



Jimmy Stewart: The Truth Behind the Legend

By Michael Munn

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Many of the stars of the silver screen in twentieth-century Hollywood became national icons, larger-than-life figures held up as paragons of American virtues. Unfortunately, the private lives of actors such as John Wayne, Henry Fonda, and Errol Flynn rarely lived up to the idealistic roles they portrayed. However, James Stewart was known as the underdog fighter in many of his films and in real life. He was highly decorated for his bravery during his time as a bomber pilot during World War II and was adored for his earnest and kindly persona.

Here many unknown sides of Stewart are revealed: his explosive temper, his complex love affairs, his service as a secret agent for the FBI, his innate shyness, and his passionate patriotism. Munn's personal touch shines through his writing, as he was a friend of Stewart and his wife, Gloria, and interviewed them as well as their colleagues and friends. This definitive biography reveals the childhood ups and downs that formed this cinema hero, explores the legendary Fonda–Stewart relationship, and recounts Stewart's experiences making acclaimed films that include *The Philadelphia Story*, *Rear Window*, *Anatomy of a Murder*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*.

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Editorial Review

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Ask a younger audience about Gary Cooper or Spencer Tracy, and you might get a blank stare. Jimmy Stewart, thanks to *It's a Wonderful Life*, hasn't suffered the same fate. Stewart's fans are in for a treat with this anecdote-filled biography, which features a major bombshell: for years, Stewart provided undercover reports to the FBI's J. Edgar Hoover. Among the nuggets mined here: the rift over politics between conservative Stewart and his liberal best friend, Henry Fonda; Stewart being tempted by Grace Kelly; and how Stewart wanted to help Hoover rout the Mafia from Hollywood but ended up naming Communists. Unfortunately, these revelations and the text as a whole could have been better documented. Appended is a list of sources, but as Munn, a friend of both Stewart and Stewart's wife, Gloria, testifies, it's limited to "who I've quoted . . . along with the year (as best I can remember it)" and the location. Much of the information comes from phone calls and social chats with Gloria Stewart. Did Munn really write everything down? Still, shaky bona fides aside, this a fun Old Hollywood bio. --Ilene Cooper

Review

"This affectionate biography is intriguing and groundbreaking. . . . The content is immensely valuable in exploring Stewart's dark side." —*Sunday Times*

"A fun Old Hollywood bio." —*Booklist*

About the Author

Michael Munn is a film historian and the author of twenty-five books, including *Stars at War*, *The Hollywood Connection*, and the bestseller *John Wayne: The Man Behind the Myth*. As a journalist he has written extensively on cinema, crime, ancient history, and the World War Two. He lives in Suffolk, England.

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