

John Wayne dead at 72

Ronald Yates

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John Wayne costumed as he will be remembered—as a tough fighter in the American West. The photo is from a 1965 TV special on the Alamo.

Tough movie hero victim of cancer

By Ronald Yates

Chicago Tribune Press Service

LOS ANGELES—Actor John Wayne, who “licked the big C” after surgery for lung cancer in 1964, died Monday in Los Angeles, victim of a cancer that couldn’t be beat. He was 72.

Wayne’s latest battle was lost weeks ago and he knew it, said Dr. Bernard Strohm, administrator of UCLA Medical Center, where Wayne died at 7:35 p.m. Chicago time.

His stomach had been removed in a 9½-hour operation last Jan. 12. On May 2 he was back in the hospital where part of his intestine was removed and tests showed the cancer had spread through most of his body, Strohm said.

Since January, Wayne had tried everything—including laetrile and other metabolic cures—to lick the big C again, but it finally got to him, Strohm said.

IN RECENT weeks radiation treatment had failed, and Wayne refused chemotherapy, apparently because he wanted to remain alert in his last days, Strohm said.

On Saturday Wayne’s condition began to deteriorate dramatically but still he refused medications, including pain-killers.

“He would stabilize, then his vital signs would falter,” Strohm said. Because of the changing vital signs, he said, “no one could predict when death would come.”

Wayne was up and around Sunday, doctors said, but when he returned to

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his bed, he lapsed into a coma from which he would awaken periodically and bellow for his children to come to his bedside.

“When they would appear, he would lapse back into the coma,” Strohm said. When he died, he was unconscious and his seven children, a nurse, and a doctor were with him, Strohm said.

“THE FAMILY was so tired and fatigued at the time of John Wayne’s death,” said Strohm. “They were here for five weeks, and it was so hard for us to watch them.

“That family was responsive to the end. It was the damndest thing. I’ve been around teaching hospitals for 20 years, and I’ve never seen anything like the love in that family.”

In recent weeks, as it became clear that death was stalking the rugged, 6-foot-4-inch “Duke,” he was given many honors. Congress and President Carter authorized a special gold medal for him

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Actor John Wayne, 72, dies

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—the kind given to such historic figures as the Wright brothers.

He made his last public appearance at the Academy Award ceremony in April, drawing an emotional standing ovation when he strode out to present the Oscar for best picture. That, he said, was "just about the only medicine a fellow'd ever really need," and said that he and Oscar had both come "to the Hollywood scene in 1928" and "we're both a little weatherbeaten, but we're both still here and plan to be around a whole lot longer."

"WE KNEW he was in tough shape," comedian Bob Hope said Monday when told of Wayne's death, "but we kept our hopes up because he had pulled through so many times before."

The Duke's death, Hope said, "is a great loss, but he made a lot of great pictures, about 200 of them, and he made a lot of pictures that will live on and on."

Sen. Barry Goldwater [R., Ariz], whose 1964 presidential candidacy Wayne supported, said the actor had been his friend for 50 years.

"I had great respect and a world of admiration for him," Goldwater said. "He was just one hell of a guy, a hell of a man. I will miss him. So will America."

At the hospital, Strohm said Wayne's burial would be private and that his family had asked that instead of flowers, donations be sent to the John Wayne Memorial Cancer Fund at the UCLA Medical Center. Strohm did not say when the funeral would be held.

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His first starring role was in "The Big Trail" (1930). Afterwards, John Wayne came to dominate the American screen from beneath a 10-gallon hat.

'The Duke': He stood for movie manhood

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If you wanted to give a war, you more or less had to invite John Wayne. D-Day found him ready to jump with Steve Forrest in "The Longest Day" (1963). Wayne changed the style of cowboy fistcuffs. Once, he recalled, "the good guy always wore a white hat and he wouldn't hit first. When someone threw a vase at me I hit right back. That started a different kind of Western." In "The War Wagon" (1967), he demonstrates.

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Wayne's first public appearance since cancer surgery in January was in April at the Academy Awards, where the Duke presented the Best Picture Oscar to "The Deer Hunter," and then was joined on stage by winners and other presenters. Wayne was a top box-office draw for decades, but didn't win an Oscar until

1970. The part: Rooster Cogburn, the hard-drinking U.S. marshal in "True Grit." The screen's most enduring tough guy was generous on and off camera. He joined the late Bing Crosby in song during the taping of a tribute to Bob Hope in 1975. Frank Sinatra and Hope were moved to laughter at the sound. Story on page 1.

AP Wirephoto