



John Ford (February 1, 1894 – August 31, 1973) was an American film director of Irish heritage. He was famous for both his westerns such as *Stagecoach*, *The Searchers* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, and adaptations of such classic 20th-century American novels as *The Grapes of Wrath*. His four Academy Award for Best Directors (1935, 1940, 1941, 1952) is a record, and one of those films, *How Green Was My Valley*, also won Best Picture.

In a career that spanned more than 50 years, Ford directed more than 140 films (although nearly all of his silent films are now lost) and he is widely regarded as one of the most important and influential filmmakers of his generation. Ford's films and personality were held in high regard by his colleagues, with Ingmar Bergman and Orson Welles among those who have named him as one of the greatest directors of all time.

In particular, Ford was a pioneer of location shooting and the long shot which frames his characters against a vast, harsh and rugged natural terrain.

Ford was born **John Martin "Jack" Feeney** (though he later often gave his given names as Sean Aloysius, sometimes with surname O'Feeny or O'Fearná; an Irish language equivalent of Feeney) in Cape Elizabeth, Maine to John Augustine Feeney and Barbara "Abbey" Curran, on February 1, 1894 (though he occasionally said 1895 and that date is erroneously inscribed on his tombstone). His father, John Augustine, was born in Spiddal, County Galway, Ireland in 1854. Barbara Curran had been born in the Aran Islands, in the town of Kilronan on the island of Inishmore (Inis Mór). John A. Feeney's grandmother, Barbara Morris, was said to be a member of a local (impoverished) gentry family, the Morrisises of Spiddal, headed at present by Lord Killanin

John Augustine and Barbara Curran arrived in Boston and Portland respectively within a few days of each other in May and June 1872. They were married in 1875, and became American citizens five years later on September 11, 1880. They had eleven children: Mamie (Mary Agnes), born 1876; Delia (Edith), 1878–1881; Patrick; Francis Ford, 1881–1953; Bridget, 1883–1884; Barbara, born and died 1888; Edward, born 1889; Josephine, born 1891; Hannah (Joanna), born and died 1892; John Martin, 1894–1973; and Daniel, born and died 1896 (or 1898). John Augustine lived in the Munjoy Hill neighborhood of Portland, Maine with his family, and would try farming, fishing, working for the gas company, running a saloon, and being an alderman.

Feeney attended Portland High School, Portland, Maine. He moved to California and began acting and working in film production for his older brother Francis in 1914, taking "Jack Ford" as a stage name. In addition to credited roles, he appeared uncredited as a Klansman in D.W. Griffith

's 1915 classic,

The Birth of a Nation

, as the man who lifts up one side of his hood so he can see clearly. He married Mary McBryde Smith, on July 3, 1920, and they had two children. His daughter Barbara was married to singer and actor Ken Curtis from 1952 to 1964. The Ford marriage lasted until his death, although he had many extramarital relationships.

Directing career

John Ford began his career in film after moving to California in July 1914. He followed in the footsteps of his multi-talented older brother Francis Ford, twelve years his senior, who had left home years earlier and had worked in vaudeville before becoming a movie actor. Francis

played in hundreds of silent pictures for Thomas Edison, Georges Melies and Thomas Ince, eventually progressing to become a prominent Hollywood actor-writer-director with his own production company (101 Bison) at Universal.

Jack Ford started out in his brother's films as an assistant, handyman, stuntman and occasional actor, frequently doubling for his brother, whom he closely resembled. Francis gave his younger brother his first acting role in *The Mysterious Rose* (November 1914). Despite an often combative relationship, within three years Jack had progressed to become Francis' chief assistant and often worked as his cameraman. By the time Jack Ford was given his first break as a director, Francis' profile was declining and he ceased working as a director soon afterward.

One notable feature of John Ford's films is that he used a 'stock company' of actors, far more so than many directors. Many famous stars appeared in at least two or more Ford films, including Harry Carey, Sr., (the star of 25 Ford silents), Will Rogers, John Wayne, Henry Fonda, Maureen O'Hara, James Stewart, Woody Strode, Richard Widmark, Victor McLaglen, Vera Miles and Jeffrey Hunter. Many of his supporting actors appeared in multiple Ford films, often over a period of several decades, including Ben Johnson, Chill Wills, Andy Devine, Ward Bond, Grant Withers, Mae Marsh, Anna Lee, Harry Carey, Jr., Ken Curtis, Frank Baker, Dolores del Río, Pedro Armendariz, Hank Worden, John Qualen, Barry Fitzgerald, Arthur Shields, John Carradine, O.Z. Whitehead and Carleton Young. Core members of this extended 'troupe', including Ward Bond, John Carradine, Harry Carey, Jr., Mae Marsh, Frank Baker and Ben Johnson, were informally known as the John Ford Stock Company.

Likewise, Ford enjoyed extended working relationships with his production team, and many of his crew worked with him for decades. He made numerous films with the same major collaborators, including producer and business partner Merian C. Cooper, scriptwriters Nunnally Johnson, Dudley Nichols and Frank S. Nugent, and cinematographers Ben F. Reynolds, John W. Brown, and George Schneiderman (who between them shot most of Ford's silent films), Joseph H. August, Gregg Toland, Winton Hoch, Charles Lawton Jr., Bert Glennon, Archie Stout and William H. Clothier.

Silent era

During his first decade as a director Ford honed his craft on dozens of features (including many westerns) but fewer than a dozen of the more than sixty silent films he made between 1917 and 1928 still exist in any form and only ten have survived in their entirety. However prints of several Ford 'silents' previously thought lost have been rediscovered in foreign film archives over recent years—in 2009 a trove of 75 Hollywood silent films was rediscovered in the New Zealand Film Archive, among which was the only surviving print of Ford's 1927 silent comedy *Upstream*.

