

# Warren Mercer Oates (1928-1982)

By Jerry Long  
c.2025





Warren Oates



**FindAGrave.com bio by John "J-Cat" Griffith**

Actor. He was a popular performer, whose distinctive style brought him leading and supporting roles in over 120 films and TV shows. His first job was on television appearing on "Beat the Clock" in 1950. He soon was a regular on TV programs such as "Wanted: Dead or Alive," "The Rifleman," "Rawhide," "The Virginian," "East of Eden," and many more. For films, his credits include "The Rise and Fall of Legs Diamond" (1960), "Ride the High Country" (1962), "Major Dundee" (1965), "The Shooting" (1966), "In the Heat of the Night" (1967), "The Wild Bunch" (1969), "There Was a Crooked Man" (1970), "Two-Lane Blacktop" (1971), "The Hired Hand" (1971), "Badlands" (1973), "Dillinger" (1973), "The Thief Who Came to Dinner" (1973), "Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia" (1974), "Race with the Devil" (1975), "Sleeping Dogs" (1977), "The Brink's Job" (1978), "1941" (1979), "Stripes" (1981), "The Border" (1982), "Tough Enough" (1983) and "Blue Thunder" (1983). Oates frequently worked with directors Sam Peckinpah and Monte Hellman.



**I Didn't Know That!:**

**Kentucky's Ties to the Stage and Screen**

**Ward Harrison (Louisville, KY: Butler Books, 1994) p.78:**

Warren Oates was hailed as being "the new Humphrey Bogart," and was listed by Time magazine, during the 1970s, as "among the finest American actors." After becoming one of the hottest properties in Hollywood, with more than 40 films to his credit, Oates died of a massive heart attack on April 3, 1982. He is buried in Hollywood's Forest Lawn Cemetery.



## Biography on Wikipedia.org

Warren Mercer Oates (July 5, 1928 – April 3, 1982) was an American actor best known for his performances in several films directed by Sam Peckinpah, including *The Wild Bunch* (1969) and *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* (1974). Another of his most acclaimed performances was as officer Sam Wood in *In the Heat of the Night* (1967). Oates starred in numerous films during the early 1970s that have since achieved cult status, such as *The Hired Hand* (1971), *Two-Lane Blacktop* (1971), *Cockfighter* (1974) and *Race with the Devil* (1975). Oates also portrayed John Dillinger in the biopic *Dillinger* (1973) and as the supporting character U.S. Army Sergeant Hulka in the military comedy *Stripes* (1981). Another notable appearance was in the classic New Zealand film *Sleeping Dogs* (1977), in which he played the commander of the American forces in the country.

Warren Oates was born and reared in Depoy, a tiny rural community in Muhlenberg County, Kentucky, located just a few miles west of Greenville, the county seat. According to the federal census of 1940, he was the younger of two sons born to Sarah Alice (née Mercer) and Bayless Earle Oates, who owned a general store. His brother, Gordon, was five years his senior.[3] On his father's side, Warren was of English, Scottish, and Welsh ancestry. He attended Louisville Male High School in Louisville, Kentucky, until 1945, but did not graduate from that institution. He did, however, later earn a high-school equivalency diploma. After high school, he enlisted in the United States Marine Corps for two years (1946–1948), serving in its air wing as an aircraft mechanic and reaching the rank of corporal Oates became interested in theater while attending the University of Louisville, where in 1953, he starred in several plays produced by the school's Little Theater Company. Four years later, in New York City, he got an opportunity to star in a live production of the television series *Studio One*

Oates moved to Los Angeles, where in the 1950s, he began to establish himself in guest roles in weekly television Westerns, including *Wagon Train*, *Tombstone Territory*, *Buckskin*, *Rawhide*, *Trackdown*, *Tate*, *The Rebel*, *Wanted Dead or Alive*, *The Virginian*, *Have Gun – Will Travel*, *Lawman*, *The Big Valley*, *Bat Masterson*, and *Gunsmoke*.

