


Sean Flynn (photojournalist)

Sean Leslie Flynn (May 31, 1941 – June 1971; [declared legally dead](#) in 1984)^[1] was an American actor and freelance [photojournalist](#) best known for his coverage of the [Vietnam War](#).^[2] Flynn was the only child of Australian-American actor [Errol Flynn](#) and his first wife, French-American actress [Lili Damita](#). After studying briefly at [Duke University](#), he embarked on an acting career. He retired by the mid-1960s to become a freelance photojournalist under contract to [Time](#).

In search of exceptional images, he traveled with [special forces](#) units and irregulars operating in remote areas. While on assignment in [Cambodia](#) in April 1970, Flynn and fellow photojournalist [Dana Stone](#) were captured

by communist guerrillas. Neither man was seen or heard from again.

<p style="text-align: center;">Sean Flynn</p> 	
Born	Sean Leslie Flynn May 31, 1941 Los Angeles, California U.S.
Disappeared	April 6, 1970 (aged 28) Highway One, Cambodia
Status	Declared dead in absentia , 1984
Died	June 1971?
Nationality	American
Alma mater	Duke University
Occupation	Photojournalist, actor
Years active	1956-1970
Parent(s)	Errol Flynn Lili Damita

In 1984, Flynn's mother had him [declared dead in absentia](#).

Early Life

Flynn's parents separated when he was young. He was raised by his mother, Lili Damita.

Entertainment career



Original film poster -
1964
U.S. Release

Flynn first appeared in front of the cameras at the age of fifteen, when he appeared in an episode of his father's television show, [The Errol Flynn Theatre](#). The episode, "Strange Auction," was broadcast in the U.K. in 1956 and in the United States in 1957.

When Errol Flynn died, he left his son \$5,000 to help with his college education (Errol left his two eldest daughters \$10,000 each.)^[3]

Flynn was studying at Duke University. Over a summer break in June 1960, he was visiting his mother in [Fort Lauderdale](#). At the suggestion of his friend, actor [George Hamilton](#), Flynn filmed a scene in Hamilton's picture [Where the Boys Are](#), which was shooting in Fort Lauderdale at the time.^[4]
^[5] Most of his scenes ended up on the cutting room floor, but he can still be seen in a scene walking by wearing a blue "[Xavier University](#)" sweatshirt.^[6]

Movie Star

In May 1961, at the age of 20, Flynn accepted a contract with Sage Western Pictures to appear in the 1962 *Il Figlio del Capitano Blood*, a sequel to his father's hit film [Captain Blood](#). He was paid \$110 a week for the testing period, going up to \$10,000 for 12 weeks work in the film. As Flynn was still legally a minor he needed his mother's permission, which was granted.
^[7] The test was successful.^[8] The film was released in the United States in 1964 as [The Son of Captain Blood](#).

In 1962 George Hamilton announced that he wanted to make *The Brothers*, based on a story by Hamilton, starring himself and Flynn and [Terry Thomas](#), but the film was never made.^{[9][10]} Around this time his fiancée was [Julie Payne](#), daughter of actors [John Payne](#) and [Anne Shirley](#).^[11] (A few years later he was engaged to Alessandra Panao.^[12])

He made a few more films in Europe, including *Il segno di Zorro (it)* (1963; released in 1964 as *Duel at the Rio Grande*), *Verspätung in Marienborn* with [José Ferrer](#) (1963; released in 1964 as *Stop Train 349*), *Agent Special a Venise "Voir Venise et...Crever"* (1964; sold to U.S. television syndication as *Mission to Venice*), and *Sandok, Il Maciste della Jungla* (1964; released in 1966 as *Temple of the White Elephant*).

Flynn became bored with acting, and he went to Africa in late 1964 to try his hand at being a guide for safaris and [big-game hunting](#). He also spent time as a game warden in [Kenya](#). In the latter part of 1965, he needed money, so he made two [Spaghetti Westerns](#) in Spain and Italy that were released in 1966: *Sette Magnifiche Pistole (Seven Guns for Timothy)* and *Dos Pistolas Gemelas* co-starring the Spanish twin performers [Pili & Mili](#). In the summer of 1966, Flynn went to Singapore to star in his eighth and final film, the French-Italian action film *Cinq Gars Pour Singapour* (1967; released in 1968 as *Five Ashore in Singapore*).

Singing Career

In September 1961 it was announced Flynn had signed a recording contract for a company known as Hi-Fidelity R.V. Records, and had already recorded four songs for them.^[13]

Two came out "Stay in My Heart" b/w "Secret Love". The songs were released regionally as a 45rpm single (Arvee 5043). The single is now a rare collector's item.^[14]

Photojournalism career

Vietnam

Flynn arrived in South Vietnam in January 1966 as a freelance photojournalist, first for the French magazine [Paris Match](#), then for [Time Life](#), and finally for [United Press International](#). His photos were soon published around the world. He made a name for himself as one of a group of high-risk photojournalists (which included [Dana Stone](#), [Tim Page](#), [Henri Huet](#), [John Steinbeck IV](#), [Perry Deane Young](#), [Nik Wheeler](#), [Chas Gerretsen](#), and others) who would do anything to get the best pictures, even go into combat.

In March 1966, Flynn was wounded in the knee while in the field.

