

# Return of the Quiet American: The Los Angeles Trial of Audie Murphy<sup>1</sup>

By Andy Wickham<sup>2</sup>

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<https://www.audiemurphy.com/msgb/viewtopic.php?t=4946>.

**O**N MARCH 26TH, 1970, Audie Murphy was arrested for assault with intent to commit murder. Hearing the news-flash on 'K-Bar-B-Q,' the country-&-western station, sandwiched poetically enough between Bill Anderson's "Where Have All The Heroes Gone" and Conway Twitty's "Up Goes The Bottle (Down Goes The Man)," I felt little surprise as I floated home from Burbank in my air-conditioned, rented Ford. As Vonnegut would say, "So It Goes." As Murphy himself once wistfully put it, "Nobody survives a war."

Perhaps because we English require rather more from our folk heroes than the looks of a baseball star and the ability to kill – somehow John Mills' features just wouldn't look right on a

bubblegum card – I was never exposed as a boy to the Murphy legend. Nor did I ever really grasp the full extent of the mythology and apparent propaganda involved.



Author Andy Wickham in late 60's or early 70's.

To me, heroism was Denholm Elliott in THE CRUEL SEA – as a fragile, bookish lawyer, conscripted into the Navy, returning from a perilous convoy to discover that his beautiful wife had fallen for a theatrical agent, and going back to sea tight-lipped and uncomplaining to die alone. This was a role Audie Murphy would not have understood,

nor could have played. Simply, it is not The American Way.

When a friend informed me that John Wayne's perennially hungry hound in

<sup>1</sup> Originally published in *Coast* magazine, June 1971, pages 37-41.

<sup>2</sup> Andy Wickham is a British citizen who worked as a commercial artist in London who later moved to Los Angeles and became prominent in the U.S. music business as a talent scout during the 60's, 70's, and 80's and as an executive and producer for Warner Brothers Records.

HONDO<sup>3</sup> (a hound, you recall, who never required to be fed and always took care of himself) symbolized an attack on welfare-abusers, I immediately diagnosed an overdose of Andrew Sarris.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, it never occurred to me that Audie Murphy, the farm boy from Texas who was first rejected by the Marines for being too small only to return, later, from the Battle of the Bulge as America's most-decorated war hero, could conceivably be a cunning fabrication of the Pentagon propaganda machine. If Murphy were intended as the model American, whose films were mostly designed to exemplify the morals and values of America's post-war generation, then the merest glance at this generation as it staggers through its twenties should be sufficient to excuse a foreign observer for missing the point.

Indeed, were it not for my friend Phil Ochs<sup>5</sup>, a mid-westerner whose immigrant ancestry seems to have led him into seeking a national identity in the romantic glorification of The American Idea, and who firmly believes that the socialist revolution he so religiously prays for can only be achieved by Elvis Presley becoming

Che Guevara, I would have banished that newsflash from my mind as unworthy of even a conversational show-piece at a Hollywood cocktail party.

I was not, however, allowed to forget it.

"Wickham," Ochs would rave, flourishing tattered movie-posters in my face, "Do you mean to tell me you haven't seen TO HELL AND BACK – directed by Jesse Hibbs and made in 1955? Where have you BEEN?"

And so, I began to do my homework on Audie Murphy.

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Four months later, on one of those lazy hot summer afternoons when the phone calls have slackened to a standstill, and I sat in my tiny office at Warner Brothers, shrouded in fantasy, listening to Merle Haggard of Porter Wagoner and gazed longingly at my wall posters of Raquel Welch emerging from the sea and Nancy Sinatra in a pink bikini, my secretary buzzed through and informed me that Phil was on the line. His voice, gluttonous with excitement and intrigue, bubbled breathlessly through my reverie.

<sup>3</sup> A 1953 Warnercolor 3-D Western film starring John Wayne and Geraldine Page.

<sup>4</sup> An American film critic and leading proponent of the "auteur theory" of film criticism.

<sup>5</sup> An American songwriter and protest singer in the 60's and 70's. Writer of hundreds of songs, he released eight albums and we well known for his anti-war and political activism. He committed suicide in 1976.

“Hey man,” it said, “I’m at the trial.”  
Four months can be a long time, and I  
did not immediately connect.

“What trial?” I asked wearily, annoyed  
at the interruption, assuming I was in  
for a windy speech on the virtue of  
Charles Manson as a Victim Of  
Oppression In A Genocidal Society.  
Ochs, after all, is continually flirting  
with the radical left, which regards  
Manson as a Major Issue rather than a  
social abscess to be dealt with and  
forgotten, and which periodically  
prints his garbled verse in its  
underground papers.

“THE TRIAL!” sang Ochs, “The Audie  
Murphy trial. What else?”

“Well,” I replied, “What’s happening? Is  
it great?”

“Great, Wickham, it’s absolutely great!  
Murphy’s here and he looks  
FANTASTIC! If only you’d seen THE  
RED BADGE OF COURAGE – directed  
by John Huston and made in 1951 –  
you’d know exactly what I mean.”

