

## ERNEST BORGNINE: 1917 - 2012



Ernest Borgnine in the Navy

Ernest Effron Borgnine was born in 1917 in Hamden, Connecticut. His mother Anna, was an Italian countess who immigrated to the USA with his father, Charles Borgnino. His parents separated when he was two years old, and he went with his mother to live in Italy. By 1923, his parents had got back together, changed their name to Borgnine and settled in Connecticut. Ernest enlisted in the U.S. Navy when he left high school in 1935 but was discharged in 1941. He re-enlisted when the US entered WW2 and served until 1945.



Ernest Borgnine & Helen Hayes in the 1952 Broadway play *Mrs McThing*

After finding that factory jobs didn't suit him, Ernest enrolled at the Randall School of Drama in Hartford, Connecticut, with his mother's full support. He later joined the Barter Theater in Abington, Vancouver, where he polished his acting skills. A big break came in 1949 when Ernest landed a supporting role in a Broadway production of *Harvey*.



Spencer Tracey, Ernest Borgnine & Robert Ryan in *Bad Day at Black Rock*

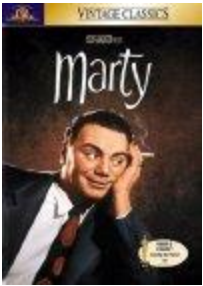
For four years, Ernest Borgnine was committed to the TV comedy series *McHale's Navy* which ran to 136 episodes between 1962 and 1966. In the series he played Lt. Cmdr. Quinton McHale in charge of the misfit crew of a US Navy PT ('Patrol Torpedo') boat during WWII.

Ernest moved to Los Angeles in 1951 and there came supporting roles in films. With the build and looks of a heavyweight boxer, he first made an impression on cinema audiences as 'Fatso' Judson who killed Frank Sinatra's character 'Maggio' in *From Here to Eternity* (1953). This led to similar roles in *Johnny Guitar* (1954) and *Bad Day at Black Rock* (1955) where he threatens Spencer Tracey's character and gets beaten up in return!



Ernest Borgnine as Sgt 'Fatso' Judson in *From Here to Eternity*

It was at this time that director Delbert Mann decided that Borgnine was the perfect actor for the title role in *Marty* (1955), a modest, black & white film made in an era of wide-screen, colour epics. It tells the story of Marty, a lonely butcher, who falls in love with a shy school teacher (played by Betsy Blair). Its box-office success was amazing - the film only cost \$340,000 to make yet brought in over \$5 million in proceeds. Much to his surprise, it won Borgnine an Academy Award for Best Actor.



Ernest Borgnine & Betsy Blair in *Marty*



Ernest Borgnine in *Marty*

He also won a Golden Globe for his performance as Marty Piletti and not only did this enhance his reputation considerably, but it also led to a wide variety of roles over the next decade including a cabdriver in *The Catered Affair* (1956) with Bette Davis, and a Norse chieftain Ragnar in *The Vikings* (1958) with Kirk Douglas, Tony Curtis and Janet Leigh.



Ernest Borgnine in *The Vikings*



Ernest Borgnine in 1956 with his Oscar for *Marty*



Ernest Borgnine in *McHale's Navy*

Following the run of *McHale's Navy*, Borgnine returned to a busy schedule of films that included the memorable, original version of *The Flight of the Phoenix* (1965) and *The Dirty Dozen* (1967) both directed by Robert Aldrich. *Ice Station Zebra* (1968) saw Borgnine cast as the scientist Boris Vaslov, a Russian defector. In complete contrast, he played Dutch Engstrom, second in command to William Holden's character Pike Bishop, in Sam Peckinpah's brutally bloodthirsty Western *The Wild Bunch* (1969).



Ernest Borgnine & Robert Webber in  
*The Dirty Dozen*



Ernest Borgnine & Hardy Kruger in  
*The Flight of the Phoenix*



Ernest Borgnine & Richard Attenborough  
in *The Flight of the Phoenix*



Ernest Borgnine in *Ice Station Zebra*



William Holden, Ernest Borgnine & Warren  
Oates in *The Wild Bunch*



Ernest Borgnine as Dutch Engstrom  
in *The Wild Bunch*



Bruce Davison & Ernest Borgnine in *Willard*



Eric Shea, Ernest Borgnine, Gene Hackman & Red Buttons in *The Poseidon Adventure*

During the 1970s Borgnine was busier than ever! He played abusive boss Al Martin, eaten by trained rats, in *Willard* (1971); a bent New York cop Rogo, one of a handful to survive in the submarine disaster movie *The Poseidon Adventure* (1973); a sadistic railroad conductor Shack, out to ensure that no hobo rode on his train, in *Emperor of the North* (1973) and Sheriff Lyle Wallace, the target of a truckers' vendetta, in another Sam Peckinpah-directed film *Convoy* (1978). Ernest Borgnine finished the decade with a remake of the classic WW1 story *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1979). Borgnine played veteran Private Katczinsky in the film, which won a Golden Globe for 'Best Motion Picture Made for TV' in 1980.