Throughout his career Ford was one of the busiest directors in Hollywood, but he was extraordinarily productive in his first few years as a director—he made ten films in 1917, eight in 1918 and fifteen in 1919—and he directed a total of 62 shorts and features between 1917 and 1928, although he was not given a screen credit on most of his earliest films.

There is some uncertainty about the identity of Ford's first film as director—film writer Ephraim Katz notes that Ford might have directed the four-part film *Lucille the Waitress* as early as 1914—but most sources cite his directorial debut as the silent two-reeler

The Tornado

, released in March 1917. According to Ford's own story, he was given the job by Universal boss Carl Laemmle who supposedly said, "Give Jack Ford the job—he yells good".

The Tornado

was quickly followed by a string of two-reeler and three-reeler "quickies" -

The Trail of Hate

,
The Scrapper

,
The Soul Herder

and

Cheyenne's Pal

; these were made over the space of a few months and each typically shot in just two or three days; all are now presumed lost.

The Soul Herder

is also notable as the beginning of Ford's four-year, 25-film association with veteran writer-actor

Harry Carey

, who (with Ford's brother Francis) was a strong early influence on the young director, as well as being one of the major influences on the screen persona of Ford's protege John Wayne.

Carey's son Harry "Dobe" Carey Jr, who also became an actor, was one of Ford's closest friends in later years and featured in many of his most celebrated westerns.

Ford's first feature-length production was *Straight Shooting* (August 1917), which is also his earliest complete surviving film as director, and one of only two survivors from his twenty-five film collaboration with Harry Carey. In making the film Ford and Carey ignored studio orders and turned in five reels instead of two, and it was only through the intervention of Carl Laemmle that the film escaped being cut for its first release, although it was subsequently edited down to two reels for re-release in the late 1920s. Ford's last film of 1917, *Bucking Broadway*, was long thought to have been lost, but in 2002 the only known surviving print was discovered in the archives of the French National Center for Cinematography and it has since been restored and digitized.

Ford directed around thirty-six films over three years for Universal before moving to the William Fox studio in 1920; his first film for them was *Just Pals* (1920). His 1923 feature *Cameo Kirby*, starring screen idol John Gilbert—another of the few surviving Ford silents—marked his first directing credit under the name "John Ford", rather than "Jack Ford", as he had previously been credited.

Ford's first major success as a director was the historical drama *The Iron Horse* (1924), an epic account of the building of the First Transcontinental Railroad. It was a large, long and difficult production, filmed on location in the Sierra Nevada. The logistics were enormous—two entire towns were constructed, there were 5000 extras, 100 cooks, 2000 rail layers, a cavalry regiment, 800 Indians, 1300 buffalo, 2000 horses, 10,000 cattle and 50,000 properties, including the original stagecoach used by Horace Greeley, Wild Bill Hickok's derringer pistol and replicas of the "Jupiter" and "119" locomotives that met at Promontory Point when the two ends of the line were joined on 10 May 1869.

Ford's brother Eddie was a crew member and they fought constantly; on one occasion Eddie reportedly "went after the old man with a pick handle". There was only a short synopsis written when filming began and Ford wrote and shot the film day by day. Production fell behind schedule, delayed by constant bad weather and the intense cold, and Fox executives repeatedly demanded results, but Ford would either tear up the telegrams or hold them up and have stunt gunman Edward "Pardner" Jones shoot holes through the sender's name. Despite the pressure to halt the production, studio boss William Fox finally backed Ford and allowed him to finish the picture and his gamble paid off handsomely—

The Iron Horse

became one of the top-grossing films of the decade, taking over US\$2 million worldwide, against a budget of \$280,000.

Ford made a wide range of films in this period, and he became well-known for his Western and 'frontier' pictures, but the genre rapidly lost its appeal for major studios in the late 1920s. Ford's last silent Western was *3 Bad Men* (1926), set during the Dakota land rush and filmed at Jackson Hole, Wyoming and in the Mojave Desert. It would be thirteen years before he made his next Western, *Stagecoach*, in 1939.

During the 1920s, Ford also served as president of the Motion Picture Directors Association, a forerunner to today's Directors Guild of America.

Talkies - 1928-1939

Ford was one of the pioneer directors of sound films; he shot Fox's first song sung on screen, for his film *Mother Machree* (1928) of which only three of the original seven reels survive; this film is also notable as the first Ford film to feature the young John Wayne (as an uncredited extra) and he appeared in Ford's next two movies. Ford also directed Fox's first all-talking dramatic feature *Napoleon's Barber* (1928), a 3-reeler which is also now lost.

Just before the studio converted to talkies, Fox gave a contract to the German director F. W. Murnau, and his film *Sunrise* (1927), still highly regarded by critics, had a powerful effect on Ford. Murnau's influence can be seen in many of Ford's films of the late 1920s and early 1930s — his penultimate silent feature *Four Sons* (1928), starring Victor McLaglen, was filmed on some of the lavish sets left over from Murnau's production. Ford's last silent feature *Hangman's House* (1928) is notable as one of the first credited screen appearances by John Wayne.

Napoleon's Barber was followed by *Riley the Cop* (1928) and *Strong Boy* (1929), starring Victor McLaglen, both of which are now lost (although Tag Gallagher's book records that the only surviving copy of *Strong Boy*, a 35 mm nitrate print, was rumored to be held in a private collection in Australia). *The Black Watch* (1929), a colonial army adventure set in the Khyber Pass starring Victor McLaglen and Myrna Loy is Ford's first complete surviving talking picture; it was remade in 1954 by Henry King as *King of the Khyber Rifles*.

