



Ernest Haycox

October 1, 1899 - October 13, 1950

Portland, Oregon

Ernest James Haycox, the Oregon writer whose short story "Stage to Lordsburg" became John Ford's Stagecoach, died in Portland, Oregon, on October 13, 1950, after unsuccessful cancer surgery. He had turned fifty-one just twelve days earlier.

He was born in Portland on October 1, 1899, to William James Haycox and Martha Burghardt Haycox, and went to school in both Washington and Oregon. He enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1915, served on the Mexican border in 1916, and went to Europe during World War I. After the war he spent a year at Reed College in Portland, then studied journalism at the University of Oregon, where he began writing fiction under professor W. F. G. Thacher and graduated in 1923. In 1925 he married Jill M. Chord; they had two children.

He got his start in the pulp magazines of the early 1920s. While living in New York from 1924 to 1926 he became absorbed in the American Revolution, visiting battlefields in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut and Massachusetts. When a reader wrote to say he had described the soldiers' uniforms wrongly, he went out and bought a book on Revolutionary-era uniforms. After moving home to Oregon in 1926 he turned to Westerns and researched the uniforms and details of each period with the same care.

From 1931 he was a regular contributor to Collier's, and from 1943 to The Saturday Evening Post. In the late summer of 1943 the two magazines were serializing different Haycox novels at the same time. Ernest Hemingway wrote, "I read The Saturday Evening Post whenever it has a serial by Ernest Haycox," and Gertrude Stein was also a fan. "Stage to Lordsburg" (1937) became Stagecoach (1939), the film that made John Wayne a star, and his serialized novel Trouble Shooter became Cecil B. DeMille's Union Pacific (1939). He wrote the screenplay for Montana (1950), starring Errol Flynn.

Across his career he published two dozen novels and about three hundred short stories, among them Bugles in the Afternoon, Alder Gulch and The Border Trumpet. In 2005 the Western Writers of America voted him one of the twenty-four best Western authors of the twentieth century. A line from his fiction captures the spirit of his work: "No sensible man watches his feet hit ground. He looks ahead to see what kind of ground they'll hit next."

Services

Died in Portland, OR, October 13, 1950, aged 51. Portrait: Photograph from the University of Oregon yearbook Oregana, 1923 (public domain), hosted by Notice Nearby.

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