I did not know what he meant – though  
I was soon to find out – for the only  
Murphy picture I had seen was THE  
QUIET AMERICAN, a vastly underrated  
film from the late ‘fifties. Graham  
Greene’s story, a little masterpiece of  
frightening lucidity, dealt with a jaded  
Catholic reporter from London, played

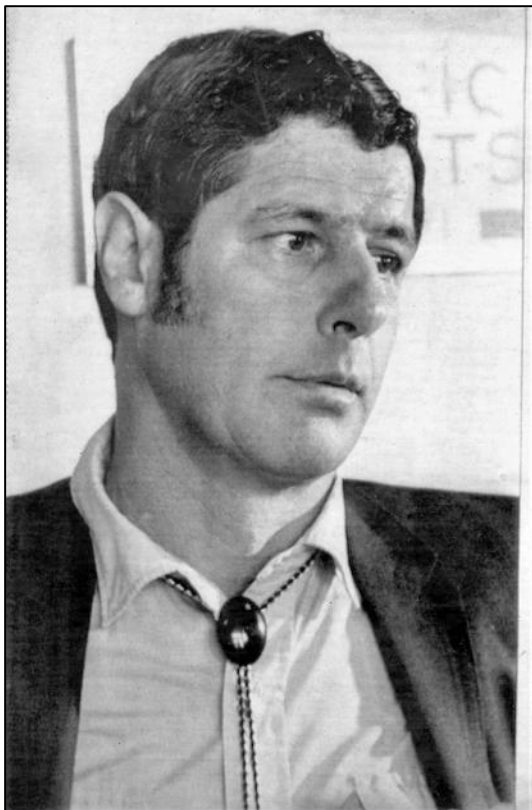


by Sir Michael Redgrave, covering the  
last days of French imperialism in  
Indo-China. Redgrave’s wife was back  
in London; his marriage was in ruins  
and his religion prevented him from  
obtaining a divorce and marrying an  
innocent little Saigon whore called  
Phuong with whom he was infatuated.  
Murphy, in the title role, played Alden  
Pyle, a fresh-faced Ivy League type  
from Boston, a virgin infuriatingly  
puritan, a loner whose only friend was  
his dog. Murphy fell in love with  
Phuong. Successfully and deceitfully  
enticing her from Redgrave, Murphy  
was murdered when betrayed to the  
Communists. They were informed by  
Redgrave, who discovered that Pyle  
was secretly smuggling weapons to

American mercenaries in the mountains.

This was an out-of-character role for Murphy, and one which cut little ice with his fans. Audie Murphy as Alden Pyle? Audie Murphy from Boston? Audie Murphy a virgin? Never! This was The Kid From Texas who had, after all, been To Hell And Back. It wouldn't do.

"Well" I said, returning to Ochs, "what exactly is going on?"



Dog Trainer David Gofstein. AP Wire photo originally printed July 6, 1970. Contributed by M.D. Marks.

"There's this girl on the stand," said Ochs, "and she's great. She's absolutely beautiful. She's Italian and her name is Maria. *Beeeaautiful girl*. You've got to come down here."

The girl's name was Maria D'Auria, and according to her testimony, the trouble started when Murphy made a present to her of a pedigree German Shepherd which he had appropriately christened "Rommel." Rommel was a puppy and his purpose, when older, was to guard Maria and her property. For this purpose, being naturally benign and friendly as puppies are, Rommel was to be trained, and Murphy suggested Maria find a trainer in the Yellow Pages.

Maria came up with a fellow named David who owned a kennel in North Hollywood. She called him up and he came over to administer the first lesson, bearing a contract which stated that this was to be free, but that the remaining dozen lessons were to be so-much-per-hour. The contract having been signed, Gofstein, according to Maria, proceeded to march out into the garden, rip a thorny branch from a cherry tree, and started belaboring the poor animal mercilessly in the face.

Maria ordered him to stop, and to leave her home immediately. A struggle ensued in which, Maria testified, Gofstein had interfered with her clothing and, when asked to be more





The cover of a French film magazine featuring THE QUIET AMERICAN. Contributed by M.D. Marks.

specific, that he had squeezed her left breast. After she was finally rid of him, she telephoned Murphy who was in his office on Sunset Boulevard inspecting his gun collection with a six-foot-five-inch bartender buddy from the Valley named John Tuell<sup>6</sup>.

Murphy and Tuell immediately took off for Maria's house. When they arrived, they found her on the phone to Gofstein who, she testified had called her on his return to the kennels and was making threatening and obscene remarks. Murphy picked up the

extension in the bedroom and announced himself in his soft Texas drawl.

"This is Audie Murphy."

"Never heard of you," replied Gofstein, at which point there seemed little else to do but pay this dude a visit and see who was boss.