Ford's output was fairly constant from 1928 to the start of World War II; he made five features in 1928 and then made either two or three films every year from 1929-1942 inclusive. Three films were released in 1929 -- *Strong Boy*, *The Black Watch* and *Salute*. His three films of 1930 were
Men Without Women, *Born*

Reckless

and

Up the River

, which is notable as the debut film for both Spencer Tracy and Humphrey Bogart, who were both signed to Fox on Ford's recommendation (but subsequently dropped). Ford's films in 1931 were

Seas Beneath

,

The Brat

and

Arrowsmith

; the last-named, adapted from the Sinclair Lewis novel and starring Ronald Colman and Helen Hayes, marked Ford's first

Academy Awards

recognition, with five nominations including Best Picture.

Ford's legendary efficiency and his ability to craft films combining artfulness with strong commercial appeal won him increasing renown and by 1940 he was acknowledged as one of the world's foremost movie directors. His growing prestige was reflected in his remuneration—in 1920, when he moved to Fox, he was being paid \$300–600 per week, but as his career took off in the mid-Twenties his annual income significantly increased. He earned nearly \$134,000 in 1929, and he made over \$100,000 per annum *every year* from 1934 to 1941, earning a staggering \$220,068 in 1938 - more than double the salary of the U.S. President at that time (although this was still less than half the income of Carole Lombard, Hollywood's highest-paid star of the 1930s, who was earning around \$500,000 per year at the time).

With film production affected by the Depression, Ford made two films each in 1932 and 1933 -

Airmail

(made for Universal) with a young Ralph Bellamy and

Flesh

(for MGM) with Wallace Beery. In 1933, he returned to Fox for

Pilgrimage

and

Doctor Bull

, the first of his three films with Will Rogers.

The World War I desert drama *The Lost Patrol* (1934), based on the book *Patrol* by Philip MacDonald, was a superior remake of the 1929 silent film *Lost Patrol*

. It starred Victor McLaglen as The Sergeant—the role played by his brother Cyril McLaglen in the earlier version—with Boris Karloff, Wallace Ford, Alan Hale and Reginald Denny (who went on to found a company that made radio-controlled target aircraft during World War II). It was one of Ford's first big hits of the sound era—it was rated by both the National Board of Review and

The New York Times

as one of the Top 10 films of that year and won an Oscar nomination for its stirring Max Steiner score. It was followed later that year by

The World Moves On

with Madeleine Carroll and Franchot Tone, and the highly successful

Judge Priest

, his second film with Will Rogers, which became one of the top-grossing movies of the year.

Ford's first film of 1935 (made for Columbia) was the mistaken-identity comedy *The Whole Town's Talking*

with Edward G. Robinson and Jean Arthur, released in the UK as

Passport to Fame

, and it drew critical praise.

Steamboat Round The Bend

was his third and final film with Will Rogers; it is probable they would have continued working together, but their collaboration was cut short by Rogers' untimely death in a plane crash in May 1935, which devastated Ford.

Ford confirmed his position in the top rank of American directors with the Murnau-influenced Irish Republican Army drama *The Informer* (1935), starring Victor McLaglen. It earned great critical praise, was nominated for Best Picture, won Ford his first Academy Award for Best Director, and was hailed at the time as one of the best films ever made, although its reputation has diminished considerably compared to other contenders like

Citizen Kane

, or Ford's own later

The Searchers

(1956).

The politically charged *The Prisoner of Shark Island* (1936) -- which marked the debut with Ford of long-serving "Stock Company" player John Carradine -- explored the little-known story of Samuel Mudd, a physician who was caught up in the

Abraham Lincoln assassination

conspiracy and consigned to an offshore prison for treating the injured John Wilkes Booth.

Other films of this period include the South Seas melodrama

The Hurricane

(1937) and the lighthearted Shirley Temple vehicle

Wee Willie Winkie

(1937), each of which had a first-year US gross of more than \$1 million. The longer revised version of

Directed by John Ford

shown on Turner Classic Movies in November, 2006 features directors Steven Spielberg, Clint Eastwood, and Martin Scorsese, who suggest that the string of classic films Ford directed

during 1936 to 1941 was due in part to an intense six-month extra-marital affair with Katharine Hepburn, the star of

Mary of Scotland

(1936), an Elizabethan costume drama.

1939-1941

Stagecoach (1939) was Ford's first western since *3 Bad Men* in 1926, and it was his first with sound. Reputedly Orson Welles watched

Stagecoach

forty times in preparation for making

Citizen Kane

. It remains one of the most admired and imitated of all Hollywood movies, not least for its climactic stagecoach chase and the hair-raising horse-jumping scene, performed by the stuntman Yakima Canutt.

The Dudley Nichols–Ben Hecht screenplay was based on an Ernest Haycox story that Ford had spotted in *Collier's* magazine and he purchased the screen rights for just \$2500. Production chief Walter Wanger urged Ford to hire Gary Cooper and Marlene Dietrich for the lead roles, but eventually accepted Ford's decision to cast Claire Trevor as Dallas and a virtual unknown, his friend John Wayne, as Ringo; Wanger reportedly had little further influence over the production.

In making *Stagecoach* Ford faced entrenched industry prejudice about the now-hackneyed genre which, ironically, he had helped to make so popular. Although low-budget western features and serials were still being churned out in large numbers by 'Poverty Row' studios, the genre had fallen out of favor with the big studios during the 1930s and they were regarded as B-grade 'pulp' movies at best. As a result, Ford shopped the project around Hollywood for almost a year, offering it unsuccessfully to both Joseph Kennedy and David O. Selznick before finally linking with Walter Wanger, an independent producer working through United Artists.

