

## Film News: Popular Character Actor Charles Durning Dies at 89

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NEW YORK – In a movie world of cops, mugs, southern governors, priests and Irish pals who had your back, there was none better than Charles Durning, a man that defined character in the term “character actor.” Durning died December 24th in New York City. He was 89 years old.

He had significant roles in classic films like “The Sting,” “Dog Day Afternoon,” “Tootsie” and “O Brother, Where Art Thou?,” plus made a multitude of guest appearances in TV series, mini-series and dramas. But what is less known about Durning is his heroic service in World War II, for which he was awarded the Silver Star, Bronze Star and Purple Heart, and participated in the invasion of Normandy on D-Day, June 6th, 1944.



Early Role: Charles Durning as Sgt. Eugene Moretti with Al Pacino in ‘Dog Day Afternoon’  
Photo credit: Warner Home Video

Charles Durning was born in Highland Falls, New York, into a large Irish family. He was drafted during World War II at the age of 21, and was in a glider that overshot the landing zone during D-Day. He was wounded twice in battle, and actually relived a bit of his veteran experience on the TV show “NCIS” in 2004, when he portrayed an ex-soldier with lingering effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

His performance career began on the New York stage, and after a decade of small parts in TV shows – including “All in the Family” in 1972 – he got a big break when he portrayed Lt. Snyder in the Best Picture Oscar winner “The Sting” (1973), memorably chasing Robert Redford on a Chicago EL platform. This began a string of character parts in 1970s films and TV, including “The Front Page” (1974), “Dog Day Afternoon” (1975), the miniseries “Captain and the Kings” (1976), “The Choirboys” (1977) and “The Muppet Movie” (1979). He defined the term “working actor” with 14 credits from 1977 to ’79.





Durning Takes Dustin Hoffman for a Ride in 'Tootsie'  
Photo credit: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

In the 1980s he had high profile roles in “Sharkey’s Machine” (1981) and “Tootsie,” (1982), plus scored his two Oscar nominations, for “The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas” (1982) – in which he displayed his roots as a dance instructor – and “To Be or Not to Be” (1983). From there he played character roles as diverse as the Pope, Santa Claus (five times), John Kennedy’s grandfather, a suicidal executive (“The Hudsucker Proxy”) and Dr. Harlan Ellridge in the Burt Reynold’s sitcom “Evening Shade” (1990-94). Although he played a high profile and memorable southern politician in “O Brother Where Art Thou?” (2000), it didn’t mean he slowed down. Post the millennium, Charles Durning had over 50 roles on TV and in film, including the voice of Peter’s Dad in “Family Guy,” a priest on “Everyone Loves Raymond” and Dennis O’Leary’s father in “Rescue Me.” In 2013, he is listed as portraying Dylan Frier in “Scavenger Killers.”

Charles Durning had two marriages, and is survived by three children. Talking about his 200 plus parts on stage, screen and TV, he said, “Of course, I’m not often the top dog, but sometimes it’s better not to be top dog, because you last longer. If a movie or play flops, you always blame the lead. They say: ‘He couldn’t carry it.’ They always blame him. But they rarely blame the second or third banana.”

*Source material for this article came from the Wikipedia and imdb. Charles Durning, 1923-2012.*



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