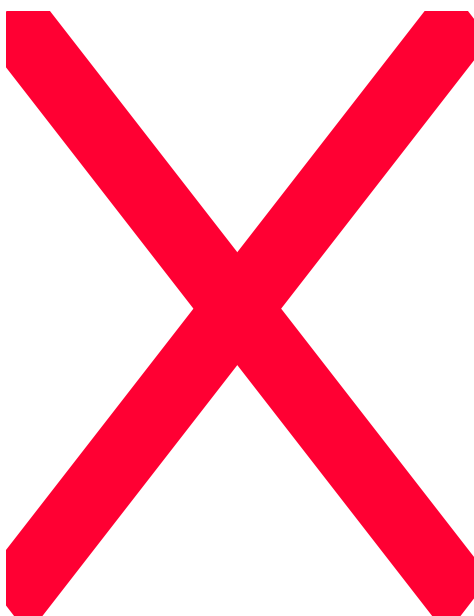


Red Ryder – General note



*The first screen Red Ryder, Don "Red" Barry, with Tommy Cook as his indian sidekick "Little Beaver", in Republic's 1940 serial "**ADVENTURES OF RED RYDER**". Three more actors would follow him in the role over 27 B-features before television picked up the franchise with a series pilot that didn't take.*

Source for all stills unless indicated: The Thrill of it All

Speelfilm Encyclopedie general note:

"Fred Harmon cannot have suspected, when he began drawing his comic strip series, that his characters would one day be true idols with a public of millions. The comic was certainly popular and world famous. In our country the strip was published in *Robbedoes* weekly. Publishers Dupuis released seven comic book annuals on the market in the Netherlands.

Towards the end of the Thirties it was very "in" to convert popular comic strips into serials – a film in episodes, in other words. Comic strips like "**Flash Gordon**" and "**Buck Rogers**" were highly popular as serials. Republic saw a good thing in Red Ryder. In 1940 the studio produced the serial "**THE ADVENTURES OF RED RYDER**" in 12 episodes. Writers were William Witney and John English. For the role of Red Ryder actor Donald Barry was chosen, who initially resisted but subsequently established his name with the serial. Young Tommy Cook was "Little Beaver", Red Ryder's faithful indian comrade. Barry would thereafter always be credited as Don "Red" Barry, until he committed suicide in 1980.

Republic was convinced it could do good business with the comic book character, and so in 1944 began an ordinary series of Westerns. For the title role Bill Elliott was sought, who had moved to Republic from Columbia the year before. Elliott was the successor to William S Hart as regards acting style, and so decidedly not the Red Ryder of the comic strips. But the fans weren't interested in that. The films were very popular and Elliott played in no fewer than 16 Red Ryder Westerns, with Bobby Blake as Little Beaver and Alice Fleming as "The Duchess". Blake would later build an adult career as Robert Blake, both in films ("**TELL THEM WILLIE BOY IS HERE**") and on TV ("**Baretta**").

In 1946 Elliott wanted to do something different for a change. Republic gave him the lead in another series of Westerns. But the studio wanted to continue with the Red Ryder series. Alan Lane was Elliott's successor. Lane had played in many films since the end of the Thirties. He played the leads in various Western serials and had just made six Westerns for Republic. He was the perfect successor. Far more so than Elliott, Lane was the true Red Ryder. The quality of the films with Lane was also maintained at a high level. Blake remained Little Beaver, and Martha Wentworth was The

Duchess. Sidney Picker remained the producer, and that must certainly have been important in maintaining the quality.

After seven episodes Lane moved to another, very good, Western series which would last until 1953. He was known as "Rock" Lane. In 1949 four more Red Ryder films were made, this time by Eagle Lion, with Lewis Collins as director and Jerry Thomas as producer. Jim Bannon was Red Ryder, but he didn't go down well with Western fans. Don Kay "Little Brown Jug" Reynolds was Little Beaver. He was not an unappealing successor to Bobby Blake, but in most of the four films had nothing to do. The series died ignominiously in 1950.

The series was still to be heard on the radio, and TV took the comic book character under its wing in 1956. A 25-minute pilot film was made with Alan Lane in the title role and Louis Lettieri as Little Beaver. The pilot did not make a hit, and no series came of it. But for Western fans Red Ryder will always be a by-word."

