

43 Beady-eyed Villain with a Blawenburg Connection

By David Cochran



Actor Lee Van Cleef

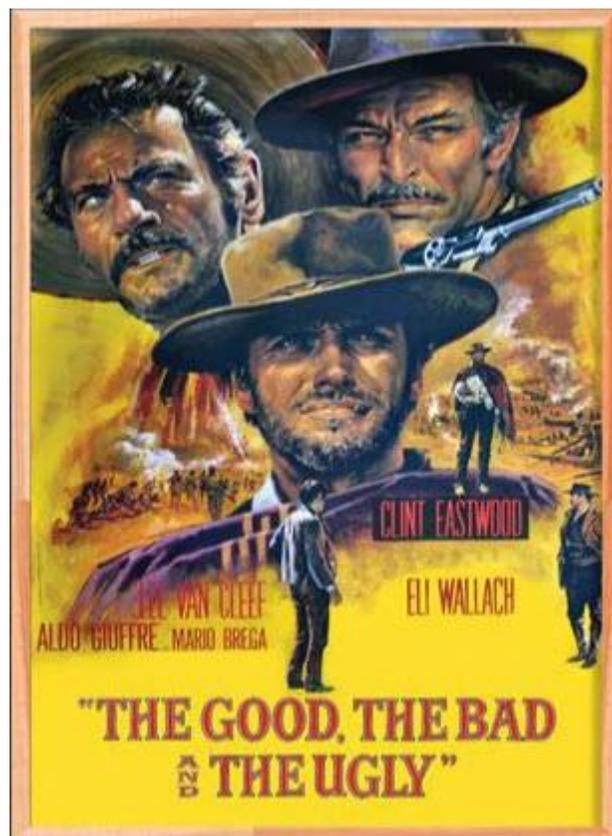
In the classic spaghetti western movie, *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, Lee Van Cleef was the ugly guy and he looked every bit like the bad guy he portrayed. In fact, in most of the westerns in which he starred in the 1950s and 60s, his beady eyes landed him the bad guy role. He once said, “Being born with a pair of beady eyes was the best thing that ever happened to me.”

Clarence Leroy (Lee) Van Cleef, Jr. was born in Somerville, NJ in 1925 to Clarence Leroy and Marion Van Fleet Van Cleef. He graduated early from Somerville High so he could enlist in the Navy in 1942. He spent time as a submarine chaser, then following sonar training, he spent the rest of his time in the Navy until his discharge in 1946 on a mine sweeper.

After the war, Van Cleef worked as an accountant and office administrator. In his spare time, he joined an amateur theater group in Clinton, NJ, where he was “discovered” by a talent agent from the Morris Agency in New York. Before long, he found himself in the original cast of *Mr. Roberts*. He remained with the show on Broadway and with the traveling cast for some time.

But it was his stereotypical villainous features that led him to his first film role. His hook nose, sharp cheeks, and steely eyes were perfect for a non-speaking part in *High Noon*. These bad looks led him to 13 years of westerns and other films where most of the time, he was the bad guy.

