

This Day in History... May 29, 1903

Birth of Bob Hope

Leslie Townes “Bob” Hope was born on May 29, 1903, in Eltham, London, England. Hope was the most honored entertainer in history, but his greatest legacy was the gift of laughter he brought to millions of American service men and women stationed far from home.

Hope was born to an English father and a Welsh mother and was the fifth of seven brothers. In 1908, four-year-old Hope and his family immigrated to the United States on the SS *Philadelphia*. Hope’s mother had dressed him and his brothers in three layers of clothes so they wouldn’t have as much to carry. The family wasn’t well-off, so they had to travel across the Atlantic in steerage – the lowest quality accommodations on the ship.

The family arrived in the United States on March 30, 1908, and was processed through Ellis Island. They moved to Cleveland, Ohio, where Hope would spend all of his childhood. In 1929, Hope unofficially changed his name from “Leslie” to “Bob” – it’s rumored he chose the name because of his interest in race car driver Bob Burman. He started earning money as a street performer at the age of 12. He sang and danced in several talent contests and had a brief boxing career under the name “Packy East.” Hope worked a variety of jobs – as a butcher’s assistant and lineman, and in clearing trees for a power company. During that work, he fell, and a tree landed on his face, requiring reconstructive surgery.

Realizing he wanted a career in show business, Hope took dance lessons and soon was part of an act called the “Dancemedians.” He then spent five years on the vaudeville circuit and began appearing on Broadway and in radio and television productions. Hope gained fame with the release of his first feature film, *The Big Broadcast of 1938*. The movie featured his signature song, “Thanks for the Memory,” which was a major hit. Hope became one of Paramount Picture’s biggest stars, appearing in the popular Road movies with Bing Crosby and Dorothy Lamour, and seen regularly on television.

Hope was aboard the RMS *Queen Mary* when World War II started in September 1939. He performed a special show for his fellow passengers and sang “Thanks for the Memory” with new lyrics. The United Service Organizations (USO) was established on February 4, 1941, to provide morale and recreational services for military service members. Hope participated in his first USO show on May 6, 1941, at California’s March Field. He went on to headline about 60 star-studded tours – 199 known shows – entertaining US troops serving overseas during World War II, as well as the Korean, Vietnam, Lebanon, Iran-Iraq, and Persian Gulf Wars. His final USO trip was during Operation Desert Storm. He was 87.



Hope was the first and only honorary veteran.

Hope was also famous for his frequent hosting of the Academy Awards show (19 times), and his love of golf. He often brought a golf club on stage during performances, and hosted the “Bob Hope Classic” charity golf tournament. In 1995, he was a member of a golf foursome that included Presidents Gerald Ford, George H.W. Bush, and Bill Clinton.

Over his lifetime, Hope acted in over 70 films, authored 14 books, and received five honorary Academy Awards – his career lasted almost 80 years in all. He holds the Guinness World Record for the most honored entertainer in history, with more than 2,000. He received 54 honorary doctorates, the Congressional Gold Medal, and the Presidential Medal of Freedom. There have also been several buildings and facilities named in his honor, as well as ships and aircraft.

In 1995, President Bill Clinton presented him with the National Medal of Arts. In his speech, President Clinton mentioned that Hope had received more than 1,000 awards and citations for both his acting and humanitarian work. For decades, Hope consistently entertained American service men and women overseas. In 1971, he even applied for a visa to Laos to help negotiate the release of American prisoners. Hope also helped raise more than \$1 billion for hospitals, the disabled, and the Boy Scouts, among others. In closing, President Clinton stated that Bob Hope was “perhaps the finest example of a successful American entertainer whose greatest performance is in what he does off stage every day.”

Hope died on July 27, 2003, from pneumonia, two months after his 100th birthday.



Stamp issued on Hope’s 106th birthday.

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