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Biography for David Niven (I)

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Date of Birth
1 March 1910, London, England, UK

Date of Death
29 July 1983, Château-d'Oex, Switzerland (Lou Gehrig's disease)

Birth Name
James David Graham Niven

Nickname
Niv

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Height

6' (1.83 m)

Mini Biography

David Niven was named after the Saint's Day on which he was born, St. David, patron Saint of Wales. He attended Stowe School and Sandhurst Military Academy and served for two years in Malta with the Highland Light Infantry. At the outbreak of World War II, although a top-line star, he re-joined the army (Rifle Brigade). He did, however, consent to play in two films during the war, both of strong propaganda value—[The First of the Few](#) (1942) and [The Way Ahead](#) (1944). In spite of six years' virtual absence from the screen, he came in second in the 1945 Popularity Poll of British film stars. On his return to Hollywood after the war he was made a Legionnaire of the Order of Merit (the highest American order that can be earned by an alien). This was presented to Lt. Col. David Niven by Gen. [Dwight D. Eisenhower](#).

IMDb Mini Biography By: [Steve Crook](#)

Spouse

Hjordis Paulina Tersmeden	(14 January 1948 - 29 July 1983) (his death) 2 children
Primula Rollo	(16 September 1940 - 21 May 1946) (her death) 2 children

Trade Mark

[names]: his characters are often named after his real-life friends, or refer to his real-life friends as sources of information.

Trivia

After Great Britain declared war in 1939, he was one of the first actors to go back and join the army. Although Niven had a reputation for telling good old stories over and over again, he was totally silent about his war experience. He said once: "I will, however, tell you just one thing about the war, my first story and my last. I was asked by some American friends to search out the grave of their son near Bastogne. I found it where they told me I would, but it was among 27,000 others, and I told myself that here, Niven, were 27,000 reasons why you should keep your mouth shut after the war."

He once asked [Greta Garbo](#) whilst under a picnic table (!), why she quit making movies. She answered, "I had made enough faces."

During his war service, his batman was Pvt. [Peter Ustinov](#).

Contrary to a popular myth, he was not a cousin of actor [Patrick Macnee](#). According to Macnee, in [Sheridan Morley's](#) 1985 biography "The Other Side of the Moon," his elder brother Max and Patrick's mother were friends and Max was described as an "uncle," as opposed to a cousin. However, there was no blood link.

Was once considered for the role of James Bond for [Dr. No](#) (1962).

In the James Bond novel "You Only Live Twice," by [Ian Fleming](#), he is referred to, and a pet bird in the story was named after him. Three years after the book was released, he played Bond in [Casino Royale](#) (1967).

Father, with [Primula Rollo](#), of [David Niven Jr.](#) and [Jamie Niven](#); and the father, with [Hjordis](#), of two adopted daughters, [Kristina](#) (adopted 1960) and [Fiona](#) (adopted 1962).

Interred at Chateau D'Oex, Switzerland.

He often used to say he was born in Kirriemuir, Scotland. It was only after his birth certificate was checked after his death that this was found to be incorrect. David thought it sounded more romantic. He was born in London, England.

His Scottish father was Lieutenant William Niven, who died at Gallipoli on 21st August 1915, aged 25, while serving with the Berkshire Yeomanry. He was reported missing until 1917. He was a landowner and left a widow Henrietta (a three quarter Frenchwoman) and two sons, Max and David and two daughters, Joyce and Grizel.

Once wrote that as a child, he felt superior to others. He attributed this to the fact that when reciting the Lord's Prayer in church, he thought for several years that the correct phrasing was, "Our Father, who art a Niven . . ."

Was originally meant to play the lead role of Charlie Allnut in [The African Queen](#) (1951).

Has a grandson Ryan (born in 1998), from daughter Fiona. Grandson Michael (born in 1990) from daughter Kristina. Granddaughters Fernanda and Eugenie from son Jamie.

He knew his wife, [Primula Rollo](#), 17 days before he married her. He knew his second wife 10 days before marrying her.

Is portrayed by [Nigel Havers](#) in [The Life and Death of Peter Sellers](#) (2004).

Became friends with [Clark Gable](#) during the 1930s. While Gable was serving in England during World War II, Gable used to stay over at the Niven's cottage and spend quality time with Niven's wife and children. When, a few years later, Niven's wife died tragically, Gable did his best to comfort Niven. Niven said "Clark was drawing on his own awful experience (his wife [Carole Lombard](#)'s tragic death) to steer me through mine.

His first wife, Primmie, died tragically while attending a dinner at fellow actor [Tyrone Power](#)'s house. After dinner while playing hide and seek, Primmie opened what she thought was a closet door but instead tumbled down the basement stairs and onto the concrete floor. She died shortly after.

Died the same day as his [The Prisoner of Zenda](#) (1937) and [A Matter of Life and Death](#) (1946) co-star [Raymond Massey](#).

