

May

By Mike West

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<https://www.audiemurphy.com/msgb/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=4793>

Editor's Note: Delivered as a speech by the author at Audie Murphy Days 2021 at the Audie Murphy – Cotton Museum in Greenville, Texas.

“**T**ODAY is May 22, 2021. I suspect that does not come as a revelation to you. Before you assume that I am simply a master of the obvious or worse, that I have lost all control of my faculties, let me point out that the month of May is highly significant in the study of Audie Murphy of the 3rd Infantry Division.

It is a painful fact that in 6 days, May 28th will mark the 50th anniversary of the death of Audie Leon Murphy. On May 28, 1971, Murphy and 5 others perished in a plane crash in western Virginia. The fatal flight departed Dekalb-Peachtree airport, in Atlanta, Georgia for a business trip to Martinsville, Virginia. The flight went well until around 11:00 a.m. when they ran into bad weather. At 11:49 a.m. the pilot, Herman Butler, radioed Roanoke, Virginia for weather conditions. The report he received was as follows “ceiling was 1,000 feet broken, 2,500 feet overcast, visibility

three miles in light rain and fog, with mountain ridges obscured.”¹

These conditions would have likely posed no problem to an instrument



-Photo source: Henry Boden
Brushy Mountain Memorial erected on the site where Audie Murphy died on May 28, 1971.

¹ Harold B. Simpson, Audie Murphy: American Soldier, (Dallas: Alcor Publishing, 1982), pp. 385-389.

rated pilot, but Herman Levelle Butler was not so rated.²

Some 19 minutes later, the airplane would crash into the side of Brushy Mountain, near New Castle, Virginia. The final report concerning the crash made note of the bad weather conditions, but the final sentence is telling. "The board also finds that the pilot attempted to continue flight into instrument weather conditions which were beyond his operational capabilities. ³"

A side note: on September 4, 1988, a plane crash near Carthage, Texas killed 4 passengers and the pilot. The pilot was Marcus Butler, brother of Herman L. Butler. ⁴

Tomorrow, May 23rd, will mark 80 years since the death of Josie Bell



-Photograph by Mike West

² National Transportation Safety Board Press Release, June 15, 1972, p. 1.

³ National Transportation Safety Board Press Release, June 15, 1972, p. 3.

⁴ The Marshall News Messenger (Marshall, Texas), Mon., Sept. 5, 1988, p. 1.; The Times (Shreveport, Louisiana), Tues., Sept. 6, 1988, p. 1.

Killian Murphy, the mother of Audie Murphy and eleven other children. The last of those children, Nadine Murphy Lokey, is an honored guest today.⁵

Let us move in time to May 22, 1944, exactly 77 years ago. The place is Anzio-Nettuno, Italy. Allied Forces have been here since January 22, 1944, and it has been a bloodbath. Allied forces are on the verge of the breakout from this costly nightmare of 4 months and one day.⁶ One day, you ask? Yes. 1944 was a leap year, so you had one extra day to be killed or maimed.⁷

In an operation called "Buffalo", allied forces were to open the offensive on May 23, 1944 at 5:45 a.m. with an intense artillery barrage followed at 6:30 a.m. with an all-out infantry assault on the German lines. The objective of the 3rd Infantry Division was the town of Cisterna, a German stronghold since the landing in January 1944. Once Cisterna was captured, the Division was to move on to take the town of Cori.⁸

On the evening of January 21, 1944, the order came, "Move up tonight".

⁵ Texas Death Certificate for Josie Murphy, author's collection.

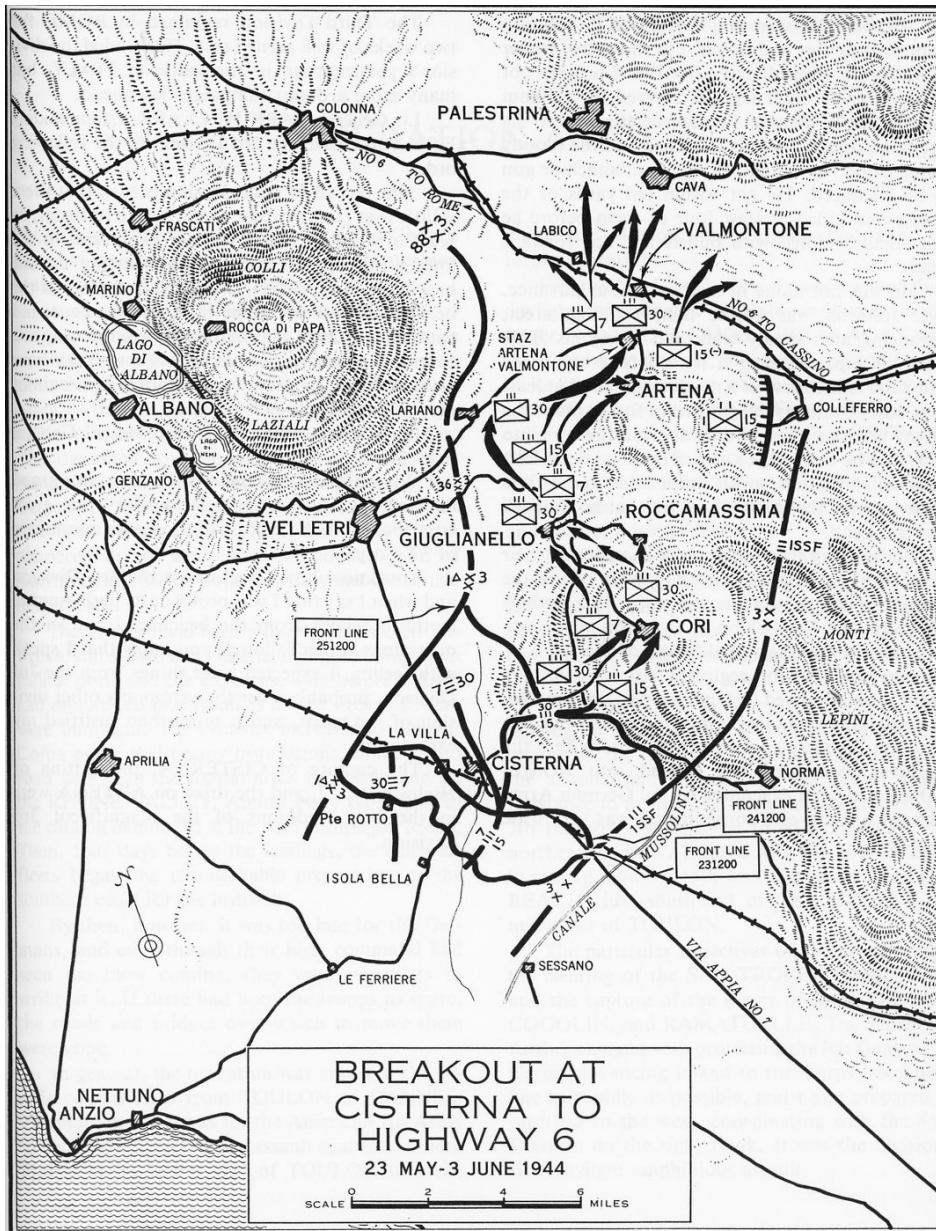
⁶ Donald G. Taggart, History of The Third Infantry Division on World War II, (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1947), p. 150.

⁷ Perpetual calendar

⁸ Taggart, pp. 153-156.

As the 3rd Infantry Division began moving, the song “Dogface Soldier” was played by the division band. The evening of the 22nd found all of the Third Division in place and everything

was in readiness.⁹ Might I add that on the 22nd, the 36th Infantry Division – also known as the “Texas Division”, had completed its secret movement



-Original Map Source: *History of the 3rd Infantry Division in World War II*

⁹ Simpson, pp. 102-103.



