

Peter Mayhew, Chewbacca in the 'Star Wars' films, dies at 74

By ANDREW DALTON
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Peter Mayhew, the towering actor who donned a huge, furry costume to give life to the rugged-and-beloved character of Chewbacca in the original "Star Wars" trilogy and two other films, has died, his family said Thursday.

Mayhew died at his home in north Texas on Tuesday, according to a family statement. He was 74. No cause was given.

As Chewbacca, known to his friends as Chewie, the 7-foot-3 Mayhew was a fierce warrior with a soft heart, loyal sidekick to Harrison Ford's Han Solo, and co-pilot of the Millennium Falcon.

Mayhew went on to appear as the Wookiee in the 2005 prequel "Revenge of the Sith" and shared the part in 2015's "The Force Awakens" with actor Joonas Suotamo, who took over the role in subsequent films.

"Peter Mayhew was a kind and gentle man, possessed of great dignity and noble character," Ford said in a statement Thursday. "These aspects of his own personality, plus his wit and grace, he brought to Chewbacca. We were partners in film and friends in life for over 30 years and I loved him... My thoughts are with his dear wife Angie and his children. Rest easy, my dear friend."

Mayhew defined the incredibly well-known Wookiee and became a world-famous actor for most of his life without speaking a word or even making a sound — Chewbacca's famous roar was the creation of sound designers.

"He put his heart and soul into the role of Chewbacca and it showed in every frame of the films," the family statement said. "But, to him, the 'Star Wars' family meant so much more to him than a role in a film."

Mark Hamill, who played Luke Skywalker alongside Mayhew, wrote on Twitter that he was "the gentlest of



From left, Harrison Ford (Han Solo), Anthony Daniels (C3PO), Carrie Fisher (Princess Leia), and Peter Mayhew (Chewbacca) are shown in 1978.

giants — A big man with an even bigger heart who never failed to make me smile & a loyal friend who I loved dearly. I'm grateful for the memories we shared & I'm a better man for just having known him."

Born and raised in England, Mayhew had appeared in just one film and was working as a hospital orderly in London when George Lucas, who shot the first film in England, found him and cast him in 1977's "Star Wars."

Lucas chose quickly when he saw Mayhew, who liked to say all he had to do to land the role was stand up.

"Peter was a wonderful man," Lucas said in a statement Thursday. "He was the closest any human being could be to a Wookiee: big heart, gentle nature ... and I learned to always let him win. He was a good friend and I'm saddened by his passing."

From then on, "Star Wars" would become Mayhew's life. He made constant appearances in the costume in commercials, on TV specials and at public events. The frizzy long hair he had most of his adult life made those who saw him in real life believe he was Chewbacca, along with his stature.

His height, the result of a genetic disorder known as Marfan syndrome, was the source of constant health complications late in his life. He had respiratory problems, his speech grew limited and he often had to use scooters and wheelchairs instead of walking.

His family said his fighting through that to play the role one last time in "The Force Awakens" was a triumph.

Even after he retired, Mayhew served as an adviser to his successor Suotamo, a former Finnish basketball player who told The Associated Press last year that Mayhew put him through "Wookiee boot camp" before he played the role in "Solo."

Mayhew spent much of the last decades of his life in the United States, and he became a U.S. citizen in 2005.

The 200-plus-year-old character whose suit has been compared to an ape, a bear, and Bigfoot, and wore a bandolier with ammunition for his laser rifle, was considered by many to be one of the hokier elements in the original "Star Wars," something out of a more low-budget sci-fi offering.

The films themselves seemed to acknowledge this.

"Will somebody get this big walking carpet out of my way?!" Carrie Fisher, as Princess Leia, says in the original "Star Wars." It was one of the big laugh lines of the film, as was Ford calling Chewie a "fuzzball" in "The Empire Strikes Back."

But Chewbacca would become as enduring an element of the "Star Wars" galaxy as any other character. His roar — which according to the Atlantic magazine was made up of field recordings of bears, lions, badgers and other animals — was as famous as any sound in the universe.