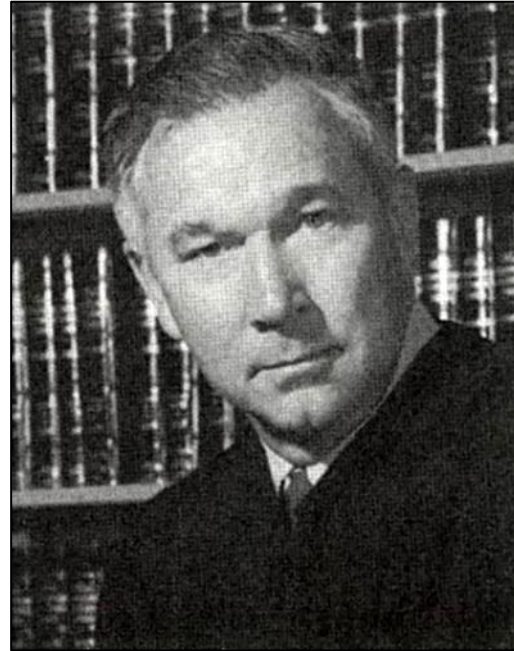
It isn't altogether clear what happened next. The way Murphy tells it, Gofstein was waiting for them when they arrived with Maria at the kennels. His wife was with him. After initial insults had been exchanged and respective gauntlets dropped, Gofstein was alleged to have made for the kennels in an attempt to set the dogs loose. A shot was fired – whether by Murphy (as the prosecution claimed) or by Tuell (as the defense claimed) was never made clear. Tuell had not been – nor would be – called to the stand. The shot went wide (by chance, claimed the prosecution; by design, claimed the defense). A vicious brawl ensued in which Gofstein was savagely beaten before the police arrived, summoned by Mrs. Gofstein, as Murphy's car hurtled off in a cloud of dust. Nearly two weeks later, Murphy was arrested at his home and charged with attempted murder.

<sup>6</sup> John Tuell – a close friend of Audie Murphy. Wickham misspelled Tuell's name as "Tool" in the original article which is likely because of his story is based on recall from listening to the courtroom testimony.

This, one had to admit, was better than Alden Pyle, and the following morning I accompanied Phil to the courtroom. The trial was being held in downtown Los Angeles<sup>7</sup>, in many ways the most colorful quarter of this infectious city of sin and scandal. Here one finds mission halls and Latin bars, dingy hotels and dirty movies, a Greyhound station and huge department stores. The streets are always alive and bursting with people of different colors and languages. These are things the New Yorker would take for granted but which still intrigue the Hollywood resident whose soul remains his own. In downtown Los Angeles, a hallucination is just that. In Hollywood, of course, one can never be sure.

The trial was taking place in a small courtroom in a faded, peeling building which smelt of urine, and the lobby we found the usual gaggle of poverty-ridden misfits, mostly blacks, with drooping figures and broken faces, shriveled housewives with anguished eyes, some carrying children, a few furtive hippies munching crackers from the battered vending machine, and everybody being over-polite to the dead-eyed officials.

As we approached the elevator, Paul Caruso, the lawyer for the defense,



Judge James Greely Kolts

joined us. According to Jaik Rosenstein (Hollywood's Jonathan Swift who writes a pamphlet called HOLLYWOOD CLOSE UP, whose office has been bombed, and who is currently facing trial himself for allegedly blackmailing Hal Wallis), Caruso was approached by a major studio for the film rights to his life story and would not grant them unless the studio promised to use him in the lead. The studio refused, says Rosenstein, because they didn't like his looks.

Caruso, however, was looking great. He is a little on the plump side, with a soft-chinned Italian face, penetrating dark eyes and glossy, well-oiled hair. He wore an elegant grey silk suit with a

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<sup>7</sup> Judge James Greely Kolts, Los Angeles Superior Court presided over the trial. Judge Kolts most famous criminal trials he presided over were a murder trial of Steve Grogan, a Charles Manson follower.



Paul Caruso, Los Angeles attorney of celebrities. Photo source: Obituary, Los Angeles Times, August 16, 2001.

double-breasted waist coat and there were rings which sparkled on his fingers. He exuded the air of one whose life has been spent in expensive restaurants and luxury penthouses, in Cadillac limousines and presidential yachts. His clients are invariably celebrities, so he's always in the papers. At this writing, he is defending L.A.'s first colored sportscaster, who is accused of shooting his wife in a crime of passion, and Sonny & Cher's manager, who has been accused of master-minding a \$200,000 jewelry heist in Bel Air. With a flamboyant

flourish of his cigar, he asked us to push the button for the third floor.

"You were here yesterday, weren't you?" he asked Phil.

"Yes, I was. How's it going?"

"Rather well, I think, don't you? How did you like the girl?"

"Very convincing. She was great."

"Wasn't she? And she was the prosecution's witness! They called her, not me." His tone suggested that Murphy was in no danger.

The courtroom was smaller than Perry Mason's<sup>8</sup>, but it conformed in every other way and my eyes searched in vain for Hamilton Burger and Lieutenant Tragg. The judge was hunched over his desk, grey and death-like, and a Mexican police lieutenant was nervously mumbling replies to routine questions shot at him in a piercing, staccato voice by the state prosecutor, a gangling, bespectacled young man of about 30 in a rather smart Ivy League suit and a kipper tie with a breakfast stain on it.