Article from **The Thrill of it All** ("A pictorial history of the B-Western from THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY and other silent classics to the colour films of the genre's last days of glory in the 50s"):

"Every B-Western fan had his own particular favourite star or series whom he enjoyed more than any other during his young moviegoing days. For those who grew up in the twenties it might have been Jack Holt or Tom Mix or some other silent saddle ace; for thirties fans, perhaps Bob Steele, Ken Maynard, Tom Tyler, or Tim McCoy was their particular dish of oats.

My moviegoing period, the early and middle forties, had numerous choices available to whet any action fan's appetite, including Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, Sunset Carson, Charles Starrett. But I found myself enjoying most the series of twenty-three features made by Republic between 1944 and 1947 based on the exploits of the famous comic-strip hero, Red Ryder. These films were the answer to an action-lover's prayer.

Filmed during those glorious days at Republic when the stunt team was at its slam-bang, set-destroying peak, almost every one of the twenty-

three films was loaded to the brim with exciting chases, fights, and assorted action highlights.

Republic had brought the Red Ryder character to the screen four years earlier in serial form. Donald Barry had scored a personal triumph in the John Wayne film **"WYOMING OUTLAW"** and studio head Herbert J. Yates decided to give Barry the leading role in what was sure to be an action-packed adventure classic. Right from the start Barry rebelled against his casting. He felt he didn't resemble the character at all physically, and he did not want to work in serials, which he felt were demeaning as they were aimed at a primarily juvenile audience.

Yates convinced him to take the role, and Barry reluctantly turned in a performance that made him a star and tagged him with the Don "Red" Barry screen name, which he also hated because he really didn't have red hair. The serial did, indeed, turn out to be a huge success, due in no small part to the excellent action work turned in by stuntman David Sharpe, who doubled Barry in most of the really exciting moments of the twelve-chapter delight. The complete serial was filmed in less than a month. It had a simple plot which found villain Harry Worth out to grab valuable property which he intended to sell to a railroad for a right of way at his own price. When the serial was completed, Barry went into his own series of action features, and the Red Ryder character remained dormant until Republic could find someone new who would be able to handle the role successfully.

That chance came in 1944 in the person of William "Wild Bill" Elliott. Elliott had had a successful career for several years at Columbia where he made Westerns and serials that pleased most fans. Republic acquired his services and starred him with George "Cabby" Hayes in a series of eight exciting Western features in 1943 and 1944. Elliott was strictly playing himself, with all the gimmicks he had used at Columbia still very much in evidence, including his favourite tag line, "I'm a peaceable man, but..." which usually prefaced a slam-bang fight sequence. Republic decided that Elliott would do the Red Ryder character justice and immediately had him do eight features which were released between May 1944 and May 1945.

There are those who argue, and quite justifiably, that Elliott was not really playing Fred Harman's character but only himself, and

that he completely changed the comic-strip image to reflect his own image (the reversible guns, the stylised shirt, etc.). The charge is quite true, but so what? As fans who looked only for action we really didn't care about the character's name or source as long as he delivered the necessary thrills and excitement, and Elliott did supply just what we wanted. So while the purists cried "fraud" and grumbled, many millions just enjoyed.

The series began with two films in which George "Gabby" Hayes was still Elliott's partner, **"TUCSON RAIDERS"** and **"MARSHALL OF RENO"**. The former found Red and friends trying to thwart the tyranny of a villainous Governor (Stanley Andrews) and had a rousing finale in which the villains were blown up, courtesy of special-effects artist Howard Lydecker, who created a spectacular miniature for a tremendous barn explosion. In the latter Red proves the innocence of a young man who was framed for murder. The young man, incidentally, was played by Blake Edwards, who went on to become a famous producer-director.

"THE SAN ANTONIO KID", a routine effort to be sure, followed but then came **"CHEYENNE WILDCAT"**, my favourite of the sixteen Elliott Ryders. In this film Red opposed the supreme villainy of Roy Barcroft, who went around murdering his victims with thrown knives. The film had four great fight sequences, and Barcroft was dispatched in memorable fashion. During the finale, Red and Roy stage a massive brawl during which the latter throws a knife that misses Red and goes through a door panel, leaving the blade exposed. Naturally, at the end of the fight Roy is knocked against the door and killed by his own weapon. I can still see Barcroft standing silently against the door as Red wonders why his opponent has suddenly stopped throwing punches and is just staring open-eyed.