In the episode "Subterranean City" (October 14, 1958) of the syndicated *Rescue 8*, Oates played a gang member, Pete, who is the nephew of series character Skip Johnson (Lang Jeffries). In the story line, rescuers Johnson and Wes Cameron (Jim Davis) search for a lost girl in the sewer tunnels and encounter three criminals hiding out underground. Pete soon breaks with his gang companions and joins the firemen Wes and Skip in locating the missing child.

In 1961, Oates guest-starred in the episode "Artie Moon" in NBC's *The Lawless Years* crime drama about the 1920s. In 1962, he appeared as Ves Painter in the short-lived ABC series *Stoney Burke*, co-starring Jack Lord, a program about rodeo contestants.

Oates also played in a number of guest roles on *The Twilight Zone* (in "The Purple Testament" and "The 7th Is Made Up of Phantoms" S5 E10 1963, in which he costarred with Randy Boone and Ron Foster), *The Outer Limits* ("The Mutant" [1964], *Combat!* ("The Pillbox" [1964]) and *Lost in Space* ("Welcome Stranger" [1965]). During the 1960s and 1970s, he guest-starred on such shows as *Twelve O'Clock High* ("The Hotshot" [1965]), *Lancer*, and *The Virginian*. While making a guest appearance on a segment of the Western television series *Dundee and the Culhane*, Oates managed to steal the show with his off-camera antics and bloopers that had

everyone on the set rolling. After a long day of filming, he headed over and set his footprints in concrete along with all the other stars who appeared at Apacheland Movie Ranch.

"There were 40 [Western] series, and I went from one to the other. I started out playing the third bad guy on a horse and worked my way up to the number-one bad guy," Oates once quipped. Oates did play the good guy once as Deke Bassop in the title role of the episode "The Bassops" on *Gunsmoke* in 1964.

Oates first met Peckinpah when he played a variety of guest roles in *The Rifleman* (1958–1963), a popular television series co-created and sometimes directed by Peckinpah. He also played a supporting role in Peckinpah's short-lived series *The Westerner* in 1960. The collaboration continued as he worked in Peckinpah's early films *Ride the High Country* (1962) and *Major Dundee* (1965) and resulted in two of his most famous film roles. In the 1969 Western classic *The Wild Bunch*, he portrayed Lyle Gorch, a long-time outlaw who chooses to die with his friends during the film's violent conclusion. According to his wife at the time, Teddy, Oates had the choice of starring in *Support Your Local Sheriff!*, to be filmed in Los Angeles, or *The Wild Bunch* in Mexico. "He had done *Return of the Seven* in Mexico; he got hepatitis, plus dysentery, but off he went again with Sam [Peckinpah]. He loved going on location. He loved the adventure of it. He had great admiration for Sam." In *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*, the dark 1974 action/tragedy also filmed in Mexico, Oates played the lead role of Bennie, a hard-drinking, down-on-his-luck musician and bartender hoping to make a final score. The character was reportedly based on Peckinpah. For authenticity, Oates wore the director's sunglasses while filming scenes of the production.

Although the Peckinpah film roles are his best-known, his most critically acclaimed role is GTO in Monte Hellman's 1971 cult classic *Two-Lane Blacktop*. The film, although a failure at the box office, is studied in film schools as a treasure of the 1970s, in large part due to Oates' performance. Film critic Leonard Maltin remarked that Oates' performance as GTO was as good as any he had seen and should have won the Oscar. Oates had a close relationship with Hellman, and worked with him on three other films: the western film *The Shooting* (1966), co-starring a young Jack Nicholson, *Cockfighter* (1974), and *China 9, Liberty 37* (1978), in which Peckinpah, who was also a friend of Hellman's, featured in a rare acting role. Oates' wife Teddy said, "Sam Peckinpah and Monte Hellman were the two directors with whom Warren would work anytime, anywhere."