Eric Shea, Ernest Borgnine, Gene Hackman & Red Buttons in *The Poseidon Adventure*



Stella Stevens & Ernest Borgnine in *The Poseidon Adventure*



Borgnine as Sheriff Wallace in *Convoy*





Ernest Borgnine & Lee Marvin in  
*Emperor of the North*



Ernest Borgnine as Shack in  
*Emperor of the North*

The 80s brought Ernest Borgnine more TV work like the popular, action series *Airwolf* (1984-86) but his film work did include some interesting, smaller roles like the Cabbie in *Escape From New York* (1981); the evil Amish family patriarch Isaiah Schmidt in the little known horror thriller *Deadly Blessing* (1981) and Colonel Smith, a role reminiscent of his 'McHale's Navy' days, in *Skeleton Coast* (1987).



Ernest Borgnine is unrecognisable in  
*The Devil's Rain*



Ernest Borgnine & Kurt Russell in  
*Escape From New York*



Adrienne Barbeau & Ernest Borgnine in  
*Escape From New York*

Following the success of *The Dirty Dozen* in 1967, Borgnine appeared again as General Worden in three more - *The Next Mission* (1985); *The Deadly Mission* (1986) and *The Fatal Mission* (1987). These were made for TV but, unlike the original film, had a mixed reception from the viewing public.



Borgnine as General Worden in  
*The Dirty Dozen: The Next Mission*



Telly Savalas & Ernest Borgnine in  
*The Dirty Dozen: The Fatal Mission*



Ernest Borgnine in *Deadly Blessing*



Robert Ryan & Ernest Borgnine in  
*The Dirty Dozen*



*The Dirty Dozen: The Fatal Mission*

In the 1990s, Ernest Borgnine's career slowed down, allowing him time to drive around America in his 'motor home', the subject of a short documentary *Ernest Borgnine on the Bus* (1997). In his 90th year, Borgnine starred in the family comedy *A Grandpa for Christmas* (2007). He plays Bert, an old-style entertainer who discovers that he has a granddaughter. Sentimental it may be, but it brought Ernest a Golden Globe nomination for 'Best Actor in a TV Series' in 2008.



Ernest Borgnine & Juliette Goglia in  
*A Grandpa for Christmas*

In recent years, Borgnine has done voice-over work including 'Carface' in the cartoon series *All Dogs Go to Heaven* (1996-97) and 'Mermaid Man' in *SpongeBob Square Pants* which has spanned the decade from 1999 to 2009.



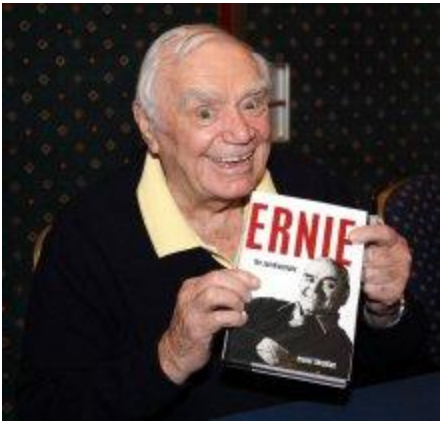
Mermaid Man

Ernest Borgnine has been married five times. He had a daughter Gina, by his first marriage to Rhoda Kemins who he met whilst he was in the Navy. He was married to actress Katy Jurado for four years, and to the singer Ethel Merman for just a month! He had three more children with fourth wife Donna Rancourt. Since 1973 he has been married to a Norwegian, Tova Traesnaes, founder of a cosmetics company. In 2008, Borgnine published his brilliant autobiography *Ernie*, in which he writes about his early life and his years in the navy. He has lots of tales to tell about the films that he made and the many iconic actors and directors with whom he has worked.



Tova Borgnine





Ernest Borgnine in 2008  
Posing with his Autobiography "Ernie"

In January 2011, he was presented with a 'Lifetime Achievement Award' by the Screen Actors Guild, at their annual awards ceremony.

Ernest Borgnine died on 8th July 2012