Breast implants tied to rare cancer to remain on US market

By MATTHEW PERRONE
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. health authorities will allow a type of breast implant linked to a rare form of cancer to stay on the market, saying its risks do not warrant a national ban.

But the Food and Drug Administration said Thursday it is considering bold warnings for the implants and requiring stricter reporting of problems by manufacturers. The announcement is the latest in the government's decades-long effort to manage implant risks and complications that can include scarring, pain, swelling and rupture.

In recent years, the FDA and other regulators around the world have grappled with the recently confirmed link to a rare cancer and the thousands of unconfirmed complaints of other health problems that women attribute to the implants, including arthritis, fatigue and muscle pain.

FDA regulators said in a statement that while they don't have definitive evidence that implants cause those chronic ailments, women considering implants "should be aware of these risks." To that end, the agency said it will consider adding a boxed warning — its most serious type — to breast implants and a checklist describing various potential harms for patients considering them.

Earlier this month, French authorities issued a rare ban of breast implants associated with a form of lymphoma, including those sold by manufacturer Allergan. The FDA's director for medical devices said the

agency wasn't ready to take that step.

"At this time, the FDA does not believe that, on the basis of all available data and information, the device meets the banning standard," Dr. Jeffrey Shuren said in a statement.

The cancer tied to implants is not breast cancer but lymphoma that grows in the scar tissue surrounding the breasts. Almost all confirmed cases involve a type of textured implant designed to prevent slippage and to minimize scar tissue.

Shuren said that variety accounts for less than 10% of the U.S. market, which is primarily smooth implants. He noted there have been cases of the cancer with smooth implants, raising questions about whether multiple factors contribute to the disease.

There have been more than 600 cases of the cancer worldwide, among an estimated 10 million women with implants.

Diana Zuckerman, who has studied breast implant safety, said a ban may not be necessary to phase out textured ones.

"I think a lot of physicians are going to avoid them and patients are going to say they don't want them," said Zuckerman, president of the nonprofit, National Center for Health Research, which evaluates studies and conducts its own research.

Breast augmentation is the most popular form of cosmetic surgery in the U.S., with roughly 300,000 women undergoing the procedure each year. Another 100,000 women receive implants for breast reconstruction after cancer surgery.

In a move to "promote

greater public transparency," the FDA also said Thursday that breast implant manufacturers will no longer be permitted to summarize routine injuries and complications in bulk reports. Manufacturers are required to report all serious injuries, malfunctions and deaths related to their devices. But under the FDA's alternative summary reporting program, breast implant makers and other manufacturers could file quarterly updates representing thousands of incidents, most of which were not listed in a public database.

That practice — which the FDA has pledged to phase out — has been criticized for obscuring the true number of incidents reported to regulators. The reports filed to the FDA include submissions from companies, doctors, patients and lawyers that often include incomplete, unverified information and duplicates.

Ahead of a March meeting, the FDA revealed for the first time that it had received more than 350,000 reports related to breast implants over the last decade.

That was roughly seven times the number of reports visible in the agency's publicly searchable database, according to Madris Tomes, a former FDA staffer who founded a company to analyze medical device reports.

"If there's a pattern of more than 300,000 malfunctions and non-serious injuries, those should be available to the public, and let them decide if they're serious," Tomes said.

Bulk reports for other medical devices are permitted under a new program which plans to make them public.

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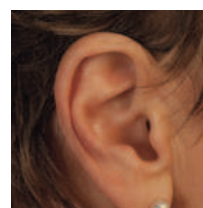
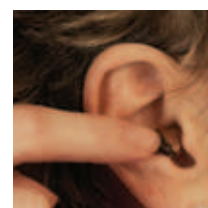
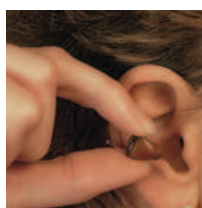


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