one of his shadiest parts. It is, by the way, directed by the well-known actor Edmund O'Brien in his only directing job. MOTION PICTURE GUIDE writes: "good performances are lost in an abundance of absurd situations." (2 points).

'No Man is an Island' (1962) As a wireless radio operator in the Navy, he is the only one to survive the Japanese invasion and has to spend three years in solitude on the island. MOTION PICTURE GUIDE writes: "Hunter is too movie-star-like to be convincing as a sailor surviving three years in the jungle." (3 Stars)

Until 1962 Jeffrey was one of the busiest stars in Hollywood. He had proved to be the character actor as well as the action hero. He was a both, a glamorous women's idol and a genuine worker without airs. He convinced in A and B movies of all genres. He could carry a movie or enrich it with a supporting part. However, since approx. 1963 - like Robert Wagner too - Jeffrey was not so much sought after in Hollywood anymore.

In these years the production of low budget movies ended completely in favor of even cheaper television productions. Many actors that hadn't entirely accomplished a breakthrough, moved to Europe or television. Hollywood's decision-making establishment couldn't carry such an amplitude of stars anymore. Even for the greatest among them the message was: television or quit.

The golden movie years did not last through the decade of the 60s. In the following years Jeffrey made many of his movies in Europe. Hunter sure did not like traveling around so much, something that of course being a family man, was not pleasant, but he got the leading parts he probably would not find anymore in his own country. So he increasingly engaged in American TV-productions and signed a two-year contract with Warner Bros.

In these years of diversity Jeffrey played in the Italian movie 'Gold for the Caesars' (1964). In this movie that was staged by the seasoned Andre de Toth, Jeffrey is described as an irresistible man: 'He is a splendid specimen of a man. Of noble descent and entirely flawless. Notice the broadness of his shoulders and the strength of his arms'.

Indeed Hunter realizes in the part of master-builder Lacer one of his most exciting performances. Tanned, with oiled muscles, slightly graying hair and scanty costume he moves with agility that it is a sheer delight. He jumps off balconies, climbs and hangs on ropes, fights with an ax, hits the bottle and gives himself over to several ladies. That all against breathtaking natural scenery. Never before has Hunter been more virile and full of action on screen.

Also his next movie 'Murieta' (1965) puts him in the right perspective. As a legendary, fictional Mexican bandit, Jeff once more excels in the title role of a Western. The well-known director George Sherman and Jeff's co-star Arthur Kennedy enhance the quality of this first of three Spanish-Western productions, in which Jeff could be seen towards the end of his career.

And all at once there were offers from Hollywood again.

The movie 'Brainstorm' (1965) is successful. A couple is planning to murder the husband of the woman. In order to go unpunished Jeffrey feigns mental illness. In the following period that he has to spend in the mental institution he actually does go mad. MOTION PICTURE GUIDE gives three points and speaks of a "great cast". One thing is certain: Jeffrey deserves by far the greatest honor.

Furthermore, he had guest appearances in several Western serials and in 1963 he became the title hero in one of the many Western TV serials of that time. However, 'Temple Houston' was not meant to become a real success, even though the pilot movie, 'The Man from Galveston', was launched with great expense and fanfare into the movie theatres. 'Temple Houston' lasted only two seasons (a total of 26 episodes). Hunter's part is the son of the legendary Sam Houston who makes an effort to establish himself as an attorney.

Hunter about the disappointing experience with television: "In the first place, we had no time to prepare for it. I was notified on July 17 to be ready to star August 7 for an October air date. When we reached the screen we did not have a single segment ready. It was done so fast the writers never got a chance to know what it was all about. We all wanted to follow the line indicated by the pilot film, which we thought would make a charming series. NBC, however, favored making it serious. Then after 13 episodes, the ratings were rather low and Warner switched to tongue in cheek comedy, somewhat on the order of 'Maverick.' We wound it up after 26 episodes". MOTION PICTURE GUIDE writes about the pilot movie: 'Hunter is sleepwalking through this undramatic waste of time' and gives 1 point.

A pilot movie followed with Jeffrey as Captain Pike, that initially it was refused and was inserted much later as an episode in a serial. The series' name was Star Trek and became probably the most popular series in the history of television.