-Source: <https://military.wikia.org>

15th Infantry Regiment official military crest.

ashore to add to the assault one more division.¹⁰

The 15th Infantry Regiment of which Audie Murphy was a member was to assault the right side of the town Cisterna so as to capture Highway 7 and the railroad. Other units of the Third Division were to assault Cisterna directly and on the left side.

With these introductory remarks, it is my desire to briefly introduce you to what happened over the next four days from May 23rd through May

¹⁰ Rick Atkinson, *The Day of Battle in Sicily and Italy, 1943-1944*, (New York, New York: Holt and Company, 2007), p. 537.

¹¹ Taggart, p. 188.

26th. A summary of what happened appears in the 3rd Infantry Division History and it reads as follows:

“The division’s frontal assault and breakthrough ... was a monument not only to the excellence of planning and coordination at every level, but also to the indomitable spirit and sheer fighting ability of the troops.”¹¹

These are lofty words, all true, mind you – but they miss the mark. *Indomitable spirit?* Yes. *Sheer fighting ability?* Absolutely, but let us get down to where the average American GI lived and died.¹² Let us see as one Company B man said, “*At a worm’s eye view.*”¹³

On the morning of May 23, following an intense artillery barrage, the infantry attacked the assigned objectives. At the end of 24 hours, the 3rd Infantry Division would suffer the highest single day casualty list in its history. Nearly 1,000 men were either KIA, WIA, or MIA¹⁴. In comparison from January 22, 1944, D-Day at Anzio, through May 22, 1944, the division suffered

¹² Taggart, p. 188.

¹³ Albert L. Pyle, interview with author.

¹⁴ Military acronyms for killed in action, wounded in action, and missing in action.

approximately 6,300 such casualties.¹⁵

The next day, May 24th, would mark a near fatal incident for Audie Murphy. It was during the effort to cross the railroad cut southeast of Cisterna that as Murphy was sliding down the bank his entrenching shovel caught on a rock. A German machinegun began firing at him and as he recounts in *TO HELL AND BACK...*

“I hung like a pigeon upon the bank with lead spattering all about me. Rock dust from the bullets fills my nostrils. My throbbing temples seem ready to burst ... I free myself with a desperate heave and bolt across the tracks.”¹⁶

Shortly after that incident, the action for which the first of only two Medals of Honors were to be awarded to Company B, 15th Infantry, was to take place. This action would be witnessed by the only other recipient of Company B, 15th Infantry, Audie Murphy. A sergeant in the 2nd platoon, after crossing the railroad, sees great danger to his men from German machineguns. He attacks across 200 yards of open territory to engage those guns and the infantry with them. He destroys several of the machineguns but is killed. In the

words of Audie Murphy in *TO HELL AND BACK*, “This was how Lutsky, the sergeant, helped buy the freedom that we cherish and abuse.”¹⁷ Sergeant Lutsky was in fact Sergeant Sylvester Antolak, 2nd Platoon, Company B.¹⁸

A footnote, if you will: of the 39 Medals of Honor received by the men of the Third Infantry Division during World War II, five of them were earned in the 48-hour period of time from May 23, 1944 to May 24, 1944. Three of the five were posthumously awarded. Two more would be



-Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org>

Sergeant Sylvester Antolak
2d Platoon, 1-15 Infantry

¹⁵ Taggart, p. 164; Atkinson, p. 541.

¹⁶ Audie Murphy, *To Hell and Back*, (First Owl Books, 2002), pp. 151-152.

¹⁷ Murphy, pp. 152-153.

¹⁸ Taggart, pp. 170-171.

awarded for actions on June 2-3, 1944. Both were posthumous.¹⁹

Over the next day or so, as the Germans were being pushed from Cisterna, a well-known character in *TO HELL AND BACK* would be killed. Let us listen to Audie as he describes what happened.

“We have not long to look before a heavy artillery barrage is turned on us ... I Dive into a foxhole ... I am sitting with my helmeted head between my knees when a body tumbles into the pit. It is Horse-Face. His face is ash-gray; his smile is feeble ... ‘Nothing but a scratch’, Horse-Face insists.”

Audie hurries for a medic but when they return, “Private Abraham Homer Johnson, otherwise known as Horse-Face, is dead.”²⁰

With the end of the fighting on May 25th, both Cisterna and Cori, a small mountain town, are in the hands of the Third Division. With strong German resistance over, the men of the 15th Infantry move along a road north of Cori in relative safety when around noon on the 26th of May, a flight of American P-40 Fighter

Bombers attack from over the hills. The 2nd Battalion is in the lead with the 1st Battalion just behind when bombs and machine gun bullets decimate the forward elements of both units. Over 100 men are casualties with most of those being in the 2nd Battalion but Company B lost at least 4 who were killed.²¹ (A side note: I will pen in a future article more on these four soldiers, which will be titled “*The Boys of Cori*”.)

The Third Division will go on to be involved in the capture of Rome and from there, they will rest and train for the assault on Southern France.

Over the next 12 to 15 months, it is my desire to write some short articles about the fictional characters found in Audie Murphy’s *TO HELL AND BACK*. I have been working on identifying them so that real names can replace these unknown men. We can then better know their stories and sacrifices.

Murphy understood that too often the valor and sacrifices of these common men went unrecognized whether they died in battle or survived and returned home. Audie Murphy recognized the obligation we have to remember them by making their stories known.

¹⁹ Edward F. Murphy, *Heroes of WWII*, (New York, First Ballentine Books Edition: Second printing, July 1992), pp. 375-395; Taggart, pp. 379-388.

²⁰ Taggart, pp. 155-156.

²¹ Murphy, p. 161.; Taggart, p. 173.: Morning Reports for Co. B, May 27-29, 1944, author’s collection.

This obligation, I think, is a goal of the Audie Murphy Research Foundation and you will see more of that over the next few months along with other stories of the folks who influenced the life of Audie Leon Murphy.

Finally, with the passing of time, the location of various places associated

with Audie Murphy's life become more and more difficult to determine. We hope to correct that too with several articles under the broad title of "*Where Was That Place?*"

- Mike West

Brush Mountain Remembrance

From an Email written by Mr. Dave Phillips

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<https://www.audiemurphy.com/msgb/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=4790>



Dave Phillips at the Brush Mountain Memorial.
Photography by Audie Murphy Phillips.

“WELL, we made the trek up to Brush Mountain. It was a nice drive and took about three and a half hours. We stopped at the base and talked to a fella who was cutting his grass. He's lived there in that house his whole life having inherited it from his parents.

He was about 12 years old when the plane went down and said after the bodies were removed his dad took him up there a day or so later. Turns out he was a Marine as well, so he and I connected pretty well. He said for years he had a set of seat belts

About Dave Phillips and his son, Little Audie

Mr. Dave Phillips has been a longtime friend and follower of the Audie Murphy Memorial Website and an important contributor. You can find countless informative posts made by him on the website and its message board.

As a retired marine who served time in Africa and many other locations, Dave has a son named Audie Murphy Phillips who is affectionately known as *Little Audie* by many friends. Little Audie is currently in high school and is an accomplished local and state rodeo enthusiast in the North Carolina area.

On Memorial Day, May 28, 2021, Mr. Phillips and his son made a trip up Brush Mountain to the location where Audie Murphy died on the same day, May 28, 1971 in a plane crash.

that came out of that plane, but he had no idea what ever happened to them.

It's about 3/4 of a mile from the trailhead to the monument. As we

For more information visit the Audie L. Murphy Memorial Website at www.audiemurphy.com

started down the trailhead, there was a couple from Pennsylvania who had set up a canopy and was serving hot dogs and hamburgers and had cold sodas and water for anyone going up or coming down the trail.