In addition to Peckinpah and Hellman, Oates worked with several major directors of his era, including Leslie Stevens in the 1960 film *Private Property*, his first starring role; Norman Jewison in *In the Heat of the Night* (1967); Joseph L. Mankiewicz in *There Was a Crooked Man...* (1970); John Milius in *Dillinger* (1973); Terrence Malick in *Badlands* (1973); Philip Kaufman in *The White Dawn* (1974); William Friedkin in *The Brink's Job* (1978); and Steven Spielberg in *1941* (1979).

He appeared in the Sherman Brothers' musical version of *Tom Sawyer* (1973), as Muff Potter, the town drunk. He also starred in *The Rise and Fall of Legs Diamond* (1960), *Return of the Seven* (1966), *The Split* (1968), *The Thief Who Came to Dinner* (1973), *Drum* (1976), and played the title role in a 1971 crime drama, *Chandler*. Oates costarred three times with friend Peter Fonda in *The Hired Hand* (1971), *Race with the Devil* (1975), and *92 in the Shade* (1975).

Oates was cast in Roger Donaldson's 1977 New Zealand film *Sleeping Dogs* together with New Zealand actor Sam Neill. A political thriller with action film elements, *Sleeping Dogs* follows the lead character "Smith" (Neill) as New Zealand plunges into a police state, as a fascist government institutes martial law after industrial disputes flare into violence. Smith gets caught

between the special police and a growing resistance movement, and reluctantly becomes involved. Oates plays the role of Willoughby, commander of the American forces stationed in New Zealand and working with the New Zealand fascist government to find and subdue "rebels" (the resistance movement).

A year before his death, Oates costarred with Bill Murray in the 1981 military comedy *Stripes*. In the role of the drill sergeant, Sgt. Hulka, Oates played the straight man to Murray's comedic character. The film was a huge financial success, earning \$85 million at the box office. In 1982, he costarred opposite Jack Nicholson in director Tony Richardson's *The Border*.

In 1981, Oates also costarred as a fanatical Southern preacher-turned-Confederate officer in *The Blue and the Gray*, a CBS TV miniseries that aired in November 1982. His last two films were not released until 1983: *Blue Thunder* and *Tough Enough*, both filmed in late 1981. Both films are dedicated to him, along with Monte Hellman's 1988 film *Iguana*, which ends with the titles "For Warren".

Oates was ill with influenza in the weeks before his death on April 3, 1982, at the age of 53, he died of a heart attack while taking an afternoon nap at his home in Los Angeles, after having experienced chest pains and shortness of breath earlier that day. An autopsy determined that he had chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. After his funeral, in accordance with Oates' wishes, his body was cremated and his ashes were scattered at his ranch in Montana.

Oates has a dedicated cult following because of his performances in Peckinpah's studio films and television shows, Monte Hellman's independent works, his films with Peter Fonda, and in a number of B movies from the 1970s. During a screening of Hellman's *Two-Lane Blacktop*, Richard Linklater introduced the film, and gave 16 reasons why viewers should love it. The sixth was: "Because there was once a god who walked the Earth named Warren Oates."

The documentary film *Warren Oates: Across the Border* was produced by Tom Thurman in 1993 as a tribute to the actor's career.

Oates was the subject of a 2009 biography, *Warren Oates: A Wild Life*, written by Susan Compo.

#### Filmography – Films

1959	<i>Up Periscope</i>	as Seaman Kovacs
1959	<i>Yellowstone Kelly</i>	as Corporal
1960	<i>The Rise and Fall of Legs Diamond</i>	as Eddie Diamond
1960	<i>Private Property</i>	as 'Boots'
1962	<i>Ride the High Country</i>	as Henry Hammond
1962	<i>Hero's Island</i>	as Wayte Giddens
1964	<i>Mail Order Bride</i>	as Jacey
1965	<i>The Rounders</i>	as Harley Williams
1965	<i>Major Dundee</i>	as O.W. Hadley
1966	<i>The Shooting</i>	as Willett Gashade, Coigne Gashade
1966	<i>Return of the Seven</i>	as Colbeey
1967	<i>Welcome to Hard Times</i>	as Leo Jenksy
1967	<i>In the Heat of the Night</i>	as Sam Wood
1968	<i>The Split</i>	as Marty Gough
1969	<i>Smith!</i>	as Walter Charlie
1969	<i>Crooks and Coronets</i>	as Marty Miller, Also released as <i>Sophie's Place</i>
1969	<i>The Wild Bunch</i>	as Lyle Gorch