As soon as I set eyes on Murphy, I knew that he was the stuff that gods are made of. There was no doubt about it. Some of us have infallible instincts

<sup>8</sup> Perry Mason was a popular courtroom drama in the 60's starring Raymond Burr who played the defense attorney and Hamilton Burger who played the hapless prosecuting attorney.

about this. The stuff that gods are made of is hard to define. It embodies burn of eye, tone of voice, ease of walk or, in a word, presence. Yet it is more than presence. It is a strange, almost spiritual quality which somehow separates the owner from us. A god, above all things, must be mysterious. James Dean had it and so did John Kennedy. Elvis Presley has it and so does John Wayne. Marlon Brando had it and lost it. The Beatles never had it. They were never gods – just local boys from the neighborhood bowling alley who made it big. There is no mystery. They have been all too human; we know them inside-out; there is nothing else to know.

Whatever it takes, Audie Murphy has it. Still has it, will always have it.

He was not sitting at the defense table but lounging comfortably in the back row of the cordoned off area which separated the tiny court from the three-row public gallery. On his right sat a handsome, grey-haired man with a bucolic, Irish face and a silver-buckled stringed tie, and, on his left, a well-built blond youth in checkered shirt and cowboy boots with a Stetson on the seat beside him. As Murphy, impeccably attired in a natty blue suit, turned to acknowledge the arrival of his lawyer, we caught him for a moment full-face.



1958 THE QUIET AMERICAN photo of Audie Murphy as Alden Pyle, *The American*. Photo contributed by M.D. Marks.

His skin is golden, his white teeth are perfect, and his hair is full and shining with barely a streak of grey. His eyes are sparkling grey, a strange, faraway grey, unforgettable eyes which are beginning to wrinkle at the corners when he smiles, and he has a little nervous tic which contorts his face, for his are eyes which have seen much pain. There is something unmistakably haunting about him. He is 46 now but he has hardly changed at all.

As we took our seats we thought we heard him mutter to his neighbor that he sure could use a fifth.

The jury was the inevitable herd of insurance salesmen's wives, aerospace clerks and token blacks. They were a



nebulous bunch, purged of life and passion by long hours in wide offices with strip-lighting and no windows, the sort of people who line up for tickets to the Andy Williams Show, who cook with Shake 'n' Bake and wash with Fab Borax, who invest their life savings in a trip to England and return babbling about the quaintness of the pubs and the stodginess of the food. They symbolize the death of America, and the recent earthquake was only the beginning of their punishment for there is, after all, no greater crime than lifelessness.

One of the jury, I had read, was a musical arranger and I searched for a familiar face, secretly hoping to discover Jack Nitzsche<sup>9</sup> squinting behind his huge spectacles and looking nervous while privately yearning to spill the beans at some night club opening or other. But there was no such luck, and I assumed that the plump, pink man in the alpaca cardigan, whose expression revealed that marijuana was not completely unknown to him, was the arranger.

There was unfortunately no sign of Maria or Gofstein of whom I had the

most vivid mental pictures (a young Alida Valli, an aging Elliott Gould) nor even John Tuell (Chuck Connors?). The public gallery was bare but for two old ladies who stared, transfixed, at the subject of the drama.

The Mexican inspector was on the stand for hours, examining weapons, chalking diagrams on a blackboard and mumbling nervously, never once looking Murphy in the eye.

When the state prosecutor<sup>10</sup> had finished, Caruso addressed the witness.

"Lieutenant,"<sup>11</sup> he began, "can you remember the date on which you presented Mr. Murphy with the warrant for his arrest?" His tone was rich and theatrical, laced with a mocking disbelief which reduced the little man to the stature of a waiter on neighboring Olvera Street.

The courtroom door opened and closed, and a woman crept in, fortyish with dyed auburn hair, rouge slightly smudge, smart but out of date clothes and anxious eyes. There was something pathetic about her, something wistful and sad and I found

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<sup>9</sup> Academy Award winner Bernard "Jack" Alfred Nitzsche was an American musician, arranger, and a song writer who worked with the Rolling Stones, film producer Phil Spector, and worked in notable films which included *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *The Exorcist*, *An Officer and a Gentlemen*, and others.

<sup>10</sup> Assistant District Attorney John L. Breault III, 1968 graduate of Georgetown University Law School would later be interviewed March 22, 1996 by the Audie Murphy Research Foundation.

<sup>11</sup> Burbank Police Department officer R.V. Rodrigo "Rod" Rodriguez was later interviewed by the Audie Murphy Research Foundation January 7, 1996.

myself wondering who she was – an old flame perhaps, or maybe a leading lady from one of those early westerns? A few heads turned as she nervously took her seat.

“The 26th,” muttered the lieutenant.