As we got to the monument there was a group of about 30 boy scouts and three scout leaders that were just departing. There were people coming up there all the time while we were there. As we were going up, there was even an elderly woman who said she was 86. She was coming down the trail with her granddaughter using a walker.

We got up to the monument and I used the GPS to navigate down the slope to the exact spot where the plane crashed. The whole hilltop is basically just shale rock. Little Audie and I took along a shovel where we dug a little dirt and shale rock for Nadine, Patsy, Betty, and yourself. I'll get it out to you, soon as I can.

It was kind of interesting, in that Audie's plane was also over or near Charlotte on that fateful day as well as Greensboro and Winston-Salem. As you know they didn't hit bad weather, till just the other side of Winston-Salem.

Fifty years later we had identical weather. It was a beautiful day from Charlotte up through Greensboro and into Winston-Salem. The weather held until we got to Brush Mountain. We got there around 11:00 a.m. and by the time we got up to the trailhead, the sun was going away, and the



Audie Murphy Phillips at a rodeo several years ago. *Photograph contributed by Dave Phillips.*

clouds were rolling in. At about the same time as the time of the crash, it started to rain. We stayed for about an hour and a half, and just as we descended the mountain, the fog came in so thick you couldn't see the hood of the car. In just a few minutes, the rain started pelting down the likes of which I haven't seen since I left Africa.

As to the monument, again it was interesting in that it was sitting in the middle of a forest – in the middle of nowhere – and I could find no signs of damage or vandalism. All over it were little plastic wristbands of various types, flags, a few toys, plastic soldiers, dog-tags, military and police patches, and even hand-painted shale rocks with various designs.

One of the neatest items, was an original World War II GI helmet without a liner. Someone had hand painted a 3rd ID patch on the side. Inside the helmet, with black sharpie, they had pinned the message "If you steal this helmet, karma will follow you."

I was amazed it had been left there unscathed.

As for us, Little Audie and I decided to buy three cards. One for Nadine, one for Patsy and one for Little Audie. We wrote some inscriptions on each and then mounted them on a large piece of poster board along with one of Little Audie's favorite bull riding photos. In addition, we brought along a Texas state flag, yellow roses, and Little



Inspired by Casey Tibbs? No doubt Audie Murphy's close friend – the legendary rodeo star Casey Tibbs – would be proud of Little Audie Murphy Phillips who has the upper hand riding this wild steer in a rodeo several years ago. *Photograph contributed by Dave Phillips.*

Audie wanted to bring along a set of his spurs to leave.

Lastly, when Little Audie was in sixth grade, I helped him build a diorama of Holtzwihr to go along with his book report on Audie Murphy. We managed to find these really good models of a *Jagdpanther*¹ and a Sherman tank. We wanted to find an M-10² but we couldn't locate one. So, Little Audie took one of his plastic soldiers and cut him in half at the bust and glued him behind the turret for his project. Each of these tanks was enclosed in a little plastic case.

So, we took the Jagdpanther and the Sherman with us and laid them at the base of the monument. We actually held our own private ceremony, and I put on the musical score of *Amazing Grace* from my cellphone. During the private ceremony, Little Audie carried each piece – one by one – to the monument and placed it at its base. Then he would return for the next piece. After he had concluded that portion, he then bowed his head in prayer."

I told Audie this 50th anniversary was important for me in that obviously I won't be around to see the 100th. He replied, "On the 100th I'll be the same age you are now and I'm going to bring my kids and grandkids up here that day and tell them I was here with my dad on the 50th."

- Dave Phillips

¹ A World War II German tank. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jagdpanther>

² M10 Tank Destroyer. A US Army World War II armored anti-tank weapon system.

Publicity Photo of Audie and Terry

By Richard L. Rodgers

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<https://www.audiemurphy.com/msgb/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=4778>

DONT MESS WITH **TEXAS TERRY.**

This publicity photo was taken during the filming of *TO HELL AND BACK* at Fort Lewis Army Base, Washington in the Yakima Training Grounds.

Apparently, Terry Murphy has the upper hand in a disagreement of some kind with Director Jesse Hibbs.

While we do not know the exact nature of the friendly conflict, we can certainly speculate.



A possible caption? "When my daddy says it's time for lunch, *IT'S TIME FOR LUNCH!*"

- Publicity photo and caption courtesy of M.D. Marks

Radiomen of 1-15

By Richard Rodgers

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<https://www.audiemurphy.com/msgb/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=4774>

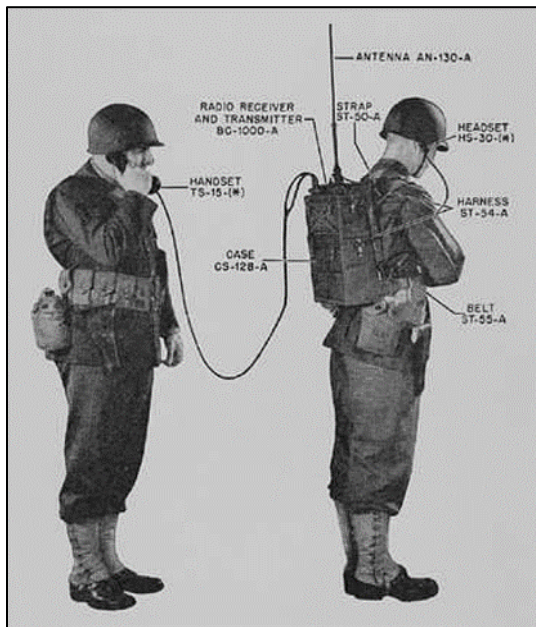
PEOPLE reflecting today on the American soldier in World War II and their combat equipment most likely think of a foot soldier armed with an M1 rifle and a bayonet. Maybe they also envision a soldier sporting a canvass-encased canteen with a tin cup, and a bevy of hand grenades attached to their utility belt. The image may include the soldier low-crawling in pools of mud below coils of barbed wire with bullets whizzing overhead. Or, maybe it is an unshaven paratrooper jumping out of the open door of a low flying airplane or someone rapidly shoving artillery rounds into the breach of a howitzer as another soldier yanks on a firing lanyard.

It is probably safe to say that enlisted soldiers serving as combat radiomen rarely, if ever, come to mind. Nevertheless, Audie Murphy mentions them and their equipment in his memoir, TO HELL AND BACK.

In Chapter 18, Audie Murphy writes of a time when his understrength company was ambushed by five well-camouflaged German machinegun nests carefully dug into a woodline at the base of a slope. As Lieutenant Murphy's men are surprised and caught in the open, he "borrows a walkie-talkie radio" from someone and begins crawling on his back "dragging the radio" with him. Eventually, Audie managed to destroy the machinegun nests with the help of the radio by calling in artillery fire on the enemy position.

Later, in Chapter 19, Audie Murphy wrote that a radioman along with a forward observer were sent to B Company to provide fire support from a neighboring artillery battalion during a pivotal battle.¹ At the time Lieutenant Murphy's men had just occupied hasty defensive positions along a frozen woodline north of the town of Holtzwihr, France. As the event unfolded, an overwhelming number of attacking Germans and

¹ The forward observer, Lieutenant Walter Weispfenning, was from the 39th Field Artillery Battalion and had a radioman assisting him. Weispfenning would later provide a handwritten eye-witness account which was used as supporting evidence to Audie Murphy's Medal of Honor recommendation.



Motorola Walkie-Talkie, Model SCR-300. Illustration from the War Department Technical Manual TM11-242. The original walkie-talkie weighed about 38-pounds and had a range of about 3 miles.

tanks emerged from the left side of the forest. The situation was hopeless, and Lieutenant Murphy refused to risk the capture of the valuable radio to the enemy. The loss of a functional radio would be catastrophic. So, Lieutenant Murphy was forced to order the radioman with everyone else, to retreat to safety while he alone remained.