Stagecoach is significant for several reasons—it exploded industry prejudices by becoming both a critical and commercial hit, grossing over US\$1 million in its first year (against a budget of just under \$400,000), and its success singlehandedly revitalized the moribund genre, showing that Westerns could be "intelligent, artful, great entertainment -- and profitable". It was nominated for seven Academy Awards, including Best Picture and Best Director, and won two Oscars, for Best Supporting Actor (Thomas Mitchell) and Best Score. *Stagecoach* became the first in the series of seven classic Ford Westerns filmed on location in Monument Valley.

John Wayne had good reason to be grateful for Ford's support, *Stagecoach* provided the actor with the career breakthrough that elevated him to international stardom. Over 35 years Wayne appeared in twenty-four of Ford's films (and three TV episodes). Ford is credited with playing a major role in shaping Wayne's screen image.

Stagecoach marked the beginning of the most consistently successful phase of Ford's career—in just two years between 1939 and 1941 he created a string of classics films that won numerous Academy Awards. Ford's next film, the biopic *Young Mr Lincoln* (1939) starring Henry Fonda, was less successful than *Stagecoach*, attracting little critical attention and winning no awards. It was not a major box-office hit although it had a respectable domestic first year gross of \$750,000, but Ford scholar Tag Gallagher describes it as "a deeper, more multi-leveled work than *Stagecoach* (which) seems in retrospect one of the finest prewar pictures".

Drums Along the Mohawk (1939) was a lavish frontier drama co-starring Henry Fonda and Claudette Colbert; it was also Ford's first movie in color and included uncredited script contributions by William Faulkner. It was a big box-office success, grossing \$1.25 million in its first year in the US and earning Edna May Oliver a Best Supporting Actress Oscar nomination for her performance.

Despite its uncompromising communist political stance, Ford's screen adaptation of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (scripted by Nunnally Johnson and photographed by Gregg Toland) was both a big box office hit and a major critical success, and it is still widely regarded as one of the best Hollywood films of the era. Noted critic Andrew Sarris described it as the movie that transformed Ford from "a storyteller of the

screen into America's cinematic poet laureate". Ford's third movie in a year and his third consecutive film with Fonda, it grossed \$1.1 million in the USA in its first year and won two Academy Awards—Ford's second 'Best Director' Oscar, and 'Best Supporting Actress' for Jane Darwell's tour-de-force portrayal of Ma Joad.

The Grapes of Wrath was followed by two less successful and lesser known films. *The Long Voyage Home*

(1940) was, like

Stagecoach

, made with Walter Wanger through United Artists. Adapted from four plays by Eugene O'Neill, it was scripted by Dudley Nichols and Ford, in consultation with O'Neill himself. Although not a significant box-office success (it grossed only \$600,000 in its first year) it was critically praised and was nominated for seven Academy Awards—Best Picture, Best Screenplay, (Nichols), Best Music (Best Photography (Gregg Toland), Best Editing (Sherman Todd), Best Effects (Ray Binger & R.T. Layton), and Best Sound (Robert Parrish). It was one of Ford's personal favorites; stills from it decorated his home and O'Neill also reportedly loved the film and screened it periodically.

Tobacco Road (1941) was a rural comedy scripted by Nunnally Johnson, adapted from the long-running Jack Kirkland stage version of the novel by Erskine Caldwell. It starred veteran actor Charley Grapewin and the supporting cast included Ford regulars Ward Bond and Mae Marsh, with Francis Ford in an uncredited bit part; it is also notable for early screen appearances by future stars Gene Tierney and Dana Andrews. Although not highly regarded by some critics (Tag Gallagher devotes only one short paragraph to it in his book on Ford) it was fairly successful at the box office, grossing \$900,000 in its first year. According to IMDb, the film was banned in Australia for unspecified reasons.

Ford's last feature before America entered World War II was his screen adaptation of *How Green Was My Valley*

(1941), starring Walter Pidgeon, Maureen O'Hara and Roddy McDowell

in his career-making role as Huw. The script was written by Philip Dunne from the best-selling novel by Robert Llewellyn. It was originally planned as a four-hour epic to rival

Gone With The Wind

-- the screen rights alone cost Fox \$300,000—and was to have been filmed on location in Wales, but this was abandoned due to the heavy German bombing of Britain, so it was shot at Fox's San Fernando Valley ranch instead; another reported factor was the nervousness of Fox executives about the pro-union tone of the story. William Wyler was originally engaged to direct, but he left the project when Fox decided to film it in California; Ford was hired in his place and production was postponed for several months until he became available. Producer Darryl F.

Zanuck had a strong influence over the movie and made several key decisions, including the idea of having the character of Huw narrate the film in voice-over (then a novel concept), and the decision that Huw's character should not age (Tyrone Power was originally slated to play the adult Huw).

How Green Was My Valley became one of the biggest films of 1940. It was nominated for ten Academy Awards including Best Supporting Actress (Sara Allgood), Best Editing, Best Script, Best Music and Best Sound and it won five Oscars—Best Director, Best Picture, Best Supporting Actor (Donald Crisp), Best B&W Cinematography (Arthur C. Miller) and Best Art Direction/Interior Decoration. It was a huge hit with audiences, coming in behind *Sergeant York* as the second-highest grossing film of the year in the USA and taking almost \$3 million against its sizable budget of \$1,250,000. Ford was also named Best Director by the New York Film Critics, and this was one of the few awards of his career that he collected in person (he generally shunned the Oscar ceremony).

War years

During World War II, Commander John Ford, USNR, served in the United States Navy and made documentaries for the Navy Department. He won two more Academy Awards during this time, one for the semi-documentary *The Battle of Midway* (1942), and a second for the propaganda film *December 7th* (1943). Commander Ford was a veteran of the Battle of Midway, he received enemy fire while filming the Japanese attack from Sand Island's power plant, Ford was wounded in the arm by shrapnel.