In April 1966 he was on patrol with some Green Berets and Chinese mercenaries, Nungs, when they were ambushed by the Viet Cong. Flynn was carrying an M-16 rifle and the time and had to fight his way out along with the other soldiers. "I thought not only me but all of us were greased." Flynn had been given the rifle by the Green Berets and been under fire with them before.^[15]

In May he was the only journalist who made it into the [Tinh Hai](#) pagoda in [Da Nang](#).^[16]

In June 1966, he left Vietnam long enough to star in his last movie. It was to be shot in Paris and Singapore based on the 1959 novel, *Cinq Gars Pour Singapour* by [Jean Bruce](#) and was tentatively called *OSS117 Goes to Singapore*, but was released as *Cinq Gars Pour Singapour* (Five Ashore in Singapore.).^[17]

He returned to Vietnam. In November 1966 he was credited with saving an Australian platoon from being decimated by a mine by identifying that mine while photographing the troops near [Vung Tau](#).^[18]

He made a parachute jump with the 1st Brigade, [101st Airborne Division](#) in December 1966.

In February 1967 he and Hamilton went on a skiing holiday in Lebanon.
^[19]

Israel

In 1967, he went to Israel to cover the [Arab-Israeli war of 1967](#).

Return to Vietnam

He returned to Vietnam in 1968, after the [Tet offensive](#).

In September 1968 he was working as a cameraman for CBS when he was injured slightly by grenade fragments while shooting a battle between US and enemy forces 85 miles south of [Danang](#).^[20]

He went to Cambodia in early 1970, when news broke of North Vietnamese advances into that country.

Disappearance

On April 6, 1970, Flynn and a group of journalists left the city of [Phnom Penh](#) to attend a government sponsored press conference in [Saigon](#). Flynn (who was freelancing) and fellow photojournalist [Dana Stone](#) (who was on assignment for [CBS News](#)) chose to travel on [motorcycles](#) instead of the limousines that the majority of the other journalists were traveling in (the limousines had been previously used by tourists before the journalists took them over). Reporter [Steve Bell](#), who was one of the last Westerners to see the two alive, later said that after the press conference, Flynn and Stone had gotten word that there was a checkpoint on [Highway 1](#) manned by members of the [Viet Cong](#). Eager to get a photograph of the Viet Cong, Flynn and Stone decided to set out on Highway 1 alone.^[21] Before they left, Bell snapped the last photo ever taken of Flynn and Stone.^[22]

Four other journalists - two Frenchmen and two Japanese - had also been captured by the Viet Cong inside Cambodia on the same day.^[23] By June 1970, 25 journalists were captured in Cambodia in the previous three weeks. Three had been killed, some returned and others missing.^[24]

Flynn and Stone were never seen or heard from again and their remains have never been found.^[25]

Although it is known that Flynn and Stone were captured by Viet Cong [guerrillas](#) at a checkpoint on Highway 1, their true fate is unclear. It has been suggested that they died in the hands of "hostile" forces.^[26] Citing various government sources, the current consensus is that Flynn and Stone were held captive for over a year before they were killed by the [Khmer Rouge](#) in June 1971.^{[27][28]}

Flynn's mother, [Lili Damita](#), spent an enormous amount of money searching for her son, with no success.^[29] In 1984 she had him declared legally dead. She died in 1994.^[21]

In March 2010, a British team searching for Flynn's body thought they had found it, when they uncovered the remains of a Western hostage allegedly executed by the Khmer Rouge.^[30] Test results on the human remains found at the grave site in eastern Kampong Cham province, Cambodia, were released on June 30, 2010, and they were found not to be the remains of Sean Flynn. Lt. Col. Wayne Perry of the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command ([JPAC](#)) said there was no match between DNA from the recovered remains and DNA samples they had on file from the Flynn family.^[31]

In popular culture

The story of Sean Flynn was recounted by [The Clash](#) in the song "[Sean Flynn](#)" from the album [Combat Rock](#).^[22]

Flynn has a prominent role in [Michael Herr](#)'s book about his experiences as a war correspondent, [Dispatches](#).

Flynn was portrayed by [Kevin Dillon](#) in the 1992 British/Australian [miniseries](#) [Frankie's House](#), based on a book by Flynn's friend and colleague, photojournalist [Tim Page](#).^[32]

In August 2008, [The Hollywood Reporter](#) announced that Mythic Films had optioned the rights to the [Perry Deane Young](#) memoir, *Two of the Missing*. Young is working on a screenplay with director [Ralph Hemecker](#).^[33]

In 2011, a film inspired by Sean Flynn as a photojournalist entitled *[The Road to Freedom](#)* was filmed on Location in Cambodia by Director Brendan Moriarty ^[34]

Filmography

- *[The Errol Flynn Theatre](#)* (1956 TV Series) - episode "Strange Auction"
- *[Where the Boys Are](#)* (1960)
- *[The Son of Captain Blood](#)* (1962)
- *[Duel at the Rio Grande](#)* (1963)
- *[Stop Train 349](#)* (1963)
- *[Mission to Venice](#)* (1964)
- *[Temple of the White Elephant](#)* (1964)
- *[Seven Guns for Timothy](#)* (1964)
- *[Sharp-Shooting Twin Sisters](#)* (1966)
- *[Five Ashore in Singapore](#)* aka *Singapore, Singapore* (1967)
- *[Wheel of Ashes](#)* (1968)

See also

- [List of journalists killed and missing in the Vietnam War](#)
- [John Dawson Dewhirst](#)
- [Mayaguez Incident](#)

References

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External links

- [Brief memoire about Flynn, with an example of his Vietnam images](#)
- [Photo of Flynn \(left\) and Stone taken two hours before their disappearance in 1970](#)

- [The Mysterious Disappearance of Sean Flynn and Dana Stone](#)
- [1963 photo-report of Flynn filming *Son of Captain Blood* in *Stars and Stripes*.](#)
- [Sean Flynn](#) on [IMDb](#)