Of course, you probably recognize this story as the event where Murphy earned his Medal of Honor. But this article is not about that award or those two events. Instead, it is about the radios and two of the brave men charged with their operation while

assigned to 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment (1-15 INF).

The Radios

There were two Signal Corps Radio (SCR) sets authorized for use by United States infantry battalions and their rifle companies. One was known as the SCR-300 and the other was the SCR-536. These radios were new battlefield innovations in World War II and gave platoon leaders and company commanders the ability to quickly talk directly to commanders and supporting units without the need to use telephone wire or messengers. The Germans had nothing like the portable combat radio either.

SCR-300 FM Radio Set²

The SCR-300 radio set was built by Motorola and weighed a little over 38-pounds. It required 18 glass vacuum tubes to operate. It had an impressive range of about 4.8 kilometers (almost 3 miles). Its components included a radio receiver and transmitter that was normally strapped to a radioman's back by a harness. Accessories included an attachable whip antenna, several large spare dry-cell batteries, spare vacuum tubes, and an attachable cord with a handset on one end. But this was not all a radio operator had to carry. Besides having to lug the radio equipment, he also had to carry his other gear and weaponry too. The job was a difficult and strenuous one.

² See <https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/2019/01/26/scr-300-ww2-radio-backpack-the-walkie-talkie-that-shaped-the-war/>

When introduced, the SCR-300 radio was given the nickname “walkie-talkie” by soldiers – a term that would quickly be applied to other smaller hand-held radio devices.

Only six of these radios were authorized by the Military Table of



Walkie-Talkie, Model SCR-536. With a range of two or three hundred feet, this Walkie-Talkie weight about 5-pounds and was found at company level. Image source: War Department Technical Manual TM11-235.

Equipment (MTOE) for the infantry battalion and all of them belonged to Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC).³

The SCR-300 radio came with its own radio operator who had a skill code of either 740 or 776. Like the equipment they used, the radio operator was assigned to the communications platoon in Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC) where they had immediate access to a solitary radio repairman and a stash of necessary spare parts. The total number of radio operators available to the infantry battalion was four.⁴

This radio and its operator were normally used by the battalion commander, the executive officer, and staff officers. They could be “attached” to a company on a temporary basis depending on the importance of a mission and the need of a company commander to have reliable radio communication. Radio operators in many cases travelled with senior officers and frequently visited subordinate companies.

SCR-536 FM Radio Set⁵

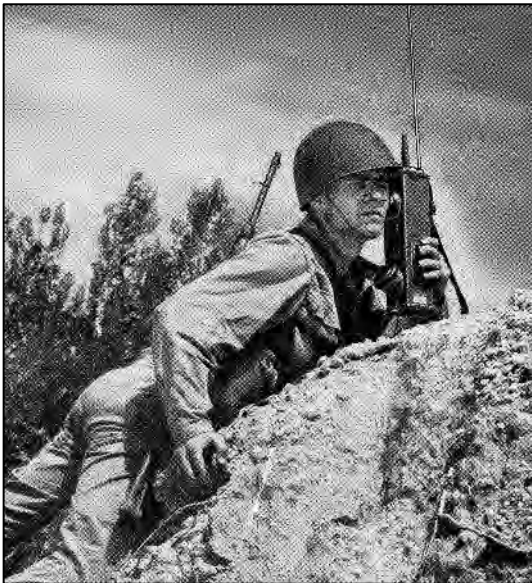
Then there was the SCR-536. It was the smallest portable radio device in the Army’s inventory during World War II.

³ See MTOE 7-15, dated February 1944, www.militaryresearch.org/7-15%2026Feb44.pdf

⁴ See MTOE 7-16, dated February 1944, <http://www.militaryresearch.org/7-16%2026Feb44.pdf>

⁵ See TM 11-235, dated May 1945, <https://ia802700.us.archive.org/7/items/Tm11-235/Tm11-235.pdf>

This radio was hand-held and weighed only 5 pounds. No backpack or dedicated radio operator was needed to make it work. It sported a long narrow rectangular case which had a built-in earpiece and a mouthpiece on one side. Like its larger counterpart, it operated on a dry-cell battery and used glass vacuum transistor tubes. Its range was extremely limited. The SCR-536 normally transmitted several hundred feet in obstructed areas but up to 1 mile if used in flat, unobscured terrain. To turn it on, all you had to do was extend the retractable antenna from the top. A large rubber button on its side was then pressed to talk.⁶ Six of these radios were authorized at the rifle company level and were to be used by company commander, platoon



Using the SCR-536 in the prone position.
Image source: War Department Technical Manual TM11-235.

leaders, first sergeant and platoon sergeants.⁷

The Radiomen – two kinds

Radiomen with the 776-skill identifier were required to transmit 13 five-letter code groups per minute without error. They were known as “slow radio operators”. The battalion was authorized only 3. These fellows were trained to use the SCR-300’s. Soldiers classified as 740 were required to transmit an impressive 18 five-letter code groups. The battalion was only authorized one who was also trained to use the SCR-300.

In total, the battalion was only authorized 4 radio operators and their ranks were either T4 or T5. T4 was the higher of the two ranks and was generally addressed as “sergeant”.

Revisiting the Ambush

Referring to the machinegun ambush described earlier Lieutenant Murphy wrote that as he and his patrol crested a hilltop, they were ambushed by five well-concealed machine gun nests at the hill’s base. As his men were being decimated, Lieutenant Murphy ordered his men to take cover. He then “borrows a walkie-talkie radio”. Was this the hand-held SCR-536 or the larger SCR-300? By this time, both were probably known as a “walkie-talkie.”

⁶ <https://ia802700.us.archive.org/7/items/Tm11-235/Tm11-235.pdf>

⁷ See MTOE 7-17 at <http://www.militaryresearch.org/7-17%2026Feb44.pdf>

At the time Murphy was a platoon leader and was authorized a SCR-536. As a lieutenant who liked to “lead from the front” – a phrase Murphy used when describing effective leadership – a five-pound radio would certainly be easier to drag downhill. Of course, he also had his rifle – probably in the other hand – while he snaked his way in the prone position on his stomach toward the enemy.

As he did, Murphy had a difficult time radioing his request for mortar support. He wrote that his transmissions were garbled and filled with static, sometimes fading in and out. This would be more characteristic of the 5-pound SCR-536 which had limited range – especially when the terrain was hilly and forested. Lieutenant Murphy, as he laid flat on the ground, probably had the retractable antenna horizontal to the ground which would have limited its range even more.

Lieutenant Murphy used the callsign “Red 3” and spoke to “Red 6”.⁸ In the Army, the callsign number “6” was designated exclusively for a commander’s use – and still is today. “3” indicated that Murphy was the 3rd platoon leader.

As Lieutenant Murphy requested mortar fire, he pressed the “talk button” on his radio. The SCR-300 did not have a rubber button on its handset.⁹ You just talked into the hand-receiver’s microphone. On the other hand, the SCR-536 did have a large black talk button on its side.

So, which was it? Was it the SCR-300 or was it the smaller SCR-536? At this point, you can probably safely conclude – based on the earlier reading – that it was the five-pound SCR-536.

Back to the Holtzwihr Woodline

Now we turn our attention back to the second event that occurred January 26, 1945 at Holtzwihr, France. By this time, Audie Murphy had been appointed the B Company commander.

Defending the Holtzwihr woodline battle was one of the highest priorities of 1-15 INF on that famous day and crucial to the success of the 3rd Infantry Division. It follows that the B Company Commander would be better off if he had his own dedicated radio operator and SCR-300 attached to him for his use during that mission. On the other hand, an artillery forward observer may have come with his own radio operator with a different radio set¹⁰ authorized for field artillery units.

⁸ “Red” probably was the color designation for B-Company. If so, Lieutenant Murphy was transmitting to the B-Company commander who was relaying the call-for-fire information to the mortar crews in the heavy weapons platoon.