“Speak up!” boomed Caruso, rising from his seat and strolling past the jury in a haze of cigar smoke with a yellow legal tablet in his well-cuffed, glittering left hand. “Speak up! I can’t hear you!”

“Mr. Murphy was arrested on the 26th!” shouted the lieutenant, and as he raised his voice the thick Spanish accent became doubly apparent, “It was on the morning of the 26th.”

“Then tell me, Lieutenant,” thundered Caruso, as if he were a schoolmaster cornering a late-comer whose excuse was inadequate, “why, if the alleged crime occurred as you have stated on the 13th, did it take your people THIRTEEN DAYS to decide whether or not to arrest Mr. Murphy?”

I could understand now why Caruso was attorney-to-the-celebs. If I were

ever nailed by the income tax people, or the FBI for draft evasion, or any of the hundred-and-one organizations in this country who make their livings creating this extraordinary climate of paranoia and neurosis in which we live, I would not hesitate to call him.

He paced back and forth between the defense table and the witness stand,

puckering the face, widening the eyes, staring at the ceiling, delving into his pockets, flourishing his cigar, ticking off points on the legal pad, now standing, now sitting, modulating his rich, smooth voice, now soft and let’s-get-to-the-bottom-of-this-in-the-interests-of-justice, now fortissimo and do-you-really-expect-

these-learned-citizens-of-the-jury-to-swallow-that?

His performance was a veritable tour de force, and it was not until I turned to Phil, who continued to gaze at Murphy in open-mouthed wonder, that I remembered who had top-billing in this little drama and my eyes and thoughts returned to the star of the show.



QUIET AMERICAN movie still # QAM-135 contributed by M.D. Marks.

A faint smile played on Murphy's lips as he watched Caruso, but he was otherwise imperturbable, the bright grey eyes revealing nothing.

A girlfriend of mine who worked for Nudie<sup>12</sup>, the famous rodeo tailor who designs the spangled costumes for most of the big country stars, used to see him occasionally in the store. He would visit, and chat about horses and guns, and once she brought home a bowl of chili he had made for her. She always referred to him as 'Murph' and was secretly in love with him.

While browsing through a junk shop, I had come across a 1945 copy of LIFE, with Murphy on the cover as America's Returning Hero. There he was, smiling shyly, small and boyish in his uniform, his tunic sagging with medals and inside were the inevitable small-town photographs of him relaxing on the Kingston farm with proud parents and wondrous friends and neighbors. There was a picture of him, rifle slung across his shoulders, walking his dog, and another of him standing alone in a military cemetery. I think they even had a picture of him holding up a child, but I cannot be sure. Though a mere dollar would have purchased these

treasures, I had no change and when I returned the magazine was gone.

Most interesting of all were the combat reports. Murphy saw most of his war-time action in the mopping-up stages of the Battle of the Bulge. At the age of 18, he had enlisted in the infantry as a private, and he was commissioned on the battlefield following a skirmish in which he privately eliminated 35 Germans. As the commanding colonel pinned the gold bars on his shoulders, he told Murphy: "You are now a gentleman by Act of Congress. Shave, take a bath – and get back into line."

Lieutenant Murphy not only got back into line, he increased his haul to 240 Germans in the remaining four months of war. The actions which won him the Medal of Honor make better reading than many of the stories he was destined to act out on the big screen. I quote here from the official report of Lieutenant Walter Weispfenning, 0-1998698 of the 39th Field Artillery which was in position south of the Bois de Riedwihr near Holtzwihr, France on the afternoon of January 26th, 1945P

"The KRAUT tanks rumbled past Lt. Murphy's position," he wrote, "passing him by as close as 50 yards and firing

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<sup>12</sup> Nudie Cohn was born and immigrated from Kiev, Russia. After deciding to become a tailor, he began making burlesque clothing in New York City and was the first to add rhinestones to clothing. He later moved to the Los Angeles area and began making clothing for well known entertainers including Tex Ritter, Roy Rogers, Elvis Presley, and Elton John – just to name a few. His clothing store "Nudies" still is in business. Terry Murphy would also work for Nudies for a while after his father was killed in 1971 in a plane crash.

at him as they passed. They didn't close in for the kill because they wanted to give our tank destroyer, which was burning but not in flames, as wide a berth as possible.

"While we attempted to hold off the tanks which directed artillery fire and bazooka rockets, the KRAUT infantry line, consisting of two full-strength companies of 125 men each, surged up across the open meadow in a wide arc. As they advanced, they fired their machine pistols and rifles at Lieutenant MURPHY.

"Then I saw Lieutenant MURPHY do the bravest thing that I have ever seen any man do in combat. With the Germans only 100 yards away and still moving up on him, he climbed onto the slowly burning tank-destroyer and began firing the 50-caliber machine gun at the KRAUTS. There he was, completely exposed and silhouetted against the background of bare trees and snow, with a fire under him that threatened to blow the destroyer to bits if it reached the gasoline and ammunition. 88mm shells, machine gun, machine-pistol and rifle fire crashed all around him.