Adding to his professional misfortune, Jeffrey encountered financial and private family problems as well. A lengthy lawsuit against a manager cost him a small fortune, and in 1967 he got divorced for the second time. Those events might have been responsible for Hunter accepting every part he was offered and consequently losing his star position. Jeff had embarrassing and unworthy appearances. Several of his projects never got released, there even seems to have been a movie called 'Strange Portrait' that got entirely lost in a fire in Hong Kong.

His cinematography of that time is highly obscure.

Obviously it is impossible to index all Hunter appearances, the meaningless films in the last years of his life are scattered all over the world. Jeff rapidly slid into C-movies. He hit rock bottom in the, predominantly uplifting, movie 'Guide for the Married Man' (1967), in which he has a walk-on part of less than one minute and in the Franz-Antel production 'Sexy Susan Sins Again' (1968) that defies all description.

The Encyclopedia of the International Film writes about one of his last movies 'Find a Place to Die' (1968): 'unusually amateurish crafted Spaghetti Western'. In contrast, the two movies 'Custer of the West' and 'The Private Navy of Sgt. O'Farrell', both from 1968 seem grand. Jeffrey plays in both the second or third lead; a director of renown stages both films with big stars. In spite of that, both movies emanate that the rest of Hollywood too doesn't fare any better than Jeff. No charm, nothing rounded off, no spirit.

The first mentioned movie, Jeffrey's third US-Spanish Western, monumentally produced by Robert Siodmak, is yet another account of the life of the legendary 'Indians-hater' George Custer. Robert Shaw as Custer and Robert Ryan belong without exception to the top film cast.

The second is a Bob Hope comedy, directed by Frank Tashlin and is located on a Pacific island in the 2nd World War. The film which also stars Gina Lollobrigida, was ruined by later interventions and therefore drops partly to a farce.

Jeffrey - now almost completely turned gray - played, like many times before, soldiers in both movies in which he had quite acceptable appearances. With gray temples, the still young and attractive forty-something appearance looked as good as ever.

Exactly the same was the case with his colleague John Derek, being the same age as Hunter, matured and turned gray relatively early too. He too had married a young, attractive actress, and didn't get any suitable parts since the beginning of the 60s. In 1966 he appeared grayed, but more attractive than ever, in his first self directed movie and shifted entirely to the production of movies. Still, one could have thought Jeffrey capable to recover professionally. His ever dazzling looks, his ability to maneuver himself out of crises, leave the assumption that as an actor - maybe in television- he definitely could have had a future.

His very last movie, in Germany titled 'Frank Mantena' ('Viva America), kindles justified hopes of seeing Jeffrey ultimately again in a tailor-made leading part reminding of more glorious days.

Furthermore, Jeffrey fell in love again. His third wife was the television actress Emily McLaughlin. They married in February 1969, but their marriage didn't even last four months before fate would very cruelly end all future hopes of Jeffrey.

On May 27, 1969 Jeffrey fell so unfortunately, that he suffered brain injuries. He didn't survive the emergency operation that followed. He was only 43 years old and left three children and a widow whom he had recently married. There also was an assumption that his fatal fall was related to a concussion and possible earlier brain injuries he suffered as a result of an explosion on the set of his last movie 'Viva America'.

Jeffrey entered into movie history as one of the most attractive actors of all times. He was equipped with great abilities that he showed more than once in a surprisingly versatile manner, without ever reaching the place he deserved in Hollywood. In spite of this he had his time. Once and again it is emphasized how popular he was in the 50s and even today, he probably ranks internationally among the top three 'Hollywood Hunks'.

As a short 'in memoriam' I would like to quote a small part of the interview Joan Schmitt had with Jeff in 1965:

Since Jeff had to look straight ahead into the mirror as the make-up man worked on him, I had an opportunity to stare without being obvious. He is more handsome in person than on the screen, mainly because of his coloring. He has a healthy sun-washed complexion, blue, blue eyes, thick black lashes and black hair streaked with gray. Since he looks too young to be turning gray I asked if his hair had been dyed for the role in 'Brainstorm'. The make-up man answered, "yes, I touch it up every morning".... then Jeff laughed and said that wasn't true. His hair began graying several years ago.