Ford was present on Omaha Beach on D-Day. As head of the photographic unit for the Office of Strategic Services, he crossed the English Channel on the USS *Plunkett* (DD-431), anchored off Omaha Beach at 0600. He observed the first wave land on the beach from the ship, landing on the beach himself later with a team of US Coast Guard cameramen who filmed the battle from behind the beach obstacles, with Ford directing operations. The film was edited in London, but very little was released to the public. Ford explained in a 1964 interview that the US Government was "afraid to show so many American casualties on the screen", adding that all of the D-Day film "still exists in color in storage in Anacostia near Washington, D.C." Thirty years later, historian Stephen E. Ambrose reported that the Eisenhower Center had been unable to find the film. Ford eventually rose to become a top adviser to OSS head

William Joseph Donovan. According to records released in 2008, Ford was cited by his superiors for bravery, taking a position to film one mission that was "an obvious and clear target". He survived "continuous attack and was wounded" while he continued filming, one commendation in his file states.

Post-war career

After the war, Ford became a Rear Admiral in the United States Navy Reserve. His last wartime film was *They Were Expendable* (MGM, 1945), an account of America's disastrous defeat in The Philippines, told from the viewpoint of a PT boat squadron and its commander. Ford repeatedly declared that he disliked the film and had never watched it, complaining that he had been forced to make it, although it was strongly championed by filmmaker Lindsay Anderson. Released several months after the end of the war, it was among the year's top 20 box-office draws, although Tag Gallagher notes that many critics have incorrectly claimed that it lost money.

Ford directed sixteen features and several documentaries in the decade between 1946 and 1956. As with his prewar career, his films alternated between (relative) box office flops and major successes, but most of his later films made a solid profit, and *Fort Apache*, *The Quiet Man*, *Mogambo*, *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, *The Searchers*, and *360°* all ranked in the Top 20 box-office hits of their respective years.

Ford's first postwar movie *My Darling Clementine* (Fox, 1946) was a romanticized retelling of the primal Western legend of Wyatt Earp and the Gunfight at the O.K. Corral, with exterior sequences filmed on location in the visually spectacular (but geographically inappropriate) Monument Valley. It reunited Ford with Henry Fonda (as Earp) and co-starred Victor Mature in one of his best roles as the consumptive, Shakespeare-loving Doc Holliday, with Ward Bond and Tim Holt as the Earp brothers, Linda Darnell as sultry saloon girl Chihuahua, a strong performance by Walter Brennan (in a rare villainous role) as the venomous Old Man Clanton, with Jane Darwell and an early screen appearance by John Ireland as Billy Clanton. In contrast to the string of successes in 1939-41, it won no major American awards, although it was awarded a silver ribbon for Best Foreign Film in 1948 by the Italian National Syndicate of Film Journalists, and it was a solid financial success, grossing \$2.75 million in the USA and \$1.75 million internationally in its first year of release.

The Argosy years

Refusing a lucrative contract offered by Zanuck at 20th Century Fox that would have guaranteed him \$600,000 per year, Ford launched himself as an independent director-producer and made many of his films in this period with Argosy Productions, a partnership between Ford and his old friend and colleague Merian C. Cooper, originally founded after the success of *Stagecoach*

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The Fugitive

(1946), again starring Fonda, was the first project of the Argosy Productions enterprise. It was a loose adaptation of

Grahame Greene

's

The Power and the Glory

, which Ford had originally intended to make at Fox before the war, with Thomas Mitchell as the priest. Filmed on location in Mexico, it was photographed by distinguished Mexican cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa (who later worked with Luis Buñuel). The supporting cast included

Dolores Del Rio

,
J. Carroll Naish

, Ward Bond,

Leo Carillo

and Mel Ferrer (making his screen debut) and a cast of mainly Mexican extras. Ford reportedly considered this his best film but it fared relatively poorly compared to its predecessor, grossing only \$750,000 in its first year. It also caused a rift between Ford and scriptwriter Dudley Nichols that brought about the end of their highly successful collaboration. Greene himself had a particular dislike of this adaptation of his work.

Fort Apache (Argosy/RKO, 1948) was the first part of Ford's so-called 'Cavalry Trilogy', all of which were based on stories by James Warner Bellah. It featured many of his 'Stock Company' of actors, including John Wayne, Henry Fonda, Ward Bond, Victor McLaglen, Mae Marsh, Francis Ford (as a bartender), Frank Baker, Ben Johnson and also featured Shirley Temple, in her final appearance for Ford and one of her last film appearances. It also marked the start of the long association between Ford and scriptwriter Frank S. Nugent, a former *New York Times*

film critic who (like Dudley Nichols) had not written a movie script until hired by Ford. It was a big commercial success, grossing nearly \$5 million worldwide in its first year and ranking in the Top 20 box office hits of 1948.

During the year Ford also assisted his friend and colleague Howard Hawks, who was having problems with his current film *Red River* (which starred John Wayne) and Ford reportedly made numerous editing suggestions, including the use of a narrator.

Fort Apache

was followed by another Western,

3 Godfathers

, a remake of a 1916 silent film starring Harry Carey (to whom Ford's version was dedicated), which Ford had himself already remade in 1919 as

Marked Men

, also with Carey and thought lost. It starred John Wayne, Pedro Armendáriz and Harry "Dobe" Carey Jr (in one of his first major roles) as three outlaws who rescue a baby after his mother (Mildred Natwick) dies giving birth, with Ward Bond as the sheriff pursuing them.

In 1949 Ford briefly returned to Fox to direct *Pinky*. He prepared the project but worked only one day before being taken ill, supposedly with shingles

, and Elia Kazan replaced him (although Tag Gallagher suggests that Ford's illness was a pretext for leaving the film, which Ford disliked).