After he left the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst he was asked to write down his three preferred regiments, he wrote 'anything but the HLI' (Highland Light Infantry) he was inevitably commissioned into the HLI, later to transferred to the Rifle Brigade

Ex-father-in-law of [Barbara Niven](#).

Was on stage at the 1974's Oscars when a naked man ran behind him.

Was born on St. David's Day, hence his Christian name. St. David was the patron Saint of Wales.

Joined the British Army's Rifle Brigade regiment and served through Dunkirk, joining the commandos and later the secret Phantom Reconnaissance Regiment. He spent most of the time behind German lines with the latter outfit, a rough, tough, hit-and-run group harassing the enemy.

Met director [Blake Edwards](#), when Edwards was writing and directing films for Four Star Television, a production company partly owned by Niven.

Close friend of [Michael Trubshawe](#). They served together in a Highland Regiment in Malta in the 1930s and Trubshawe figures prominently in Niven's biography, "The Moon's A Balloon". Niven states: "He swiftly made a name for himself in television and one of his earliest screen appearances was in The Guns of Navarone - a lovely bonus for me." Niven does not mention Trubshawe's earlier appearance in Around the World in 80 Days. Trubshawe was Niven's best man on the occasion of his two marriages, and also godfather to Niven's son David, Jr.

As a joke he agreed to celebrate the wedding of two gorillas and to be the godfather of their first son.

Personal Quotes

I've been lucky enough to win an Oscar, write a best-seller - my other dream would be to have a painting in the Louvre. The only way that's going to happen is if I paint a dirty one on the wall of the gentlemen's lavatory.

[on [Separate Tables](#) (1958)] They gave me very good lines and then cut to [Deborah Kerr](#) while I was saying them.

[during an Academy [Award](#) presentation. responding to the unexpected entrance of a streaker] Isn't it fascinating to think that probably the only laugh that man will ever get in his life is by stripping off and showing his shortcomings?

I have a face that is a cross between two pounds of halibut and an explosion in an old clothes closet.

Can you imagine being wonderfully overpaid for dressing up and playing games?

I suppose everybody becomes an actor because they want to be liked. I do enjoy being liked, but I don't work hard at it. I try to do the best I can for my age.

In 40 years I've never been late. They pay me enough - so the least I can do is arrive sober, be on time and know all the jokes.

I make two movies a year to take care of the butcher and the baker and the school fees. Then I try to write, but it's not that easy. Acting is what's easy.

I wonder why it is, that young men are always cautioned against bad girls. Anyone can handle a bad girl. It's the good girls men should be warned against.

You can count on [Errol Flynn](#), he'll always let you down.

The hardest thing in the world to do, for a director, is a comedy. If you do a drama, that doesn't quite come off, you may still have a fairly good drama, but if a comedy does not come off, you've got a disaster. Blake [[Blake Edwards](#)] takes a big chance every time he does a comedy. There's no covering up with a comedy. They're frightfully hard to write, very difficult to direct, and they're not at all easy to act, as a matter of fact.

[on acting] This isn't work. It's fun. The whole thing is fun. I hear actors say, "I have to go to work tomorrow". Nonsense. Work is eight hours in a coal mine or a government office. Getting up in the morning and putting on a funny mustache, and dressing up and showing off in front of the grown-ups, that's play, and for which we're beautifully overpaid. I've always felt that way. After all, how many people in the world are doing things that they like to do?.

[on Frank Sinatra] So much has been written about Sinatra, of his talent, his generosity, his ruthlessness, his kindness, his gregariousness, his loneliness and his rumored links with the Mob that I can contribute nothing except to say that he is one of the few people in the world I would instinctively think of if I needed help of any sort. I thought of him once when I was in a bad spot; help was provided instantly.

[on Audrey Hepburn] A great lady. It's quite an achievement to spend that long in Hollywood and not become a Hollywood product. She always maneuvered around that - and that takes intelligence. She was always her own person.

[on Marlene Dietrich] Marlene, the most glamorous of all, she was also one of the kindest.

[on Humphrey Bogart] It took a little while to realize that he had perfected an elaborate camouflage to cover up one of the kindest and most generous of hearts. Even so, he was no soft touch and before you were allowed to peek beneath the surface and catch a glimpse of the real man, you had to prove yourself. Above all, you had to demonstrate conclusively to his satisfaction that you were no phony.

[on Lauren Bacall] 'Betty' Bacall was the perfect mate for Bogey [Humphrey Bogart] - beautiful, fair, warm, talented and highly intelligent. She gave as good as she got in the strong personality department. Women and men love her with equal devotion.

[on Errol Flynn] Flynn was a magnificent specimen of the rampant male. Outrageously good looking, he was a great natural athlete who played tennis with

Donald Budge and boxed with "Mushy" Calahan. The extras, among whom I had many friends, disliked him intensely.

[on Jack L. Warner] He was a generous host, a big gambler at work and at play, and with superb confidence he put his money where his mouth was.

[on Cary Grant] Cary's enthusiasm made him search for perfection in all things, particularly the three that meant most to him -- filmmaking, physical fitness and women.

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