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Oscar-winning actor Coburn remembered as 'hippest of hip'

LOS ANGELES (AP) — James Coburn's intense smile could switch from cheerful to menacing with the slightest narrowing of his eyes.

That enabled the gravel-voiced actor, who died of a heart attack Monday at age 74, to play a wide array of characters, from the gruff mountaineer in the kiddie comedy *Snow Dogs* to his Oscar-winning performance as a violent, alcoholic father in *Affliction*.

Coburn's breakthrough performances came in 1960s action flicks such as *The Magnificent Seven*, *Hell is For Heroes* and *The Great Escape*.

He then changed direction and found what was for decades his greatest fame: portraying tongue-in-cheek secret agent Derek Flint in the late 1960s James Bond spoofs *Our Man Flint* and *In Like Flint*.

But while they remain cult favorites, the *Flint* movies didn't afford him the status and respect enjoyed by other contemporary "tough guy" actors such as Lee Marvin and Steve McQueen.

His role as Glen Whitehouse, the violent drunk in *Affliction* that Nolte's small-town cop feared becoming, brought him his only Oscar. It was a role he savored after years spent recovering from the near-crippling arthritis that

impeded his career.

"He enjoyed every day of it and never complained and always acted like he was the luckiest guy in the world," said Paul Schrader, the screenwriter and director of *Affliction*.

"Some of them you do for money, some of them you do for love," Coburn said of the film. "This is a love child."

Coburn had recently completed two films, *The Man From Elysian Fields* with Andy Garcia, and *American Gun*, in which his character travels the country in search of his daughter's killer.

Garcia described Coburn as "the personification of class, the hippest of the hip."

"With an extraordinary level of artistry and a trend-setting flare, I will always look at our time together as a great privilege," Garcia said.

"He was of that '50s generation," Schrader said. "He had that part hipster, part cool-cat aura about him. He was one of those kind of men who were formed by the Playboy/Rat Pack kind of style."

Coburn was born in Laurel, Neb., on Aug. 31, 1928, and grew up in Southern California. He made his stage debut opposite Vincent Price in a La Jolla Playhouse production of *Billy Budd*. He appeared regularly throughout the 1950s in such

James Coburn's lasting legacy

James Coburn died Monday after suffering a heart attack at his home in Beverly Hills, Calif. A versatile actor known for playing gritty, tough characters won an Academy Award for his supporting role in "Affliction." He was 74.



SOURCE: Associated Press

Selected filmography

- 1960 "The Magnificent Seven"
- 1963 "The Great Escape"
- 1965 "Major Dundee"
- 1966 "Our Man Flint"
- 1967 "The President's Analyst"
- 1973 "Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid"
- 1979 "Goldengirl"
- 1990 "Young Guns II"
- 1994 "Maverick"
- 1996 "The Nutty Professor"
- 1998 "Affliction"
- 2001 "Monsters, Inc."
- 2002 "The Man from Elysian Fields"

TV Westerns as *Wagon Train*, *The Rifleman* and *Wanted: Dead or Alive*.

His role as knife-throwing Britt in the epic Western *The Magnificent Seven* was his first big breakthrough. Other notable works included *The President's Analyst* (1967), *Goldengirl* (1979), and the Sam Peckinpah films *Major Dundee* (1965) and *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973).

He worked steadily through the '90s, appearing in such wide-ranging fare as *Young*

Guns II, *The Nutty Professor*, *The Cherokee Kid* and *Maverick*. He also provided voice of corrupt company executive Henry J. Waterhouse III in the year's popular animated comedy *Monsters Inc.*

Coburn and his wife, Pauline, were listening to music at his Beverly Hills home on Monday when he had the heart attack, said Hillard Elkins, the actor's longtime friend and business manager.

Plans for a memorial service remained incomplete Tuesday.

Man under NASA scrutiny may have jumped

HOUSTON (AP) — A man who apparently jumped from a single-engine plane at 9,000 feet was the target of a federal investigation involving the theft of NASA technology, authorities said.

Russell Edward Filler, a 47-year-old engineer for a NASA contractor, became a suspect when federal authorities traced a NASA laptop computer to his home. The computer disappeared Oct. 25.

He was contacted by federal authorities Thursday.