His only completed film of that year was the second installment of his Cavalry Trilogy, *She Wore A Yellow Ribbon*

(Argosy/RKO, 1949), starring John Wayne and Joanne Dru, with Victor McLaglen, John Agar, Ben Johnson, Mildred Natwick and Harry Carey Jr. Again filmed on location in Monument Valley, it was widely acclaimed for its stunning Technicolor cinematography (including the famous cavalry scene filmed in front of an oncoming storm); it won Winton Hoch the 1950 Academy Award for Best Color Cinematography and it did big business on its first release, grossing more than \$5m worldwide. John Wayne, then 41, also received wide praise for his role as the 60-year-old Capt. Nathan Brittles.

1950s

Ford's first film of 1950 was the offbeat military comedy *When Willie Comes Marching Home*, starring Dan Dailey and Corinne Calvet, with William Demarest, from Preston Sturges 'stock company', and early (uncredited) screen appearances by

Alan Hale Jr

and Vera Miles. It was followed by

Wagon Master

, starring Ben Johnson and Harry Carey Jr, which is particularly noteworthy as the only Ford film since 1930 that he scripted himself. It was subsequently adapted into the long-running TV series

Wagon Train

(with Ward Bond reprising the title role until his sudden death in 1960). Although it did far smaller business than most of his other films in this period, Ford cited

Wagon Master

his personal favorite of all his films, telling Peter Bogdanovich that it "came closest to what I had

hoped to achieve".

Rio Grande (Republic, 1950), the third part of the 'Cavalry Trilogy', co-starred John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara, with Wayne's son Patrick Wayne making his screen debut (he appeared in several subsequent Ford pictures including *The Searchers*). It was made at the insistence of Republic Pictures who demanded a profitable Western as the condition of backing Ford's next project, *The Quiet Man*

. A testament to Ford's legendary efficiency, *Rio Grande*

was shot in just 32 days, with only 352 takes from 335 camera setups, and it was a solid success, grossing \$2.25m in its first year.

Republic's anxiety was erased by the resounding success of *The Quiet Man* (Republic, 1952), a pet project which Ford had wanted to make since the 1930s (and almost did so in 1937 with an independent cooperative called Renowned Artists Company). It became his biggest grossing picture to date, taking nearly \$4 million in the USA alone in its first year and ranking in the top 10 box office films of its year. It was nominated for seven Academy Awards and won Ford his fourth Oscar for Best Director, as well a second Best Cinematography Oscar for Winton Hoch. It was followed by

What Price Glory?

(1952), a World War I drama, the first of two films Ford made with James Cagney (*Mister Roberts*

was the other) which also did good business at the box office (\$2m).

The Sun Shines Bright (1953), Ford's first entry in the Cannes Film Festival, was a western comedy-drama with Charles Winninger reviving the Judge Priest role made famous by Will Rogers in the 1930s. Ford later referred to it as one of his favorites, but it was poorly received, and was drastically cut (from 90 mins to 65 mins) by Republic soon after its release, with some excised scenes now presumed lost. It fared poorly at the box office and its failure contributed to the subsequent collapse of Argosy Pictures.

Ford's next film was the romance-adventure *Mogambo* (MGM, 1953), a loose remake of the celebrated 1932 film *Red Dust*. Filmed on location in Africa, it was photographed by British cinematographer Freddie Young and starred Ford's old friend Clark Gable, with Ava Gardner, Grace Kelly (who replaced an ailing Gene Tierney) and Donald Sinden. Although the production was difficult (exacerbated by the irritating presence of Gardner's then husband Frank Sinatra),

Mogamabo

became one of the biggest commercial hits of Ford's career, with the highest domestic first-year gross of any of his films (\$5.2m); it also revitalized Gable's waning career and earned Best Actress and Best Supporting Actress Oscar nominations for Gardner and Kelly (who was rumored to have had a brief affair with Gable during the making of the film).

In 1955, Ford made the lesser-known West Point drama *The Long Gray Line* for Columbia Pictures, the first of two Ford films to feature Tyrone Power, who had originally been slated to star as the adult Huw in

How Green Was My Valley

back in 1941. Later in 1955 Ford was hired by Warner Bros to direct the Naval comedy *Mister Roberts*

, starring Henry Fonda, Jack Lemmon, William Powell, and James Cagney, but there was conflict between Ford and Fonda, who had been playing the lead role on Broadway for the past seven years and had misgivings about Ford's direction. During a three-way meeting with producer Leland Hayward to try and iron out the problems, Ford became enraged and punched Fonda on the jaw, knocking him across the room, an action that created a lasting rift between them. After the incident Ford became increasingly morose, drinking heavily and eventually retreating to the

Araner

and refusing to eat or see anyone. Production was shut down for five days and Ford sobered up, but soon after he suffered a ruptured gallbladder, necessitating emergency surgery, and he was replaced by Mervyn LeRoy.

Ford also made his first forays into television in 1955, directing two half-hour dramas for network TV. In the summer of 1955 he made *Rookie of the Year* (Hal Roach Studios) for the TV series *Studio Directors*

Playhouse

; scripted by Frank S. Nugent, it featured Ford regulars John and Pat Wayne, Vera Miles and Ward Bond, with Ford himself appearing in the introduction. In November he made

The Bamboo Cross

(Lewman Ltd-Revue, 1955) for the *Fireside Theatre*

series; it starred Jane Wyman with an Asian-American cast and Stock Company veterans Frank Baker and Pat O'Malley in minor roles.