⁹ A copy of the SCR-300 war department technical manual, TM 11-242 can be found at www.mcmlv.org/Archive/Military/TM%2011-242_SCR-300-A%20Technical%20Manual.pdf

¹⁰ The SCR-619 had a range of about 5 miles and was authorized by the 39th Field Artillery. It was bulky and consisted of several separate units but suitable to their mission.



Livingston County War Museum display. Tech5 John Rodino, radioman assigned to HHC/1-15 INF becomes the focus of a local county war museum display on July 7, 2007. He stands next to his uniform and awards. *Image source: Livingston County War Museum, Pontiac, Illinois.*

There is no conclusive proof which unit provided the radio operator on that day. We only know one was assisting the 39th Field Artillery forward observer, Lieutenant Weispfenning.

As it turns out, Lieutenant Murphy wisely directed his men to run telephone lines back to the battalion command post. This created redundancy in communication. If things went sour with the radio, updates and requests for support could

still be passed via landline and a handheld telephone device. As it turned out, this is exactly what happened.

Tech4 Radioman John Rodino

John Rodino, service number 36480855, was a radioman for HHC, 1st Battalion 15th Infantry. Born August 19, 1923, at Pontiac, Illinois he enlisted at Peoria, Illinois as a private on April 5, 1943.¹¹ After getting his affairs in order, he then entered service on April 12, 1943 at Scott Field, Illinois. His

¹¹ National Archives and Records Administration; <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/record-detail.jsp?dt=893&mtch=1&cat=all&tf=F&q=36480855&bc=&rpp=10&pg=1&rid=6648323>

term of service was for the duration of the war plus six months. At the time of his enlistment, he was a college student and single.

After a brief period in basic training Private Rodino received specialty training as a radioman and earned the skill identifier 776.

Rodino would become one of the few radiomen for 1-15 INF; He also managed to survive the war.

On September 20, 1943 Rodino deployed overseas and arrived a month later in the European Theater of Operations. His unit of assignment was HHC, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment with the 3rd Infantry Division. Rodino would remain with his unit for the war's duration. By the war's end he had earned the rank of T4 (Technician 4th Grade).

His combat service included combat at the Anzio, Italy beachhead ¹², the invasion of southern France, and finally Rhineland, Germany.

His awards and decorations include the coveted Combat Infantry Badge, the Bronze Star, an overseas European African Middle Eastern theater ribbon with an affixed silver battle star¹³, a good conduct medal, a distinguished

unit badge, and the French Croix de Guerre.¹⁴

There are no direct military references that can be found which officially establish that Tech4 Rodino served directly with Audie Murphy or B Company, 1-15. On the other hand, there is no doubt that as a radioman, he had many opportunities to rub shoulders with B Company and Lieutenant Audie Murphy. These opportunities would extend to every other company in 1-15 INF too. Rodino was probably a well-travelled man on the battlefield and as one of four radiomen for 1-15 INF, he must have been well known among battalion and company level leadership.

Tech4 Rodino returned from the war on December 13, 1945. He would later marry Ms. Jeanette Wharrie in 1948. He passed away at the age of 85 on October 22, 2008.¹⁵

Tech5 Radioman John J. Larussa

John J. Larussa, service number 35060052, was also one of the radiomen for HHC, 1st Battalion 15th Infantry. Born December 30, 1923 at Geneva, Ohio he enlisted at Cleveland,

¹² Letter, April 23, 1944 written to sister Mary Rodino, April 23, 1944 from the Anzio, Beachhead. See the end of this article to read the letter.

¹³ An affixed silver battle star represents 5 battle campaigns (Naples-Foggia, Rome-Arno, Southern France, Rhineland, and Central Europe).

¹⁴ US Army Record and Report of Separation John Rodino; see image at the end of this article.

¹⁵ <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/30934717/john-rodino>

REGISTRATION CARD—(Men born on or after January 1, 1922 and on or before June 30, 1924)

SERIAL NUMBER N. 376	1. NAME (Print) JOHN - JAMES - LARUSSA <small>(First) (Middle) (Last)</small>	ORDER NUMBER 11,582
2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print) 3367 E 135th ST CLEVELAND - COV - OHIO <small>(Number and street) (Town, township, village, or city) (County) (State)</small>		
[THE PLACE OF RESIDENCE GIVEN ON THE LINE ABOVE WILL DETERMINE LOCAL BOARD JURISDICTION; LINE 2 OF REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE WILL BE IDENTICAL]		
3. MAILING ADDRESS SAME <small>(Mailing address if other than place indicated on line 2. If same insert word same)</small>		
4. TELEPHONE LO-5363 <small>(Exchange) (Number)</small>	5. AGE IN YEARS 18 DATE OF BIRTH Dec. 30 - 1923 <small>(Mo.) (Day) (Yr.)</small>	6. PLACE OF BIRTH GENEVA <small>(Town or county)</small> OHIO <small>(State or country)</small>
7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS JOSEPHINE LARUSSA - 3367 E 135th ST - (MOTHER)		
8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS REPUBLIC STEEL CORP.		
9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS UPSON NUT - UNDER LORAIN BRIDGE CLEVE. <small>(Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)</small>		
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE		
D. S. S. Form 1 (Revised 6-1-42)	(over)	016-21630-3 John James Larussa <small>(Registrant's signature)</small>

Military Registration Card, John James Larussa. John J. Larussa enlisted in Ohio and would soon join HHC/1-15 Infantry where he would befriend fellow radioman John Rodino. *Image source: Ancestry.com.*

Ohio as a private on April 20, 1943.¹⁶ He began service seven days later at Fort Hayes, Ohio. Like most enlisted men of his day, his term of service was for the duration of the war plus six months. At the time of his enlistment, he lived with his mother and only had 3 years of high school. He worked in a machine shop for the Republic Steel Corporation as a lathe operator. He was single.

After a brief period in basic training Private Larussa received specialty

training as a radioman and earned the skill identifier 776.

After his training, he departed the U.S. on October 4, 1943 to North Africa – arriving two weeks later. He would not return until December 13, 1945.

His rank at the time of separation was T5 (Tech5) which is one rank below T4.

His awards include the Combat Infantry Badge, the Good Conduct Medal, World War II Victory Medal, French Croix de Guerre, the

¹⁶ National Archives and Records Administration; <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/record-detail.jsp?dt=893&mtch=1&tf=F&q=35060052&bc=&rpp=10&pg=1&rid=5426352>

Distinguished Unit Badge with 1 oak leaf cluster, a Bronze Star, and a European African Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with an affixed silver battle star.¹⁷

Larussa would later marry and have three children. After moving to Texas, he would pass away at the age of 66 in Kaufman County, Texas and is interred in Dallas, Texas with his wife.¹⁸

A Guestbook Entry

On April 9, 2013 a guestbook entry on the Audie Murphy Memorial Website was written by a Mr. Tom Larussa – the son of John Larussa. This entry eventually led to penning of this article. In the entry, Tom Larussa stated he was seeking information on his father's service but was having trouble because the US Army Records building in St. Louis was destroyed by fire in the 1970's with a loss of nearly 80% of all archived army service records. An incredibly significant part of history had gone up in smoke and with it, part of his father's life.

Mr. Larussa mentioned that his father John Larussa and John Rodino were good friends.¹⁹

Very recently, Mr. Tom Arnolts, the grandson of John Rodino left a separate guestbook entry which paid tribute to his grandfather, a radioman of 1-15. A series of emails and communications

were then made by the author with both individuals.

Tom Larussa stated that his father was very quiet about the events of World War II and practically never spoke of them. Tom Larussa did say that his father was very easily startled during sleep and his mother attributed this to his war experiences.

Tom Larussa has since come to the realization, along with his other siblings, that his father was deeply affected by the war and found it difficult to recount painful combat experiences.