1969 Lanton Mills as Gunmank  
 1970 Barquero as Jake (Jacob) Remy, Gang Leader  
 1970 There Was a Crooked Man... as Floyd Moon  
 1971 Two-Lane Blacktop as G.T.O.; Nominated - National Society of Film Critics Award for Best Supporting Actor, Nominated - New York Film Critics Circle Award for Best Supporting Actor  
 1971 The Hired Hand as Arch Harris; Nominated - National Society of Film Critics Award for Best Supporting Actor, Nominated - New York Film Critics Circle Award for Best Supporting Actor  
 1971 Chandler as Chandler  
 1973 The Thief Who Came to Dinner as Dave Reilly  
 1973 Tom Sawyer as Muff Potter  
 1973 Kid Blue as Reese Ford  
 1973 Dillinger as John Dillinger  
 1973 Badlands as Mr. Sargis  
 1974 The White Dawn as Billy  
 1974 Cockfighter as Frank Mansfield  
 1974 Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia as Bennie  
 1975 Rancho Deluxe as Harmonica Player In Bar, Uncredited  
 1975 Race with the Devil as Frank Stewart  
 1975 92 in the Shade as Nichol Dance  
 1976 Dixie Dynamite as Mack  
 1976 Drum as Hammond Maxwell  
 1977 American Raspberry as Celebrity Sportsman; also released under the titles Prime Time, and Funny America  
 1977 Sleeping Dogs as Colonel Willoughby  
 1978 China 9, Liberty 37 as Matthew Sebanek  
 1978 The Brink's Job as 'Specs' O'Keefe  
 1979 1941 as Colonel 'Madman' Maddox  
 1981 Stripes as Sergeant Hulka  
 1982 The Border as 'Red'  
 1983 Blue Thunder as Captain Jack Braddock; released posthumously, filmed in 1981  
 1983 Tough Enough as James Neese; released posthumously, filmed in 1981

#### Television films

1968 Something for a Lonely Man as Angus Duren  
 1970 The Movie Murderer as Alfred Fisher  
 1971 The Reluctant Heroes of Hill 656 as Corporal Leroy Sprague  
 1977 The African Queen as Captain Charlie Allnut  
 1978 True Grit: A Further Adventure as Reuben J. 'Rooster' Cogburn  
 1979 And Baby Makes Six as Michael Kramer  
 1979 My Old Man as Frank Butler  
 1980 Baby Comes Home as Michael Kramer

