

Character actor Charles Napier dies at 75

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BAKERSFIELD, Calif. (AP) -- His granite jaw, toothy grin and steely stare were the tools that made Charles Napier one of the most recognizable actors movie and TV audiences never heard of.

From the dim-witted country music star John Belushi flimflammed in "The Blues Brother" movie to the scheming military intelligence officer who matched wits with Sylvester Stallone in "Rambo: First Blood Part 2," Napier appeared in scores of films and TV shows in a career spanning more than 40 years.

Charles Napier

Bing: More on Charles Napier

He died Wednesday at age 75 at Bakersfield Memorial Hospital, his longtime friend Dennis Wilson told the Bakersfield Californian. The cause of death was not given.

The actor, whose earliest roles included a memorable turn as a hippie wanderer searching for paradise in a classic 1960s "Star Trek" episode, continued to work until shortly before his death. He had a voice role in the animated series "Archer" earlier this year.

In recent years he was a sheriff in an episode of "Monk," a father on "Curb Your Enthusiasm" and a security guard on the children's show "Ned's Declassified School Survival Guide." His voice was also heard on several episodes of "The Simpsons" as Officer Krackney and other characters.

His favorite role was as the judge in "Philadelphia," the 1993 film that won Tom Hanks a best actor Oscar as an attorney stricken with HIV.

His stock in trade, however, was playing steely eyed tough guys in films like "The Silence of the Lambs." and even comedies like "The Blues Brothers," in which he famously threatened to knock out Belushi's teeth for asking to see his musician's union card.

Charles Napier and John Belushi in the Blues Brothers

"I always felt I played myself or some kind of version of myself," Napier told the Bakersfield Californian earlier this year. "If you think about it, old actors probably don't even have a self."

Born in the small town of Mt. Union, Ky., on April 12, 1936, Napier was a high school basketball star before enlisting in the Army in 1954.

After earning a degree in art from Western Kentucky University, he worked at various jobs, including art teacher and basketball coach. (He had minored in physical education.)

It was in graduate school at Western Kentucky in 1964 that he decided to try his hand at theater. He appeared in several local plays, including Shakespeare's "Othello."

He eventually moved to Los Angeles, where he landed a small role on an episode of "Mission Impossible" in 1967.

He eventually began appearing regularly in TV shows, including "Hogan's Heroes," "The Rockford Files," "Baretta," "The A-Team," "Kojak," "Murder, She Wrote" and numerous others.

He also made several films for schlock director Russ Meyer, including "Beyond the Valley of the Dolls," "Supervixens" and "Cherry, Harry and Raquel." He said the latter provided him his most embarrassing Hollywood moment, when Meyer had him run toward the cameras wearing nothing but a hat and boots.

Napier settled in the Bakersfield area in the mid-1980s, saying he was captivated by the western Sierra mountain range after getting lost on the way home from filming a TV commercial.

Survivors include sons Whit and Hunter and a daughter, Meghan.

(MSN.com)