Ford returned to the big screen with *The Searchers* (Warner Bros, 1956), the only Western he made between 1950 and 1959, which is now widely regarded as not only one of his best films, but also regarded by many as the greatest western ever made, and one of the best performances of John Wayne's career. Shot on location in Monument Valley, it tells of the

embittered Civil War veteran Ethan Edwards who spends years tracking down his niece, kidnapped by Comanches as a young girl. The supporting cast included Jeffrey Hunter, Ward Bond, Vera Miles and rising star Natalie Wood (Hunter's first film for Ford). It was very successful upon its first release and became one of the top 20 films of the year, grossing \$4.45m, although it received no Academy Award nominations. However its reputation has grown greatly over the intervening years—it was named the Greatest Western of all time by the American Film Institute in 2008 and also placed 12th on the Institute's 2007 list of the Top 100 greatest movies of all time.

The Searchers

has exerted a wide influence on film and popular culture—it has inspired (and been directly quoted by) many filmmakers including David Lean and George Lucas, Wayne's character's catchphrase "That'll be the day" inspired Buddy Holly to pen his famous hit song of the same name, and the British pop group The Searchers also took their name from the film.

The Searchers was accompanied by one of the first "making of" documentaries, a four-part promotional program created for the "Behind the Camera" segment of the weekly

Warner Brothers Presents

TV show, (the studio's first foray into TV) which aired on the ABC network in 1955-56.

Presented by Gig Young, the four segments included interviews with Jeffrey Hunter and Natalie Wood and behind-the-scenes footage shot during the making of the film.

The Wings of Eagles (MGM, 1957) was a fictionalized biography of Ford's old friend, aviator-turned-scriptwriter Frank "Spig" Wead, who had scripted several of Ford's early sound films. It starred John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara, with Ward Bond as John Dodge (a character based on Ford himself). It was followed by one of Ford's least known films,

The Growler Story

, a 29-minute dramatized documentary about the

USS Growler

. Made for the US Navy and filmed by the Pacific Fleet Command Combat Camera Group, it featured Ward Bond and Ken Curtis alongside real Navy personnel and their families.

Ford's next two films stand somewhat apart from the rest of his films in terms of production, and he notably took no salary for either job. *The Rising of the Moon* (Warner Bros, 1957) was a three-part 'omnibus' movie shot on location in Ireland and based on Irish short stories. It was made by Four Province Productions, a company established by British tycoon Lord Killanin

, who had recently become Chair of the International Olympic Committee, and to whom Ford was distantly related. Killanin was also the actual (but uncredited) producer of

The Quiet Man

. The film failed to recoup its costs, earning less than half (\$100k) its negative cost of just over

\$256,000 and it stirred up some controversy in Ireland.

Both of Ford's 1958 films were made for Columbia Pictures and both were significant departures from Ford's norm. *Gideon's Day* (titled *Gideon of Scotland Yard* in the USA) was adapted from the novel by British writer John Creasey. It is Ford's only police genre film, and one of the few Ford films set in the present day of the 1950s. It was shot in England with a British cast headed by Jack Hawkins, whom Ford (unusually) lauded as "the finest dramatic actor with whom I have worked". It was poorly promoted by Columbia, who only distributed it in B&W, although it was shot in color, and it too failed to make a profit in its first year, earning only \$400,000 against its budget of \$453,000.

The Last Hurrah, (Columbia, 1958), again set in present day of the '50s, starred Spencer Tracy, who had made his first film appearance in Ford's *Up The River* in 1930. Tracy plays an aging politician fighting his last campaign, with Jeffrey Hunter as his son. Katharine Hepburn reportedly facilitated a rapprochement between the two men, ending a long-running feud, and she convinced Tracy to take the lead role, which had originally been offered to Orson Welles (but was turned down by Welles' agent without his knowledge, much to his chagrin). It did considerably better business than either of Ford's two preceding films, grossing \$950,000 in its first year although cast member Anna Lee stated that Ford was "disappointed with the picture" and that Columbia had not permitted him to supervise the editing.

Korea: Battleground for Liberty (1959), Ford's second documentary on the Korean War, was made for the U.S. Department of Defense as an orientation film for US soldiers stationed there. It was followed by his next feature, *The Horse Soldiers* (Mirisch Company-United Artists, 1959), a Civil War story starring John Wayne and William Holden. Although Ford professed unhappiness with the project, it was a commercial success, ranking in the year's Top 20 box-office hits, grossing \$3.6m in its first year, and earning Ford his highest-ever fee -- \$375,000, plus 10% of the gross.

Last years, 1960-1973

In his last years Ford was dogged by declining health, largely the result of decades of heavy drinking and smoking, and exacerbated by the wounds he suffered during the Battle of Midway. His vision in particular began to deteriorate rapidly and at one point he briefly lost his sight entirely; his prodigious memory also began to falter, making it necessary to rely more and more on assistants. His work was also restricted by the new regime in Hollywood, and he found it hard to get many projects made — by the 1960s he had been pigeonholed as a Western director and complained that he now found it almost impossible to get backing for projects in

other genres.

Sergeant Rutledge, (Ford Productions-Warner Bros, 1960) was Ford's last cavalry film. Set in the 1880s it tells the story of an African-American cavalryman (played by Woody Strode) who is wrongfully accused of raping and murdering a white girl. It was erroneously marketed as a suspense film by Warners and was not a commercial success. During the year Ford made his third TV production, *The Colter Craven Story*, a one-hour episode of the network TV show *Wagon Train*, which included footage from Ford's *Wagon Master* (on which the series was based). He also visited the set of *The Alamo*, produced, directed by and starring John Wayne, where his interference caused Wayne to send him out to film second-unit scenes which were never used (nor intended to be used) in the film.