#### Television

1956 The United States Steel Hour ("Operation Three R's") as Private Lear

1956 The Big Story ("Reunion") as Danny (Adult)  
 1957 Kraft Television Theatre ("Gun at a Fair One") as Milkman  
 1956–1958 Westinghouse Studio One as 2nd Card Player  
 1958–1967 Gunsmoke as Al Tresh / Chris Kelly / Deke Bassop / Speeler / Lafe / Tate Crocker / Billy 'Sweet Billy' Cathcart / Jep Galloway / Jed Hakes / Seth Pickett  
 1958–1961 Wanted Dead Or Alive as Jesse Cox / Billy Clegg / George Aswell / Clem Robinson; note: wrongly credited as "Warren Oats" as Jesse Cox in "Die by the Gun," Season 1, Episode 14, first aired 12/6/1958.  
 1958 Rescue 8 ("Subterranean City") as Pete  
 1958 The Adventures of Rin Tin Tin ("The Epidemic") as Deke  
 1958 Playhouse 90 ("Seven Against The Wall") as Ted Ryan  
 1958 Black Saddle ("Client: Steele") as Deputy Simms  
 1958–1960 Tombstone Territory as Joe Clinton / Bob Pickett / Vic Reel  
 1958–1960 Have Gun – Will Travel as John Bosworth / Harrison  
 1959 Buckskin ("Charlie, My Boy") as Charlie  
 1959 The Rough Riders ("The Rifle") as Frank Day  
 1959 Trackdown as 'Lute' Borden / Kelly Hooker / Deputy Norvil  
 1959 Wagon Train ("The Martha Barham Story") as Private Silas Carpenter  
 1959 The Rebel ("School Days") as Troy Armbruster  
 1959–1961 Bat Masterson as Sonny Parsons / 'Cat' Crail  
 1960 Hotel de Paree ("Hard Luck for Sundance") as Charlie Aiken  
 1960 Bronco ("Every Man a Hero") as Private Hurd Maple  
 1960–1965 Rawhide as Marco / Charlie 'Rabbit' Waters / Weed / Jesse Gufler  
 1960 Johnny Ringo ("Single Debt"), as Burt Scanlon  
 1960 Tate ("Before Sunup") as Cowpoke  
 1960 Wrangler ("Affair at the Trading Post") as Shep Martin  
 1960 Outlaws ("Thirty a Month") as Bill Hooton  
 1960 The Westerner ("Jeff") as Drunk  
 1960 Lawman ("The Second Son") as Al May  
 1960 Hawaiian Eye ("The Contenders") as Al  
 1960 Michael Shayne ("Murder 'Round My Wrist") as Frank Hobbes  
 1960 The Case of the Dangerous Robin ("Baubles and Bullets") as Unknown  
 1961–1962 Target: The Corruptors! ("Mr. Megalomania" and "Journey into Mourning") as Unknown  
 1961 Bat Masterson ("Members of Mimbres") as 'Cat' Craig, JB Villain  
 1961 Laramie ("Two for the Gallows") as Pete Dixson  
 1961 Stagecoach West as Billy Joe / Trooper Haig / Tom Lochlin  
 1961 The Lawless Years ("Artie Moon") as Charlie Brown  
 1961 The Dick Powell Show ("Somebody's Waiting") as Bruno  
 1958–1962 The Rifleman ("The Day of Reckoning", "The Marshall", "Bloodlines", "The Prodigal") as Willie Breen / Andrew Sheltin / Jed Malakie  
 1960–1962 Thriller ("Knock Three-One-Two" & "The Hollow Watcher") as Unknown  
 1960–1962 77 Sunset Strip as 'Dink' Strahman / Orville  
 1962 Bonanza ("The Mountain Girl") as Paul Magruder  
 1962 The Untouchables ("Pressure") as Artie Krebs  
 1962–1963 Stoney Burke as Ves Painter (Oates' only regular role on a television series)