John Rodino's and John Larussa's family have preserved letters and other valuable documents from these radiomen's service while assigned to HHC/1-15 Inf.

Prior to his passing, John Rodino was also honored in 2007 by a local museum which put together a display of John Rodino's uniform and service medals. John Rodino proudly posed for a picture on that day too.

To help preserve the memory of John Rodino and John Larussa, the Rodino and the Larussa families have shared official documentation, pictures, and - personal letters of their father and grandfather, respectively. The Audie Murphy Research Foundation hopes you will take a moment to reflect on the

¹⁷ US Army Record and Report of Separation – John J. Larussa; see image, page 12, of this article.

¹⁸ <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/83721153/john-j-larussa>

¹⁹ <https://www.audiemurphy.com/msgb/viewtopic.php?f=2&t=3185&p=12331&hilit=John+Rodino#p12331>

service of these two radiomen and the awful combat they must have experienced.

While these radiomen are no longer with us, it turns out that their voices are still heard these many years later.

- *Richard Rodgers*



Final resting places. John Rodino and John James Larussa, radiomen of 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment. *Image source: www.findagrave.com*

For more information visit the Audie L. Murphy Memorial Website at www.audiemurphy.com

HONORABLE DISCHARGE									
1. LAST NAME - FIRST NAME - MIDDLE INITIAL RODINO JOHN		2. POST SERIAL NO. 36 480 855		3. GRADE TEC 5		4. BRANCH OR SERVICE INF		5. COMPONENT AUS	
6. ORGANIZATION HQ CO 1ST BN 15 TH INF		7. DATE OF SEPARATION 19 DEC 45		8. PLACE OF SEPARATION CAMP GRANT ILL SEPARATION CENTER					
9. PERMANENT ADDRESS FOR MAILING PURPOSES RODINO SQUARE PONTIAC ILLINOIS				10. DATE OF BIRTH 19 AUG 23		11. PLACE OF BIRTH PONTIAC ILLINOIS			
12. ADDRESS FROM WHICH EMPLOYMENT WILL BE RECEIVED SEE #9				13. GRADE BIRTH HAZEL BROWN		14. GRADES 5 6		15. PAY GRADE 147mm 0	
16. CIVIL STATUS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MARRIED <input type="checkbox"/> SINGLE <input type="checkbox"/> SEPARATED <input type="checkbox"/> DIVORCED <input type="checkbox"/> WIDOWED		17. U.S. CITIZEN <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO		18. CURRENT OCCUPATION AND NO. STUDENT COLLEGE (X-02)					
MILITARY HISTORY									
19. DATE OF INDUCTION 5 APR 43		20. DATE OF SEPARATION 12 APR 43		21. PLACE OF BIRTH (SEE BIRTH RECORD) SCOTT FIELD ILLINOIS					
22. BILLING ADDRESS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO		23. SOCIAL SECURITY NO. 2		24. CITY AND STATE LIVINGSTON ILL		25. BIRTH ADDRESS AT TIME OF BIRTH (SEE BIRTH RECORD) RFD 5 PONTIAC ILLINOIS			
26. MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTY AND NO. RADIO OPERATOR 776				27. SERVICE OCCASIONS AND NO. (U.S. ARMY, AIR FORCE, NAVY AND MARINE CORPS, U.S. AIR FORCE) COMBAT INFANTRYMAN BADGE MM: M1					
28. THEATERS AND CAMPAIGNS NAPLES FCGGIA ROME ARNO SOUTHERN FRANCE RHINELAND CENTRAL EUROPE									
29. DECORATIONS AND CITATIONS 4 OVERSEAS SERVICE BARS EUROPEAN AFRICAN MIDDLE EASTERN THEATER RIBBON W/1 SILVER BATTLE STAR GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL BRONZE STAR GO 350 3 INF DIV 25 SEP 45 DISTINGUISHED UNIT BADGE CROIX DE GUERRE*									
30. SERVICE RECEIVED IN SERVICE NONE									
31. SERVICE RECORDS DATES									
32. SERVICE RECORDS DATES		33. SERVICE RECORDS DATES		34. SERVICE RECORDS DATES		35. SERVICE RECORDS DATES		36. SERVICE RECORDS DATES	
VACD APR 43		ST JAN 45		ST JUN 45		20 SEP 43		ETO 30 OCT 43	
37. SERVICE RECORDS DATES		38. SERVICE RECORDS DATES		39. SERVICE RECORDS DATES		40. SERVICE RECORDS DATES		41. SERVICE RECORDS DATES	
0 5 14 2 2 24		T/5		2 DEC 45		USA		13 DEC 45	
30. PRISON SERVICE NONE									
31. REASON AND AUTHORITY FOR SEPARATION CONV OF GOVT HR 1-1 (DEMOBILIZATION) AR 615-365 DATED 15 DEC 1944									
32. SERVICE RECORDS ATTACHED NONE									
33. PAY DATA YOU 18275									
34. PAY DATA FOR PAYMENT		35. PAY DATA FOR PAYMENT		36. PAY DATA FOR PAYMENT		37. PAY DATA FOR PAYMENT		38. PAY DATA FOR PAYMENT	
2 8 175 1,300 1,700		375.80 9.00		352.55		G F DOLBEAR CAPT FD			
INSURANCE NOTICE									
IMPORTANT: THIS NOTICE IS FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE VETERAN AND HIS DEPENDENTS. IT IS NOT A CONTRACT. THE INSURANCE COMPANY IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ACCURACY OF THE INFORMATION CONTAINED HEREIN.									
39. KIND OF INSURANCE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LIFE <input type="checkbox"/> ACCIDENT AND SICKNESS		40. HOW PAID <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CASH <input type="checkbox"/> ANNUITY		41. DATE OF BIRTH OF INSURED 31 DEC 45		42. DATE OF DEATH OF INSURED 31 JAN 46		43. INTENTION OF VETERAN TO 6.50	
44. SERVICE RECORDS DATES		45. REASONS (Check name for completion of above items or entry of other items specified in M. D. Directive) LAPEL BUTTON ISSUED ASR SCORE (2 SEPT 45) 33 *1939 - 45 BRONZE ARROWHEAD AG 200 61 PO 26 MAY 45 WORLD WAR II VICTORY MEDAL ERC FROM 5 APR 43 TO 11 APR 43							
46. SIGNATURE OF PERSON WHO SEPARATED 		47. PERSONNEL OFFICER'S SIGNATURE AND TITLE ROBERT O BURTON CAPT FA							

Enlisted Record, Report of Separation, Honorable Discharge - Tech5 John Rodino.
 Image is courtesy of Tom Arnolts and Tom Larussa and family.