"Standing on top of the TD, Lieutenant MURPHY raked the approaching enemy force with machine gun fire. Twelve KRAUTS, stealing up a ditch to flank him from his right were killed in

the gully at 50 yards range by concentrated fire from his 50-caliber gun. Twice the tank-destroyer he was standing on was hit by artillery fire and Lieutenant MURPHY was enveloped in clouds of smoke and spurts of flame. His clothing was torn and riddled by flying shell fragments and bits of rock. Bullets ricocheted and careened off the tank-destroyer as the enemy concentrated on the full fury on this one-man strongpoint.

"He was wounded in the leg by fragmentation from an 88mm shell, but he kept on fighting. With blood spreading over his torn trouser-leg, he continued to hold off the entire German force of about 250 men, aided only by our artillery fire. The enemy tanks, unwilling to press their attack on Company 'B' without infantry support, had meanwhile returned and were milling around the meadow firing their '88's at Lieutenant MURPHY'S position.

"Covered with grime and dust, Lieutenant MURPHY withstood persistent fire from the tank guns and a hailstorm of automatic weapon fire from the tanks and infantry. Germans crept forward through ground folds; others attempted to rush his exposed position. He killed KRAUTS as close as ten yards from his burning tank-destroyer. Their corpses lay clogging



the draws and on the open meadow beyond the woods.

“Fighting on despite his wound, Lt. MURPHY killed and wounded an estimated 35 of the enemy in addition to the 12 he killed in the ditch. After an hour-long fight, exhausted, bleeding profusely and his ammunition spent, Lt. MURPHY limped back to his Company. He reorganized his men and let them in a violent attack on the enemy, driving the Germans from the area. Lt. MURPHY then had his wound treated on the field. He consistently refused to be evacuated.

“Lt MURPHY’S intrepid stand resulted directly in inflicting at least a hundred casualties on the attacking force. Fighting alone against overwhelming odds, he smashed a powerful assault, enabling his Regiment to hold ground that was won at a heavy cost in blood.”

If only Robert Aldrich had been there with a camera! And to think that John Wayne passed up the opportunity for active service because he wasn’t offered a commission! “I would have had to go in as a private,” said Wayne, maker of THE GREEN BERETS, “and I took a dim view of that.”

The difference between Wayne and Murphy, of course, is that while Wayne

acts out his glorious military fantasies in Technicolor on the big screen, Murphy was directed to recreate a wooden image of himself on screen when there were no real battles left to fight.

He says he never liked making pictures: “It beats picking cotton,” he once opined, “but that’s about all.” In 1945 he tried for West Point, but a war wound at Colmar has prevented him from passing the physical. One of the secretaries at Warner Brothers, a pretty girl of Swedish origin, had once been an actress and had appeared with Murphy in minor roles in a couple of his mid-period westerns. She thought he was a nut. “Do you know,” she told me, “that he refused to use blanks in his films? When Audie Murphy did a picture, he always insisted on using live ammunition. Scared the hell out of me!” Of course. If West Point wouldn’t have him, he would have to pretend. The spirit must be fed. It came as no surprise to me to learn that he had personally expressed his sympathy to Lieutenant Calley<sup>13</sup> down in Georgia.

After 40-odd pictures, a few interesting ventures (THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE – a misunderstood anti-war sermon from John Huston which some consider to be ahead of its time, THE

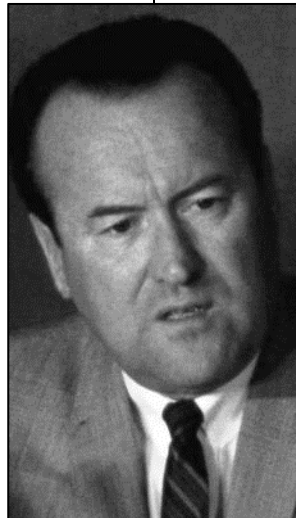
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<sup>13</sup> Army officer Lieutenant William Calley was accused and convicted of murdering between 200-400 unarmed civilian men, women, and children from the village of Mỹ Lai, South Vietnam.

QUIET AMERICAN in which the critics thought Murphy had been hopelessly miscast, THE UNFORGIVEN, again Huston, in which his part had been infinitesimal) but mostly clichéd cowboys-and-Indians fodder, Murphy vanished from the public eye.

He invested all his money in a middle eastern oil venture and was bankrupted by the Six Day War. He tried his hand at country-and-western, but beyond authorship of a Jerry Wallace hit called "Shutters And Boards," he made little headway. By 1968, biographers note, he was drinking heavily, had become insomniac, was hooked on pills and was said to be suffering from hallucinations.<sup>14</sup>

Support was not forthcoming from the veterans organizations – he had never joined any. "I'm not a joiner," he once said, "and if I didn't feel all these medals belonged to a lot of people and not just me, I'd like to wrap them up and send them to the President."



Tom Reddin, former Los Angeles Police Chief who became a newscaster.