Another crowd-pleaser followed immediately with the title **"VIGILANTES OF DODGE CITY"**, in which Red did battle with LeRoy Mason and Hal Taliaferro, who were out to try and gain the Duchess's freight line. The Duchess was played by that fine character actress Alice Fleming in all sixteen of the Elliott films, and Ryder's constant sidekick, "Little Beaver", was played in all twenty-three features by Bobby Blake, who matured into an excellent actor in later years in such films as **"THE PURPLE GANG"**, **"IN COLD BLOOD"** and **"TELL THEM WILLIE BOY IS HERE"**.

The remaining titles in the first series, **"SHERIFF OF LAS VEGAS"**, **"THE GREAT STAGECOACH ROBBERY"**, and **"LONE TEXAS RANGER"**, were milder in overall thrills, but were still big enough at the box-office to warrant the studio's making a second series of eight titles, which were released between August 1945 and April 1946.

This second set began with **"PHANTOM OF THE PLAINS"** (which contained a spectacular fight sequence and stagecoach chase that ran for almost the entire last two reels of the film and which is hard to beat for sheer continued action) and continued with **"MARSHAL OF LAREDO"**, **"COLORADO PIONEERS"** (which featured a trouble-prone collection of scene-stealing kids), **"WAGON WHEELS WESTWARD"** (which had Roy Barcroft riding into a mysteriously deserted town and taking it over in order to swindle Red and a bunch of new homesteaders who were traveling there to settle down), **"CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH"** (which really had nothing to do with California or a gold rush), **"SHERIFF OF REDWOOD VALLEY"** (in which former cowboy great Bob Steele had a meaty role as a former crook who was trying to go straight), **"SUN VALLEY CYCLONE"** (which purported to tell the story of how Red first acquired his famous horse, Thunder) and, finally, **"CONQUEST OF CHEYENNE"**, which had Peggy Stewart riding around in a newfangled horseless carriage and causing Red all kinds of trouble in one of the weakest films in the entire series.

After sixteen films Elliott had had enough of Red Ryder. He wanted better roles, and the studio obliged him by giving him big productions which may have flattered his ego but which cost him his legion of devoted Saturday afternoon fans.

The studio began auditioning new actors to fill the Ryder vacancy, including young Marshall Reed who had played numerous minor roles and did stunt work at Republic, and was featured in Johnny Mack Brown vehicles at Monogram. He might have gotten the part if Herbert Yates hadn't seen a clip from one of the six Westerns Allan Lane had turned out in 1944 and 1945. He is said to have remarked at a private screening, pointing at the screen where Lane was on view, "That's my new Red Ryder!"

For a great many people, Lane was a better physical choice to play the character of Red Ryder. It really boils down to a matter of personal choice. I enjoyed Elliott and Lane almost equally. The first film in the series, **"SANTA FE UPRISING"**, was released in September 1946, and was an action-packed debut in which Lane matched wits with class-A badman Barton MacLane, who was out to control a toll road owned by the Duchess, now played in these final seven features by Martha Wentworth. The finale featured a great shoot-out and fight in the famous Republic cave sets, which were located on the studio lot adjacent to the famous blacksmith shop set where so many outstanding fight sequences were staged.

"STAGECOACH TO DENVER" followed and was one of the weaker Lane entries, but the following feature, **"VIGILANTES OF BOOMTOWN"**, had a most unusual and entertaining plot. "Gentleman" Jim Corbett (George Turner) and Bob Fitzsimmons (John Dehner) arrive in Carson City to train for their world heavyweight bout. Peggy Stewart tries to get them to leave the territory because she feels boxing is brutal and she feels people will consider the townspeople savages for tolerating the planned slugfest. Into this situation rides evil Roy Barcroft, who intends to rob the proceeds from the planned spectacle, but who is finally thwarted by Red. He fights Roy with professional boxing punches taught to him by none other than Jim Corbett. The whole thing was a lot of fun and well worth viewing.