607-25
 ENLISTED RECORD AND REPORT OF SEPARATION
 HONORABLE DISCHARGE

1. LAST NAME - FIRST NAME - MIDDLE INITIAL LARUSSA JOHN J		2. ARMY SERIAL NO. 35 060 052	3. GRADE TEC 5	4. ARM OR SERVICE INF	5. COMPONENT AUS
6. ORGANIZATION HQ CO 1ST BN 15TH INF		7. DATE OF SEPARATION 19 DEC 45	8. PLACE OF SEPARATION UNIT A SEP CTR 45 IGMR PA		
9. PERMANENT ADDRESS FOR MAILING PURPOSES 3308 W 30TH ST CLEVELAND 9 OHIO		10. DATE OF BIRTH 30 DEC 23	11. PLACE OF BIRTH GENEVA OHIO		
12. ADDRESS FROM WHICH EMPLOYMENT WILL BE BOUGHT SEE 9		13. COLOR EYES HAZEL	14. COLOR HAIR BRN	15. HEIGHT 5'8"	16. WEIGHT 160 lbs.
17. NO. DEPEND.	18. MARITAL STATUS SINGLE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MARRIED <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (specify)		19. U.S. CITIZEN YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>		20. CIVILIAN OCCUPATION AND NO. LATHE OPER AUTO 6-78.164

MILITARY HISTORY

22. DATE OF INDUCTION 20 APR 43	23. DATE OF ENLISTMENT 27 APR 43	24. DATE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE 27 APR 43	25. PLACE OF ENTRY INTO SERVICE FT HAYES OHIO
26. SELECTIVE SERVICE DATA YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>	27. LOCAL S.S. BOARD NO. 31	28. COUNTY AND STATE CUYAHOGA OHIO	29. HOME ADDRESS AT TIME OF ENTRY INTO SERVICE 3367 E 135TH ST CLEVELAND OHIO
30. MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTY AND NO. RADIO OPER 776		31. MILITARY QUALIFICATION AND DATE (i.e., infantry, aviation and marksmanship badges, etc.) COMBAT INF BADGE RIFLE M1 ERP 43	
32. BATTLES AND CAMPAIGNS GO 33 & 40 WD 45 NAPLES-FOGGIA ROME-ARNO SOUTHERN FRANCE RHINELAND CENTRAL EUROPE			
33. DECORATIONS AND CITATIONS GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL WORLD WAR II VICTORY MEDAL FRENCH CROIX DE GUERRE DISTINGUISHED UNIT BADGE WITH 1 OAK LEAF CLUSTER BRONZE STAR MEDAL EUROPEAN AFRICAN MIDDLE EASTERN CAMPAIGN MEDAL WITH *			
34. WOUNDS RECEIVED IN ACTION NONE			
35. LATEST IMMUNIZATION DATES		36. SERVICE OUTSIDE CONTINENTAL U.S. AND RETURN	
SKALLFOX 1 JUN 43	TYPHOID 22 MAR 45	TETANUS 15 DEC 44	CITY PHUS 15 JAN 45
37. TOTAL LENGTH OF SERVICE		38. HIGHEST GRADE HELD	39. DATE OF DEPARTURE
TEARS MONTHS DAYS 0 5 14		TEC 5	4 OCT 43
40. PRIOR SERVICE NONE		41. SERVICE SCHOOLS ATTENDED NONE	42. EDUCATION (Years) Grammar 8 High School 4 College 0
43. REASON AND AUTHORITY FOR SEPARATION AR 615-365 15 DEC 44 COVN OF THE GOVT RR1-1 DEMOBILIZATION			

PAY DATA

44. MUSTERING OUT PAY TOTAL \$ 300 THIS PAYMENT \$ 100	45. SOLDIER DEPOSIT NONE	46. TRAVEL PAY \$ 20.15	47. TOTAL AMOUNT PAID TO SEPARATED OFFICER MAJOR FD 366-46
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INSURANCE NOTICE

48. KIND OF INSURANCE Nat. Sec. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> U.S. Govt. <input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/>	49. HOW PAID Aliment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Direct <input type="checkbox"/> V. A.	50. Effective Date of Allotment Discontinuance 31 DEC 45	51. Date of Next Premium Due (One month after 50) 31 JAN 46	52. PREMIUM DUE EACH MONTH \$ 6.90	53. INTENTION OF VETERAN TO Cash <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue Only <input type="checkbox"/> Discontinue <input type="checkbox"/>
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54. REMARKS (This space for completion of above items or entry of other items specified in W. D. Directives)

RIGHT THUMB PRINT

LAPEL BUTTON ISSUED
 ASR SCORE (2 SEP 45) 82
 INACTIVE SERVICE ERC FROM 20 APR 43 TO 26 APR 43

55. SIGNATURE OF PERSON BEING SEPARATED
John J. Larussa

57. PERSONNEL OFFICER (Type name, grade and organization - signature)
RUSSELL WALCH
1ST LT AUS

OHIO WORLD WAR II CLAIM COMPENSATION APPLIED FOR - No. 88085

WD AGO FORM 23-55
1 November 1944

Enlisted Record, Report of Separation, Honorable Discharge - Tech5 John J. Larussa. Image is courtesy of Tom Larussa and his family.



A LETTER FROM PFC JOHN RODINO TO SISTER MARY RODINO

April 23, 1944
Anzio Beachhead

Dear Sis,

I try to get some more of your letters answered today. Yesterday I viewed about 20 more letters – about 4 from you. I got one from Josie & Jim too.

Sis, I don't need a dagger because the Army issues very good ones and besides, we don't use them much except to cut bread or something.

I finally heard from Lt. Radison. He told me about wanting to get into the Infantry & that he wanted to see overseas duty here in Italy. I guess that is okay but I think he will change his mind when he gets here because it is far from being a picnic or any pleasure.

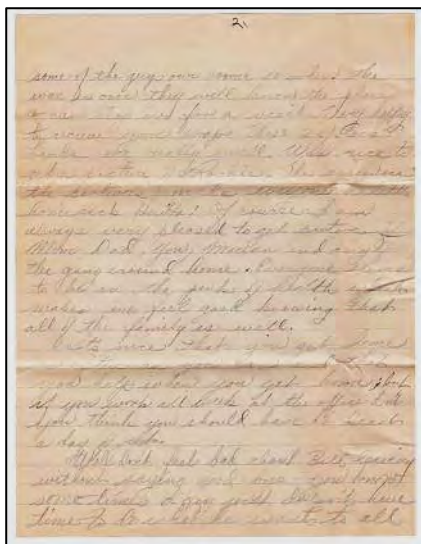
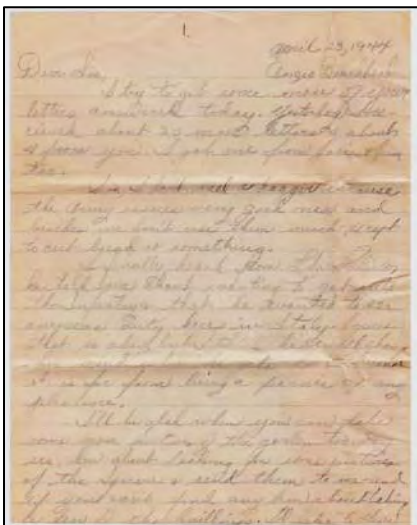
I'll be glad when you can take some pictures of the garden too. Say sis, how about looking for some pictures of the Square & send them to me - and if you can't find any, how about taking a few of the buildings. I'd like to show some of the guys over some when the war is over they will know the place & can stop in for a visit. Very happy to receive your snaps. Those 2 of Lois and Linda are really swell. Was nice to get a picture of Rockie. The snow in the pictures made everyone a little homesick. Haha! Of course I am always very pleased to get pictures of Mom, Dad, You, Marian, and any of the gang around home. Everyone seems to be in the pink of health which makes me feel good knowing that all of the family is well.

It's nice that you get home as often as you can and that you help when you get home; but if you work all week at the office don't you think you should have at least a day of rest?