Only the tic in his face gave hint to the scars he bore. His cool grey eyes, his flickering smile, his firm, broad shoulders and his elegantly tailored suit suggested strength and stature. He was a study in impassive dignity.

The court recessed for lunch after Caruso had bullied the little cop into admitting that he hadn't really noticed clearly – "beyond a reasonable shadow of doubt" – the make of the get-away car, and Phil and I went to find a restaurant.

On our way, outside the federal building, we passed what seemed to be a private luncheon party in progress in a basement, for sitting at the head of a long table with serviette tucked under his chin, his cheeks bulging with masticated vegetables while his mouth moved silently but widely behind a plate-glass window, was Tom Reddin<sup>15</sup>, Los Angeles' former police-chief-turned-newscaster.

Reddin was always credited with being The Man Who Cracked The Watts Riots,

<sup>14</sup> Wickham relates information he has heard from "biographers" regarding heavy-drinking and drug use. The fact is that Audie Murphy did not drink at all. He did become addicted to a powerful doctor-prescribed drug Placydil used to treat Murphy's war-related PTSD and insomnia. When Murphy realized he was addicted, he locked himself in a hotel room for a week and "kicked" his addiction "cold-turkey".

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Reddin was a Los Angeles Police Department chief from 1967 to 1969 who then became a TV commentator. He was featured on the cover of Time magazine, July 19, 1968.

and he has hard little curranty eyes and is rumored to play golf with Bob Hope.

He never really caught on as a newscaster, mainly because he always wore shiny suits of diarrhetic brown and his voice was high-pitched and squeaky. Besides, the news in Los Angeles is the exclusive property of the legendary George Putnam, whose editorials bear such stentorian titles as "Your Kid, Dope And You!", who went on assignment to the Middle East and came back with Golda Meir's secret recipe for chicken soup with matzo balls (which he will mail to anyone who sends in a stamped envelope), and who annually bears the American flag on his white palomino in the Rose Bowl parade. Putnam is another story, for he alone would make Los Angeles worth living in and against such competition, Reddin wilted, was replaced (by a dashing young Australian with wide-lapelled suits and a surfer's physique), and was duly relegated to the role of commentator, a sort of provincial ultra-conservative Severeid<sup>16</sup> until his contract expires.

"Let's just walk in and sit down for lunch," said Ochs as we watched Reddin emphasize a point with a wave of his fork. Ochs had that 'I will if you will' expression on his face which I

have encountered many times outside sleazy bars and whorehouses, and with my usual timidity, I replied no, we'd better not, it looked like a private do.

So, we went to Olvera Street and sampled steak picado and guacamole at a terraced restaurant where, sitting alone we found the auburn-haired lady from the public gallery, a said, solitary figure who nervously powdered her nose and kept dabbing at her face with a lace handkerchief.

In the afternoon, Murphy took the stand. His voice was soft and musical, unmistakably Texas, calm and even. I can remember little of his testimony. He repeatedly insisted that John Tuell, not he, had carried the gun and that the shot was merely a warning and was fired into the air. In short, in his soft firm tones, he created an unlikely image of himself as a reasonable, sober, peace-loving individual, the very embodiment of middle-class clean-living who had only gone over to Maria's in the first place for a spaghetti dinner, whose sole intention of going over to Gofstein's kennels was "to talk this thing over," and who only threw a punch in self-defense when provoked. This was not convincing, for Audie Murphy is not Denholm Elliott - he's The Kid From Texas and The Kid From

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<sup>16</sup> Eric Severeid was a well-known American author and newsman for CBS evening news who ended his career in 1977.

Texas will endure many things but will not stand for his woman being messed with. That means fists and guns and trouble.

“Mr. Murphy,” rapped the state prosecutor, “you say you are a collector of weapons.”

“A gun collector,” drawled Murphy, “yes, sir,” with an emphasis on the ‘sir’.

“Could you tell me which weapon fired the shot in question?”

“Yes, sir. It was a Magnum .38.”

“Where is this weapon at present, Mr. Murphy?”

“It is in the possession of Mr. Caruso.”

“Now, is this the only Magnum .38 registered to you, Mr. Murphy?”

“No sir, there is one other.”

“Why were the police unable to locate the other Magnum when they searched your residence?”

“OBJECTION!” boomed Caruso, leaping to his feet. “This is irrelevant and immaterial. We have already established that the weapon used is in my possession ....”

“Overruled!” snapped the judge. “Witness will answer the question.”

A stenographer repeated the question, and a hush fell over the court.

“Why were the police unable to locate the other Magnum when they searched your residence?”

There was a pause of what seemed like two long minutes before Murphy answered, and when he did, his voice was a little louder, a little harder and considerably slower than before, and he weighed each word carefully.

“The police were unable to locate the weapon,” he said clearly, “because I gave it to President Boumédiène<sup>17</sup> of Algeria for a Christmas present last year.”



Algerian President  
Houari Boumédiène.

Silence. There was not a buzz, not even a whisper. I felt a thrill come over my body. So, he was the Quiet American after all.