"HOMESTEADERS OF PARADISE VALLEY" and **"OREGON TRAIL SCOUTS"**, two routine but entertaining features, followed. Then came **"MARSHALL OF CRIPPLE CREEK"**, which is very likely the best of the Lane Ryders, and one of the best B-Westerns Republic ever turned out. The cast was loaded with pros like Trevor Bardette, Tom London, and Roy Barcroft. Bardette comes to Cripple Creek with his family in the hopes of making a fast fortune. He falls in with Gene Stutenroth, who tricks him into hijacking an ore wagon. Bardette is caught and goes to jail. In the meantime, his son arrives in town and very quickly falls under Stutenroth's influence. Red tells the bandit leader to leave the kid alone or "I'll break you in two."

Meanwhile, Barcroft winds up in prison in a cell next to Bardette and tells the latter that Red is making things tough for his son. "Why," Roy says, "he's even got him cleaning out spittoons."

Well, that would be enough to make any man break out of jail, and Bardette does. The film ends on a frantic note with Bardette convinced that Ryder is right, and he dies saving Red's life. Ryder, in turn, goes to Stutenroth's saloon where, after telling him, "I told you if you didn't leave that kid alone I'd break you in two," proceeds to do just that in a terrific slugfest. This was entertainment to be sure, at its supercharged best.

The final film in the series, "**RUSTLERS OF DEVIL'S CANYON**", found Red combating an evil Arthur Space who was supposedly the friendly town doctor, but who was in reality the head of a gang of rustlers. With the conclusion of this final Ryder feature Lane tacked on his nickname of "Rocky" and did a long and successful series for Republic that continued into the fifties.

Republic no longer utilised the Ryder character, but Eagle-Lion turned out four features starring Jim Bannon as Red in 1949. Filmed in colour, "**RIDE, RYDER, RIDE**", "**ROLL, THUNDER,**

ROLL", "**THE FIGHTING REDHEAD**" and "**THE COWBOY AND THE PRIZE FIGHTER**" were generally awful, but Bannon, for those good old purists, did look quite a bit as you would expect a real-life Red Ryder to look. Informed sources say that a television pilot was made with Allan Lane playing Red again, but it was never sold and I have been unable to verify the information.

All in all, those twenty-three features produced by Republic satisfied completely my enormous Saturday afternoon craving for thrills, and my memories of those films are still vivid even today. From the very first entrance of the characters (remember Red and Little Beaver walking out of a giant-sized replica of a Red Ryder book?) in the opening credits, to the final fade-out, it was polished Republic professionalism all the way - and what more could any Western fan really ask for?"

- Alan G Barbour



- 1: THE ADVENTURES OF RED RYDER
Republic 1940 : 12x serial

Red Ryder..... Don "Red" Barry
Little BeaverTommy Cook (10)

- 2: TUCSON RAIDERS
Republic 1944

Red Ryder..... "Wild" Bill Elliott
Little BeaverBobby Blake (10)

- 3: MARSHAL OF RENO
Republic 1944

Red Ryder..... "Wild" Bill Elliott
Little BeaverBobby Blake (10)

- 4: SAN ANTONIO KID
Republic 1944

Red Ryder..... "Wild" Bill Elliott
Little BeaverBobby Blake (10)

- 5: CHEYENNE WILDCAT
Republic 1944

Red Ryder..... "Wild" Bill Elliott
Little BeaverBobby Blake (11)

- 6: VIGILANTES OF DODGE CITY
Republic 1944

Red Ryder..... "Wild" Bill Elliott
Little BeaverBobby Blake (11)

- 7: SHERIFF OF LAS VEGAS
Republic 1944

Red Ryder..... "Wild" Bill Elliott
Little BeaverBobby Blake (11)

- 8: THE GREAT STAGECOACH ROBBERY
Republic 1945

Red Ryder..... "Wild" Bill Elliott
Little BeaverBobby Blake (11)

- 9: LONE TEXAS RANGER
Republic 1945

Red Ryder..... "Wild" Bill Elliott
Little BeaverBobby Blake (11)

- 10: PHANTOM OF THE PLAINS
Republic 1945

Red Ryder..... "Wild" Bill Elliott
Little BeaverBobby Blake (11)



11: MARSHAL OF LAREDO
Republic 1945

Red Ryder..... "Wild" Bill Elliott
Little Beaver**Bobby Blake** (12)

12: COLORADO PIONEERS
Republic 1945

Red Ryder..... "Wild" Bill Elliott
Little Beaver**Bobby Blake** (12)