On Sunday, Filler went to Hooks Airport because he needed more hours to renew his pilot's license.

Filler turned the controls of the single-engine Cessna 152 over to his flight instructor, then asked him to turn the plane sharply so he could get a better look at the ground, Waller County Sheriff Randy

"There was no accidental exit from the aircraft."

— Lt. John Kremmer
Waller County Sheriff's Department

Smith said.

Smith said Filler then opened the cockpit door and unfastened his seat belt as the plane flew over a rural area about 45 miles northwest of Houston. The instructor looked away for a moment, and when he looked back he saw Filler's feet going out the door. Filler's body has not been found.

Filler told authorities last week that he bought the computer for \$500 through an ad posted in a grocery store, said Harris

County sheriff's Capt. Robert Van Pelt.

Van Pelt said Filler turned on the computer and saw that it had some non-proprietary NASA software on it, but he kept the computer. Filler admitted he knew the computer was stolen, Van Pelt said.

Filler worked for United Space Alliance since 1996 in the contractor's computer test and verification group, which does ground testing for the international space station.

Waller County Sheriff's Department Lt. John Kremmer said officials are not officially calling the fall a suicide, but there was no accidental exit from the aircraft.

Federal officials inspected the Cessna but found nothing wrong with its cockpit door latch or with the seat belt. Smith said. The investigation and the search for the body were continuing, authorities said.

Meteors draw enthusiastic audience

AP — Amateur and professional stargazers alike were treated to a spectacular light show early Tuesday as meteors blazed Technicolor trails across the night sky.

Most of Europe and many parts of North America were obscured by clouds, but it was clear enough at Raleigh, N.C., that Debbie Moose and her husband, Rob Vatz, saw 20 to 25 meteors in the 45 minutes or so that they stood outside in the freezing cold.

"Some were little pinpoints, but some were really bright, like flaming golf balls," Moose said.

The celestial display was the annual appearance of the Leonid meteor shower, caused when the Earth passes through a trail of comet debris. But this year's show came from two unusually dense trails on one night.

It will be nearly a century before the Leonids, usually one of the year's biggest displays, produce such a big swarm of shooting stars again.

"They were bursting like six

"Even though I know what's causing it, it's like a little bit of magic."

— Debbie Moose
meteor shower observer

at a time in different colors," said Linda Mora, one of about 40 people who fortified themselves against the cold with sleeping bags and blankets at Paradise, Texas. "I was so excited I didn't feel any cold."

The temperature was only 18 degrees at Flagstaff, Ariz., when Phil Massey, an astronomer at the Lowell Observatory, went out to watch in the clear mountain air.

"I thought it was spectacular," he said. "All professional astronomers are really tourists when it comes to meteor showers."

The annual shower occurs when the Earth passes through the trail of dust left by comet Tempel-Tuttle, which swings around the sun once every 33 years. The dust grains, traveling at 158,000 mph, glow and vaporize as friction heats them up in the upper atmosphere, producing streaks of light.

The Earth intersects those debris trails each year in mid-November, but this year it crossed two unusually dense trails, laid down in 1767 and 1866. That produced two peaks of meteors during the night, one over Europe and one over North America.

"Even though I know what's causing it, it's like a little bit of magic," Moose said in Raleigh.

The Earth is not expected to strike another stream of equal density from the Tempel-Tuttle comet until 2098 or 2131.

The Leonids are named for the constellation Leo that marks the direction from which the meteors appear to arrive.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Texas set to execute convicted cop killer Tuesday night

HUNTSVILLE, Texas (AP) — Condemned murderer Ogan disputes the circumstances that led him to death row but pragmatic about his fate.

"I killed a cop and this Texas," he said recently. "I've nothing to hide. I've never been trying to cover up."

Ogan faced lethal injection Tuesday evening for the shooting death of a Houston police officer, James Boston, gunned down near the Astrodome.

Ogan, 47, would be the 13th convicted killer put to death in Texas and the first of the year on consecutive nights this week.

"A lot of people say that Texas they really use that death penalty a lot," said Larry Standley, one of the district attorneys who prosecuted Ogan. "But I truly believe if someone will do that to a cop that you just think of what they would do to just anybody else."

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