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<sup>17</sup> President Houari Boumédiène was the second President of Algeria up until his death in 1978.



We left shortly after that, and heading down the freeway into a thick, beige sunset, Phil was all agog. He positively simmered.

“Stick with me, Wickham,” he gloated, “I’ll show you the Real America. Good thing you know me, isn’t it, or you’d have missed it. You could have been sitting in that stuffy old office. You’ve got to get a screening of THE KID FROM TEXAS, directed by Kurt Neumann and made in 1950. That should be next on your list of things to do. Imagine going back to Warner Brothers and telling Mo Ostin, when he asks you why you weren’t at the meeting, that you’re sorry but you just couldn’t make it, you had to go to the trial – you know, THE trial, the Audie Murphy trial. . . .”

A few days later I was watching Putnam, and he announced that Audie Murphy had been acquitted, and there followed a brief interview outside the courthouse in which Murphy, boyish as ever, explained how the verdict had restored his faith in American justice and what a great thing it was to live in a free country.

I heard the news on a Monday evening hoot night at the Troubadour, the local folk club where shattered survivors of the early Village Folk Boom claw at each other over bottles of liquor, lamenting lost careers and envying successful ones. I knew Phil would be

down there feeding on the gossip, so I made all haste.

I found him sitting at a table with Ed Sanders and two of the lawyers from the Manson trial. They were huddled over glasses of wine and speaking in whispers.

“Phil!” I shouted across the bar, “Murphy got off!”

“Who got off?” asked one of the lawyers.



Source: Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles, Calif.), Sat. Oct 17, 1970, p.21.  
Contributed by M.D. Marks

“Murphy,” said Phil, “Audie Murphy.”  
And he proceeded to tell them about  
the Kid From Texas.

I wasn’t listening, though, because for  
me, Audie Murphy will always be Alden

Pyle, the Quiet American, running guns  
by day to General The in the mountains,  
and by night whistling tunelessly as he  
walks his dog along the Saigon  
waterfront.



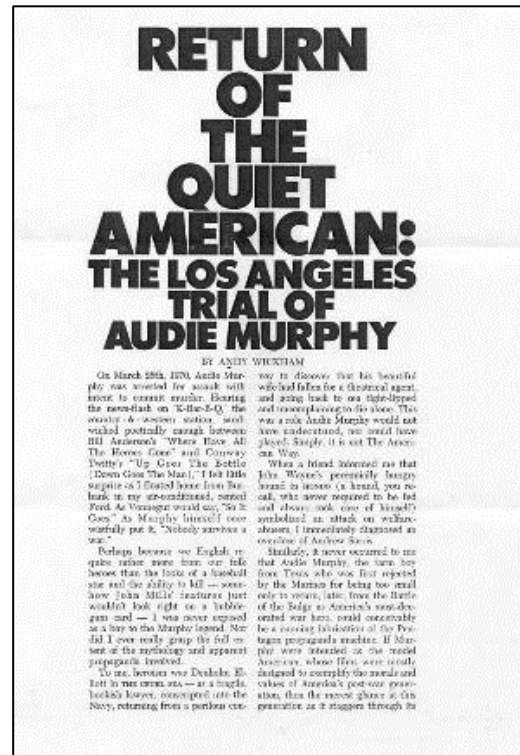
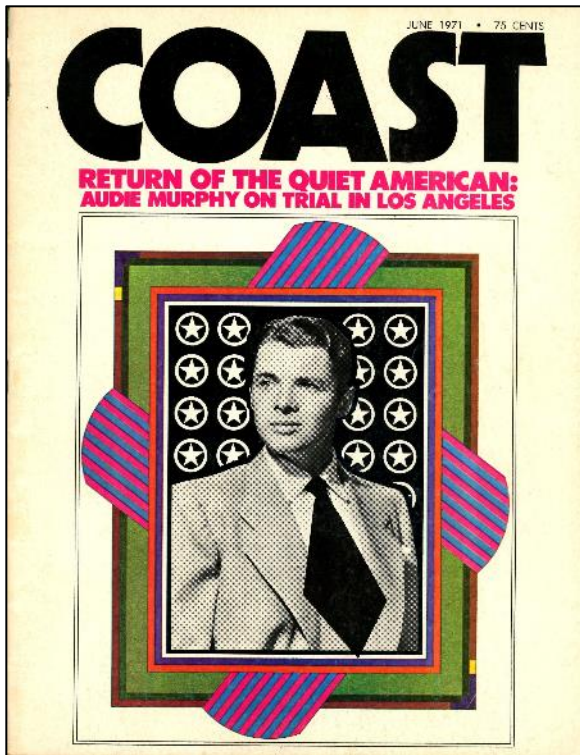
QUIET AMERICAN movie still #QAM-46 contributed from  
the collection of M.D. Marks.

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QUIET AMERICAN movie still with Audie Murphy  
and Michael Redgrave. Contributed by M.D. Marks.

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Cover and page 37 of *Coast Magazine*, June 1971. From the collection of Lillian Bailey.