1963 The Twilight Zone "The Purple Testament" & "The 7th Is Made Up of Phantoms" as Unknown  
 1963 The Travels of Jaimie McPheeters ("The Day of the First Suitor") as Eldon Bishop  
 1963–1966 The Virginian as Corbie / Roy Judd / Bowers / Buxton  
 1964 Combat! ("The Pillbox") as Soldier Stark  
 1964 The Outer Limits ("The Mutant") as Reese Fowler  
 1964 The Fugitive ("Devil's Carnival" & "Rat in a Corner") as Hanes McClure / Herbie Grant  
 1964 The Reporter ("No Comment") as Mickroe  
 1965 Bob Hope Presents the Chrysler Theatre ("The War" & "Eric Kurtz") as Joe Grover  
 1965 Branded ("Judge Not") as Pierce / Frank  
 1965 A Man Called Shenandoah ("The Fort") as Sergeant Ryder  
 1965 Slattery's People as Eugene Henson / Stu Burns  
 1965 Twelve O'Clock High as Lieutenant Colonel Troper  
 1965 Lost in Space ("Welcome Stranger") as Jimmy Hapgood  
 1965–1966 The Big Valley as Korby Kyles / Duke  
 1966 The Monroes as Nick Beresford  
 1966 Shane as Kemp Spicer  
 1967 Dundee and the Culhane as Lafe Doolin  
 1967 The Iron Horse as Hode Avery  
 1967 Cimarron Strip as Mobeetie  
 1968 Run for Your Life as Deputy Potter  
 1968 Disneyland as John Blythe  
 1969–1970 Lancer as Sheriff Val Crawford / Drago  
 1971 The F.B.I. as Richie Billings  
 1971 The Name of the Game as John Lew Weatherford  
 1978 Black Beauty as Jerry Barker  
 1973 Police Story as Richey Neptune  
 1979 Insight as Unknown  
 1981 East of Eden (Miniseries) as Cyrus Trask  
 1982 The Blue and the Gray as Major 'Preacher' Welles (released posthumously)  
 1985 Tales of the Unexpected as Harry (filmed in 1981; released posthumously; final role)



**Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 21 September 2004, Connections, p.55:**



Warren Oates, who was born in Depoy, appeared in more than 100 movie and TV roles before he died at the age of 53.



Although Oates never gained leading-man status, he was known as one of the finest character actors of his time. Time magazine named him one of the nation's top actors after his role in the 1971 film "Two-Lane Blacktop."



Warren Oates' characters were killed by some of Hollywood's biggest stars.

In westerns, Oates' characters were shot to death by Hollywood's most famous actors, including Randolph Scott and Kirk Douglas.

According to a 1998 article in the Kentucky Explorer magazine, Oates' family moved to Louisville when he was 13. The Great Depression had taken a toll on Muhlenberg County's mining community, and Oates' family owned a general store there that catered to miners.

After graduating from Louisville Male High School, Oates enlisted in the U.S. Marines. Two years later, he returned to Louisville and attended the University of Louisville.

"There, on a lark, he tried out for a part as a hillbilly moonshiner in a student play," the Kentucky Explorer reported. "Discovering that he liked acting so much, he became a regular with Louisville's Shakespeare in Central Park. ..."

When he was 25, Oates jumped on a Greyhound bus and went to New York City. He reportedly had \$200 in his pocket. In New York, he washed dishes and checked hats to make ends meet. He also became friends with two other aspiring actors, Steve McQueen and Robert Culp, the Kentucky Explorer reported.

Oates' first big-time job was one that legendary actor James Dean had held at CBS. Oates rehearsed stunts on "Beat the Clock." But the pivotal moment in his career came in 1954 when he and Culp were cast in "Theatre Guild," a TV play.

Some of the memorable films in which Oates appeared include "The Wild Bunch," "Dillinger," "In the Heat of the Night," "Badlands" and to comedy fans, "Stripes," in which he played Bill Murray's nemesis, drill Sgt. Hulka.

After he started his film career, there was only one year when he didn't make a movie. That was in 1977, when he took time off to marry for the third time. The ceremony was performed in Muhlenberg County.

He reportedly said he wanted to buy a farm in Muhlenberg County as a sanctuary between films. But he never did. Oates died unexpectedly on April 3, 1982, of a heart attack at his Hollywood Hills home.



**Kentucky Explorer, Vol. 12, Number 9, March 1998, Jackson, KY, pp.60-61:**

## **Kentuckian Warren Oates Got His Big Break In 1954**

*Motion Picture Star Born In Coal Camp In Muhlenberg County*

By Warder Harrison – 1998



Warren Oates, from Louisville, played Indiana's infamous gangster Dillinger in the 1973 film by the same name.  
(Author's Photo)

