

Alan Ladd Biography Roger Hohenbrink

Alan Walbridge Ladd (Nickname Laddie) was born September 3, 1913 to an English mother in Hot Springs, Arkansas. His accountant father died when he was four. At age five he burned his apartment playing with matches and his mother moved them to Oklahoma City. He was malnourished, undersized, and nicknamed Tiny. Ladd's mother married a house painter who moved them to California a la *Grapes of Wrath* when he was eight. There he picked fruit, delivered papers, and swept stores.

Moving to California as a child, Ladd became a gifted sportsman, and also took to performing in school productions. In high school he discovered track and swimming. By 1931 he was training for the 1932 Olympics, but an injury cancelled plans. He opened a hamburger stand, Tiny's Patio, then worked as a grip at Warner's.

Struggling to enter acting, Ladd supported himself in a number of odd jobs including as a gas station attendant, a hot dog vendor, and a lifeguard. His first real foray into show business came in radio, where Ladd played small parts, and he then moved into local theatre. It was as a grip and bit-player that he began to enter the film-world in his late teens. He was appearing regularly in minor film parts by the mid-1930s.

Ladd married his friend Midge in 1936 but couldn't afford her so they lived apart. In 1937 they shared a friend's apartment. She delivered Alan, Jr., and his destitute alcoholic mother moved in with them, her agonizing suicide from ant poison witnessed a few months later by her son.

In 1941 Ladd landed the small part of the reporter in Orson Welles' classic, *Citizen Kane*. His size (height 5' 6") and coloring were regarded as not right for movies so he worked hard at radio. He met Hollywood agent and former screen actress Sue Carol around this time. She helped him get work and promoted him around town, landing him a major part as an assassin in the 1942 film, *This Gun for Hire*, opposite Veronica Lake. After divorcing his first wife, Ladd and Carol married in 1942.

The visual combination of Ladd and Lake proved so popular that they were paired for several other films, including *The Blue Dahlia*, *Saigon* and *The Glass Key*. Ladd's films remained on the top ten box-office list in 1947, 1953, and 1954, as he played a succession of action-packed, tough-guy roles.

Ladd portrayed Dan Holiday on Mutual Radio's *Box 13* (1948-1949). This show was also syndicated. It was in the classic Western film *Shane* in 1953 where Ladd truly outdid himself, in an uncharacteristically honest role, showcasing both his visual magnetism and subtle style. Most of his other 1950s films were clichéd bare-chested bar room movies, and his stardom was waning by the early 1960s.

By the end of the fifties, liquor and a string of so-so movies had taken their toll. In November 1962 he was found unconscious lying in a pool of blood with a bullet wound near his heart. In January 1964 he was found dead, apparently due to an accidental combination of alcohol and sedatives.

Ladd was married to Sue Carol from 1942 to his death on January 29, 1964 and they had two children: Alana and David. His first wife was Marjorie Jane "Midge" Harrold from 1936 until their divorce in 1941. They had one son, Alan Ladd Jr.