13: WAGON WHEELS WESTWARD
Republic 1945

Red Ryder..... "Wild" Bill Elliott
Little Beaver**Bobby Blake** (12)

14: CALIFORNIA GOLDRUSH
Republic 1945

Red Ryder..... "Wild" Bill Elliott
Little Beaver**Bobby Blake** (12)

15: SHERIFF OF REDWOOD VALLEY
Republic 1945

Red Ryder..... "Wild" Bill Elliott
Little Beaver**Bobby Blake** (12)

16: SUN VALLEY CYCLONE
Republic 1946

Red Ryder..... "Wild" Bill Elliott
Little Beaver**Bobby Blake** (12)

17: CONQUEST OF CHEYENNE
Republic 1946

Red Ryder..... "Wild" Bill Elliott
Little Beaver**Bobby Blake** (12)

18: SANTA FE UPRISING
Republic 1946

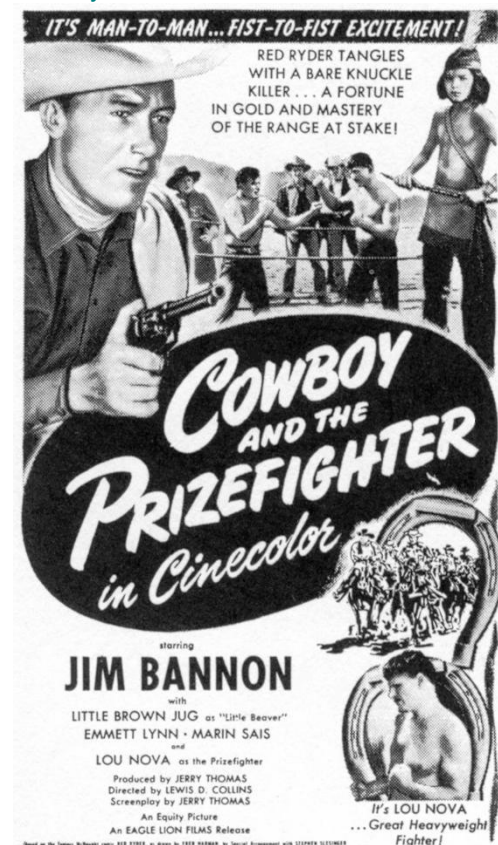
Red Ryder..... Allan Lane
Little Beaver**Bobby Blake** (13)

19: STAGECOACH TO DENVER
Republic 1946

Red Ryder..... Allan Lane
Little Beaver**Bobby Blake** (13)

20: VIGILANTES OF BOOMTOWN
Republic 1946

Red Ryder..... Allan Lane



Little Beaver**Bobby Blake** (13)

21: HOMESTEADERS OF
PARADISE VALLEY
Republic 1946

Red Ryder..... Allan Lane
Little Beaver**Bobby Blake** (13)

22: OREGON TRAIL SCOUTS
Republic 1946

Red Ryder..... Allan Lane
Little Beaver**Bobby Blake** (13)

23: MARSHAL OF CRIPPLE CREEK
Republic 1946

Red Ryder..... Allan Lane
Little Beaver**Bobby Blake** (13)

24: RUSTLERS OF DEVIL'S CANYON
Republic 1946

Red Ryder..... Allan Lane
Little Beaver**Bobby Blake** (13)

25: **RIDE, RYDER, RIDE**
 Eagle-Lion 1949

Red Ryder.....Jim Bannon
Little Beaver**Don Kay “Little
Brown Jug” Reynolds**

26: **ROLL, THUNDER, ROLL**
 Eagle-Lion 1949

Red Ryder.....Jim Bannon
Little Beaver**Don Kay “Little
Brown Jug” Reynolds**

27: **THE FIGHTING REDHEAD**
 Eagle-Lion 1949

Red Ryder.....Jim Bannon
Little Beaver**Don Kay “Little
Brown Jug” Reynolds**

28: **THE COWBOY AND THE
PRIZEFIGHTER**
 Eagle-Lion 1949

Red Ryder.....Jim Bannon
Little Beaver**Don Kay “Little
Brown Jug” Reynolds**

29: **Red Ryder**
 TV series pilot 1956

Red Ryder.....Allan Lane
Little Beaver**Louis Lettieri**