Famous Role

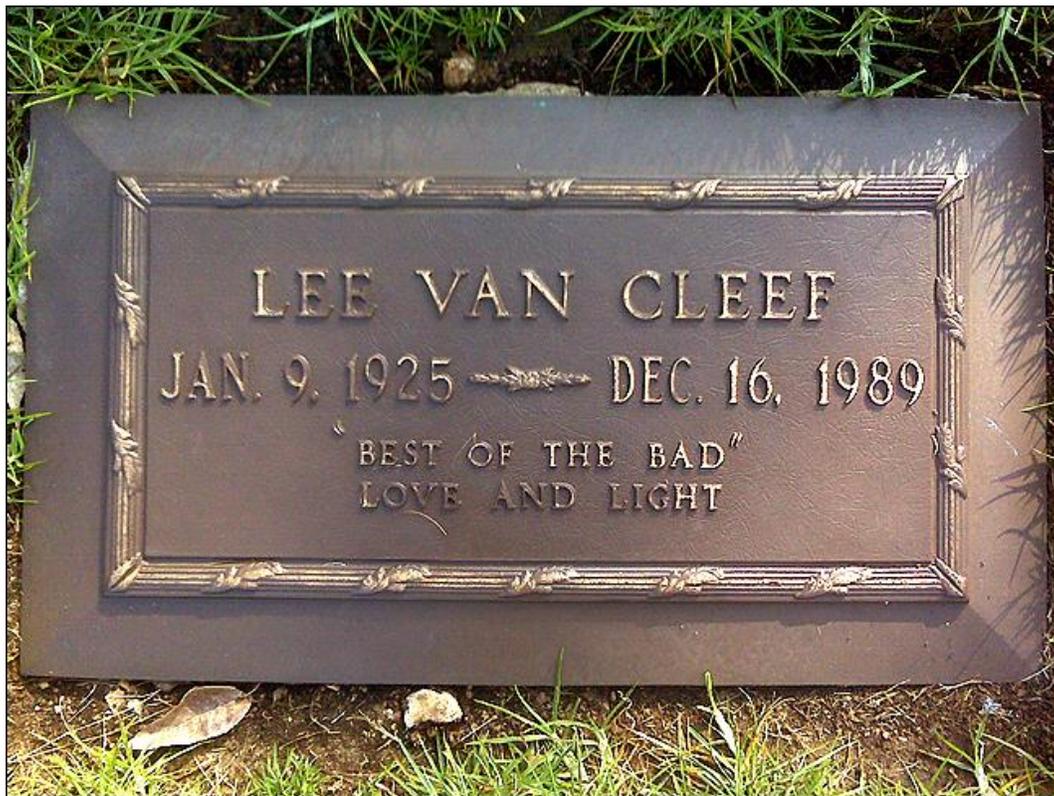


Movie poster for Van Cleef's classic film

In the mid-1960s, Van Cleef 's most famous roles came in *For a Few Dollars More* and *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, playing with Clint Eastwood and Eli Wallach. In addition to film success, Van Cleef had over 100 TV appearances. A complete list of these appearances appears on Wikipedia.

Several people remember that Van Cleef visited Blawenburg often, even attending Troop 46 Boy Scout meetings that were held at Blawenburg Church. Larry May remembered Lee's connection to Blawenburg. "As I understood things, Lee was related to the Van Fleets through Earl Van Fleet and I never recall Lee actually living in Blawenburg. He came to one of our scout meetings which at the time was held in the old church house (now the preschool). I also remember that he did not bring his 'six guns' because he said that the law did not allow him to be carrying them."

Dick Van Zandt remembers that Lee was a good friend of his father, John Van Zandt. He said, "They went to school together and were in Scouts together. They are not related, just good friends." He does not believe that Lee lived in Blawenburg although he visited many times. He believes that Van Cleef lived on Skillman Road or Sunset Road. Dick also remembers Lee's visit to scout meetings. "I remember Lee Van Cleef's visit (to scout meetings), but don't remember any details. I just remember being very excited that a Hollywood movie star was coming to little ole Blawenburg. I was disappointed that he didn't show us his six shooters."



Lee Van Cleef died on December 16, 1989, and was buried at Forest Lawn Memorial Park Cemetery, Hollywood Hills, California. His gravestone bears an appropriate inscription: "BEST OF THE BAD"

Blawenburg Facts

1. The Van Fleets lived just two houses east of Wild Azalea Lane in Blawenburg. At the time, Wild Azalea Lane was not there.
2. Troop 46 was established in the 1930s. It is still going strong today and although it meets elsewhere, it is still sponsored by Blawenburg Church.
3. Spaghetti westerns were so named by critics because they were produced and directed by Italians. Violence and action are the main ingredients of these films that were prevalent in the 1950s and 60s.

Sources

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spaghetti_Western

<https://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/lee-van-cleef-35071.php>

Email remembrances of Lee Van Cleef: Jim Beachell, Larry May, Eric Perkins, and Dick Van Zandt.

Photo credits

Photo of Lee Van Cleef - <https://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/lee-van-cleef-35071.php>

Movie poster – commonly on Internet

Grave plaque – www.pinterest.com

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