Bayless E. Oates was born in 1809 in Kentucky, as was his wife, Elizabeth Randolph in 1814. One hundred and nineteen years later, their great grandson, Warren Mercer Oates, was born on the 5th of July, 1928 to Bayless E. and Sarah Alice (Mercer) Oates in Depoy, Kentucky. As Oates grew into manhood in this small coal-mining town his life was encompassed by hard times. This was the time of the Great Depression and men who worked in the mines were losing their jobs right and left. During endless labor disputes several miners were murdered causing citizens to move to safer towns. As a result, his father was forced to close his general store due to lack of business. To make ends meet, Mrs. Oates took in boarders and young Warren, at one point in time, picked strawberries for two cents a quart. Finally, their situation became so critical the Oates

family moved to Louisville where his father became a helper at the Kentucky Baptist Hospital. Warren was thirteen at the time. Eventually, life became a little easier on one hand, but on the other Warren found himself in fist fights when neighborhood guys would call him a 'hillbilly'. In 1945 he graduated from Louisville Male High School; after which he joined the Marines to keep out of trouble. Some of his buddies had been thrown in jail for various reasons and he feared he might be next.

After serving two years in the Marines as an airplane mechanic he returned to Louisville to enter the University of Louisville. There, on a lark he tried out for a part as a hillbilly moonshiner in a student play. Discovering that he liked acting so much, he became a regular with Louisville's Shakespeare in Central Park operated by C. Douglas Ramey.

By the age of twenty-five, at Ramey's urging, Oates caught a Greyhound bus to New York City with a head full of dreams and \$200 in his pocket. Once there, he took jobs washing dishes, checking hats at the "21" nightclub, washing cars and any other menial task to keep alive until his break came along. During this time, Oates made lifelong friends with two other aspiring actors, Steve McQueen and Robert Culp. Oates' determination saw him through the countless rounds of casting offices with no results. Finally, he landed a job at CBS which was earlier vacated by none other than James Dean. This job consisted of his rehearsing the stunts on the game show *Beat the Clock*. Finally, Oates' real breakthrough came in 1954 when he was cast, along with his friend Robert Culp, in a *Theatre Guild* TV play. Fortunately, the play won a 'Christopher Award' proving to be a calling card for both Oates and Culp. After friends and associates kept telling him that his rugged features and Kentucky drawl made him a natural for Western films he made his way west. In Hollywood for several weeks, he was cast in a small role in the TV series *Have Gun Will Travel*. Another brief appearance came in the film *Up Periscope* in 1959 for Warner Bros. During this same year he had a larger role in the Warner Bros. film, *Yellowstone Kelly*. The 1960s saw Oates in a number of films including: *Private Property*, *Hero's Island*, *Mail Order Bride*, *Major Dundee*, *Return of the Seven*, *In the Heat of the Night*, *The Split*, *Crooks and Coronets* and the classic *The Wild Bunch*. During the 1970s, Oates' film credits were just as impressive. His role in the 1971 film *Two-Lane Blacktop* prompted *Time* magazine to name him as "among the finest American actors". After receiving "star" billing in the 1973 film *Dillinger*, Oates became one of the hottest properties in Hollywood with him being touted as the next Humphrey Bogart.

In all, Oates appeared in more than 100 movie and TV roles. After his debut in films, the only year he didn't make a motion picture was in 1977 when he took time off to marry his third wife, Judith Jones, in a simple ceremony in Muhlenberg County, Kentucky. He was 49 and she was 30. At the time Oates told reporters, "I'd like to buy a little farm back here, have a couple of horses, and start living like a human being between films." Regretfully, this was one aspiration Oates never fulfilled. On April 3, 1982, Oates died from a massive heart attack in his Hollywood Hills home. He was survived by his widow, and four children: Jennifer (born 1960) and Timothy (1964) by his second wife, and Torey (1979) and Cody (1980) by Judith. By his first wife he had no children. He was also survived by his brother, Gordon Oates, of Louisville. Warren Oates is buried in Forest Lawn, in Hollywood, California.