Two Rode Together (Ford Productions-Columbia, 1961) co-starred James Stewart and Richard Widmark, with Shirley Jones and Stock Company regulars Andy Devine, Henry Brandon, Harry Carey Jr, Anna Lee, Woody Strode, Mae Marsh and Frank Baker, with an early screen appearance by Linda Cristal, who went on to star in the Western TV series *The High Chaparral*. It was a fair commercial success, grossing \$1.6m in its first year.

The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance (Ford Productions-Paramount, 1962) is frequently cited as the last great film of Ford's career. It co-starred John Wayne and James Stewart, with Vera Miles, Edmund O'Brien, Andy Devine as the inept marshal, Denver Pyle, John Carradine and Lee Marvin in one of his first major roles as the brutal Valance, with Lee Van Cleef and Strother Martin as his henchmen. It is also notable as the film in which Wayne first used his trademark phrase "Pilgrim" (his nickname for James Stewart's character). It was very successful, grossing over \$3m in its first year, although the lead casting stretched credibility—the characters played by Stewart (then 53) and Wayne (then 54) were meant to be in their early 20s, and Ford reportedly considered casting a younger actor in Stewart's role but feared it would highlight Wayne's age. Budget constraints meant that most of the film was shot on sets on the Paramount lot, although it was still one of Ford's most expensive films at US\$3.2 million.

After completing *Liberty Valance*, Ford was hired to direct the Civil War section of MGM's epic *How The West Was Won*

, the first non-documentary film to use the Cinerama wide-screen process. Ford's segment featured George Peppard, with Andy Devine, Russ Tamblyn, Harry Morgan as Ulysses S. Grant and John Wayne as William Tecumseh Sherman. Also in 1962, Ford directed his fourth and last TV production,

Flashing Spikes

, a baseball story made for the

Alcoa Premiere

series and starring James Stewart, Jack Warden, Patrick Wayne and Tige Andrews, with Harry Carey, Jr. and a lengthy surprise appearance by John Wayne, billed in the credits as "Michael Morris."

Donovan's Reef (Paramount, 1963) was Ford's last film with John Wayne. Filmed on location on the Hawaiian island of Kauai (doubling for a fictional island in French Polynesia), it was a morality play disguised as an action-comedy, which subtly but sharply engaged with issues of racial bigotry, corporate connivance, greed and American beliefs of societal superiority. The supporting cast included Elizabeth Allen, Lee Marvin, Jack Warden, Dorothy Lamour, and Cesar Romero. It was also Ford's last commercial success, grossing \$3.3m against a budget of \$2.6m.

Cheyenne Autumn (Warner Bros, 1964) was Ford's epic farewell to the West, which he publicly declared to be an elegy to the Native American. It was his last Western, his longest film and the most expensive movie of his career (\$4.2m), but it failed to recoup its costs at the box office and lost about \$1m on its first release. The all-star cast was headed by Richard Widmark, with Carroll Baker, Karl Malden, Dolores del Río, Ricardo Montalbán, Gilbert Roland, Sal Mineo, James Stewart as Wyatt Earp, Arthur Kennedy as Doc Holliday, Edward G. Robinson, Patrick Wayne, Elizabeth Allen, Mike Mazurki and many of Ford's faithful Stock Company, including John Carradine, Ken Curtis, Willis Bouchey, James Flavin, Danny Borzage,

Harry Carey Jr

, Chuck Hayward, Ben Johnson, Mae Marsh and Denver Pyle. William Clothier was nominated for a Best Cinematography Oscar and Gilbert Roland was nominated for a

Golden Globe

award for Best Supporting Actor for his performance as Cheyenne elder

Dull Knife

In 1965 Ford began work on *Young Cassidy* (MGM), a biographical drama based upon the life of Irish playwright Sean O'Casey, but he fell ill early in the production and was replaced by Jack Cardiff.

Ford's last completed feature film was *7 Women* (MGM, 1966), a drama about missionary women in China ca. 1935 trying to protect themselves from the advances of a barbaric Mongolian warlord. Anne Bancroft took over the lead role from Patricia Neal, who suffered a near-fatal stroke two days into shooting. The supporting cast included Margaret Leighton, Flora Robson, Sue Lyon, Mildred Dunnock, Anna Lee, Eddie Albert, Mike Mazurki and Woody Strode, with music by Elmer Bernstein. Unfortunately it was a commercial flop, grossing only about half of its \$2.3m budget. Unusually for Ford it was shot in continuity for the sake of the performances and he therefore exposed about four times as much film as he usually shot. Anna Lee recalled that Ford was "absolutely charming" to everyone, and that the only major blow-up came when Flora Robson complained that the sign on her dressing room door did not include her title ("Dame") and as a result Robson was "absolutely shredded" by Ford in front of the cast and crew.

Ford's next project, *The Miracle of Merriford* was scrapped by MGM less than a week before shooting was to have begun. His last completed work was

Chesty: A Tribute to a Legend

, a documentary on the most decorated U.S. Marine, General Lewis B. Puller, with narration by John Wayne, which was made in 1970 but not released until 1976, three years after Ford's death.

Ford's health deteriorated rapidly in the early 1970s; he suffered a broken hip in 1970 which put him in a wheelchair, and had to move from his Bel Air home to a single-level house in Palm Desert near Eisenhower Medical Center, where he was being treated for cancer. In October 1972 the Screen Directors Guild staged a tribute to Ford and in March 1973 the American Film Institute honored him with its first Lifetime Achievement Award at a ceremony which was telecast nationwide, with President Richard Nixon promoting Ford to full Admiral and presenting him with the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Ford died on 31 August 1973 at Palm Desert, California, and his funeral was held on 5 September at Hollywood's Church of the Blessed Sacrament. He was interred in Holy Cross Cemetery in Culver City, California.