Warder Harrison, 115 South 4th Street (Utica) Jeffersonville, Indiana 47130, phone (812) 282-5132, writer and genealogist, is the author of "I Didn't Know That! (Kentucky's Ties to the Stage and Screen)." This interesting book is available from him for \$14.95, plus \$2.00 p. &h.



**The Greenville Leader – Central City News, Greenville, KY, 16 May 1963, p.10:**

**DEPOY RESIDENT  
TEE VEE STAR**

Warren Oates, born in Depoy, Kentucky near Greenville on July 5, 1928 has become a feature on the Stoney Burke TV program presently carried by the ABC network, Oates, or Ves Painter will take on another part in a series titled "The Outer Limits" as the Stoney Burke series is going off the air,

Warren Oates lived in Depoy with his parents, who operated a grocery until the family moved to Louisville, Kentucky where he attended Louisville Male High School. After graduation, he joined the Marines for a two-year hitch, In the Marine Corps library at Cherry Point, North Carolina, an event occurred that was to change his life. He picked up Eugene O'Neill's "Mourning Becomes Electra" – the first play he had ever read, He was fascinated and immediately began reading every play he could come by. When he returned home, he entered the University of Louisville, where he joined a little theater group.

Oates' first TV job was for the CBS network, where he worked at \$5.60 an hour on the Beat the Clock Show. After a series of ups and downs and hold one or more jobs at a time, Warren made good and appeared to be opening a new field with the help of producer, Leslie Stevens.

The complete story of Oates appears in the May 11 through issue of TV Guide.



**Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Monday, 5 April 1982, p.1B:**

*Muhlenberg native*  
**Actor Oates dies**

Staff and AP reports. LOS ANGELES – Warren Oates, the veteran television and film character actor who grew up in Muhlenberg County, has died of an apparent heart attack, officials said Sunday. He was 52.

Oates, who died Saturday at his Hollywood Hills home, spent the first 12 years of his life in Depoy in western Muhlenberg, where his father ran a general store. The family moved to Louisville when he was 13.

Robert Ewert, a battalion chief with the Los Angeles City Fire Department, said the actor's wife, Judith, tried to reach other agencies for help first and did not call the Fire Department for some time.

When paramedics arrived an estimated three minutes after receiving the call, Oates had been dead for "at the very minimum an hour," Ewert said. He said attempts to revive him were unsuccessful.

Oates' body was taken first to Forest Lawn Memorial Park and on Sunday was moved to the coroner's office for an autopsy, said Phillip Schwartzberg of the Los Angeles County Coroner's Office.

Oates, who began his professional career with a role in the television series "Have Gun, Will Travel," appeared in many films including "In the Heat of the Night" in 1967, "The Wild

Bunch" in 1969, "Two Lane Blacktop" and "The Hired Hand" in 1971, "Badlands" and "Dillinger" in 1973 and in "The Border" this year.

He played the bad guy in many of his early appearances, but his characters retained separate identities. "Even when I did the heavies I stayed away from stereotypes," he said in a 1980 interview.

Oates was a rodeo rider in the television series "Stoney Burke," made in the early 1960s. In 1980 he appeared with Kristy McNichol and Eileen Brennan in the television movie "My Old Man."

He also made several TV pilots, including "True Grit" and "The African Queen," in which he starred with Mariette Hartley. Neither sold, but a movie pilot, "And Baby Makes Six," won high ratings.

He had great respect for Ben Johnson, another character actor known for his Western roles. The two worked together in "Dillinger."

"I want to be like Ben Johnson," Oates said. "Not just Ben Johnson on the screen, but Ben Johnson in every aspect of his life. He's a straight, wonderful, natural performer. He's a purist."

After growing up in Depoy and Louisville, Oates joined the Marines at 18 and served as an airplane mechanic for two years.

He attended Louisiana State University and developed an interest in acting when he joined a student theater group there. Later he went to New York City to study acting and moved to Hollywood in the 1950s.

A spokesman at Forest Lawn Memorial Park said Oates' family was expected to begin making funeral arrangements today.