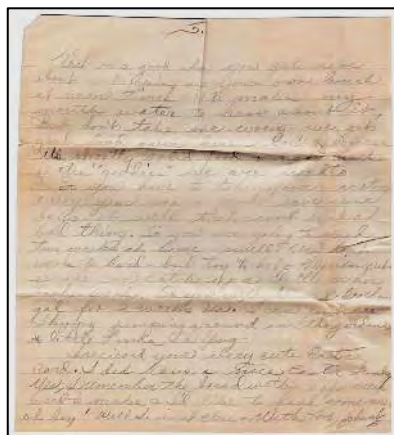
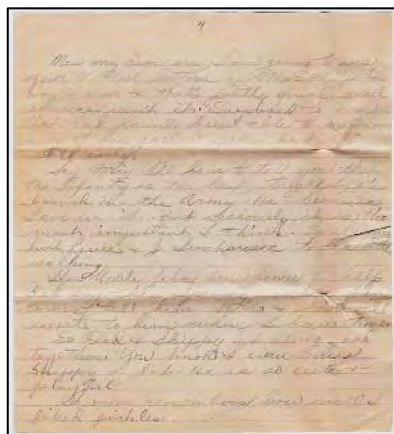
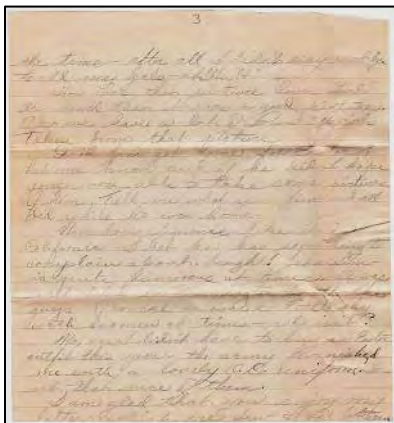
Well don't feel bad about Bill leaving without saying good-bye - you forget sometimes a guy just doesn't have time to do what he wants to all time - after all, I didn't say good-bye to all my gals - ok. Ha ha!

How was that picture "Cover Girl". We heard that it was a good picture. Also we have a lot of pin up girls taken from that picture.

How does Jimmie like it in California - I bet he has something to complain about. Laugh! John-Jim is quite



Letter from the Anzio Beachhead. Because of security and censorship requirements, the brutal conditions of the invasion cannot be discussed. (More on next page).



humorous at times. He was well liked in Bloomington by all the guys - of course he was a little shy with women at times - who isn't?

No, sis I didn't have to buy an Easter outfit this year - the army furnished me with a lovely O.D. uniform. So nice of them.

I am glad that you enjoy my letters which are few & far between.

Now my dear sis, I am going to ans. your V-Mail letters of March 31, April Fools Day, & April 4. That's pretty quick mail service isn't it. Surprised to hear that dad hasn't been able to put in any of his garden yet - but it's still early.

Say Mary, I'll have to tell you that the Infantry is the best, toughest, etc. branch in the Army - Ha - because I am in it. But seriously it is the most important I think. So it wouldn't hurt Louie & J. Simhauser to do a little walking.

Has Uncle John been down to help dad any this Spring? When John comes tell him hello & that I'll write to him when I have time.

So Dad & Skippy get along good together. You know I even miss Skippy a lot. He is so cute & playful.

So mom remembers how well I liked pickles.

That is a good idea you gals have about whipping up your own lunch at times - it makes my mouth water to hear about it. But don't take me wrong - we get good food over here - but of course it's mostly solid food and not much of the "goodies" we are used to.

So you have to take your vacation every year now & can't save your days - oh well that isn't such a bad thing. So you are going to spend two weeks at home - swell. Now don't work too hard - but try to help Marian out so she can catch up a little on her book-work. So you will be a V-Garden gall for 2 weeks. Ha. I can just see Skippy jumping around in the garden & little Linda helping.

I received your very cute Easter card. I did have a nice Easter Sunday. Yes, I remember the bread with eggs mom used to make & I'd like to have some now. Oh boy! Well, I must close.

With Love, Johnnie.

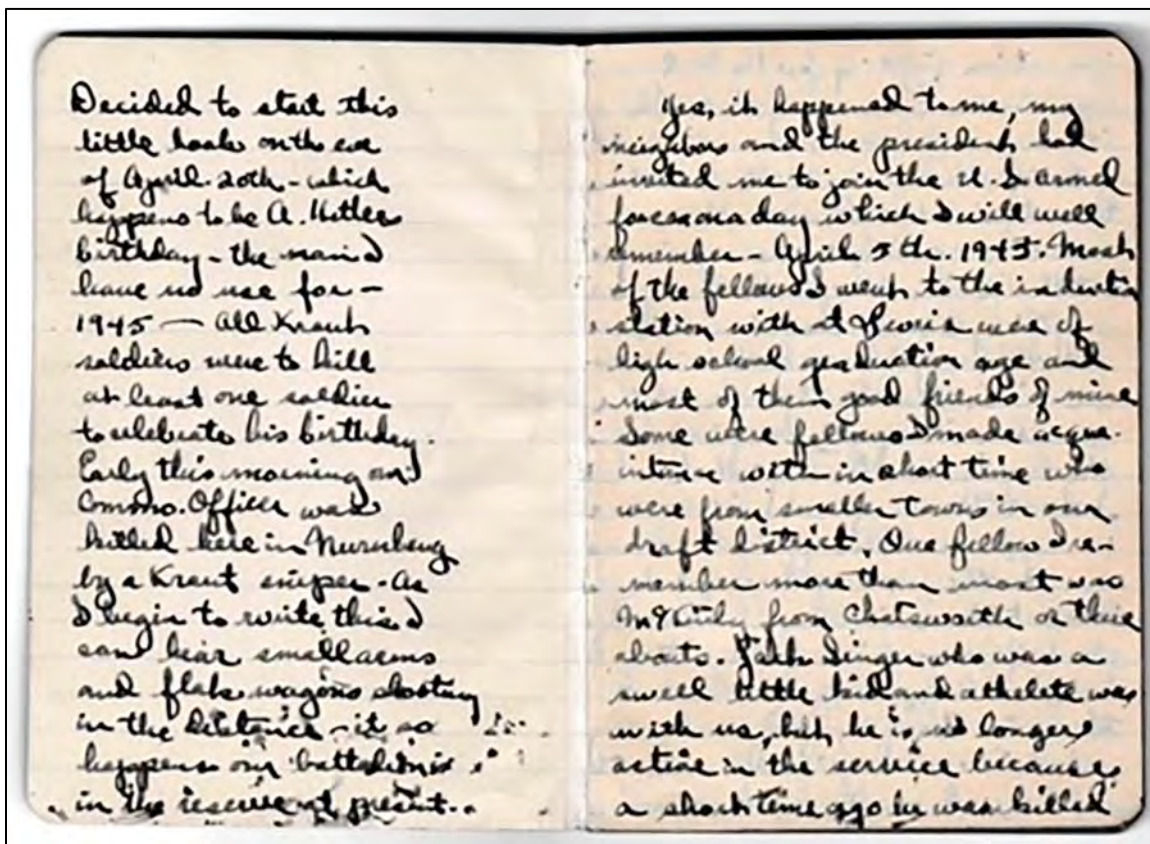
Conclusion of the Rodino letter from the Anzio Beachhead, April 23, 1944.

Images of letter are courtesy of Tom Arnoltz and the Rodino family.

An Excerpt from the personal journal of John Rodino

“Decided to start this little book on the eve of April 20th – which happens to be on the eve of A. Hitler’s birthday – the man I have no use for – 1945. All Kraut soldiers were to kill at least one soldier to celebrate his birthday. Early this morning a Commo. [communications] Officer was killed here in Nuremberg by a Kraut sniper. As I begin to write this, I can hear small arms and flak wagons shooting in the distance – it so happens our battalion is in the reserve at present.

“Yes, it happened to me, my neighbors and the president had invited me to join the U.S. armed forces on a day which I will well remember – April 5th, 1943. Much of the fellows I went to the induction station with at Peoria were of high school graduation age and most of them good friends of mine. Some were fellows I made acquaintance within a short time who were from smaller towns in our draft district. One fellow remembers more than most [name obscured] from Chatsworth or thereabouts. Jack Singer who was a swell little kid and athlete was with us but he is no longer active in the service because of a short time ago he was killed ...”



Personal Journal excerpt of John Rodino
Images of are courtesy of Tom Arnoltz and the Rodino family.



V-Mail from John Rodino. Written on specially formatted stationery, it was designed to reduce the space needed to transport mail thus freeing up transportation resources. Once written, the letters were microfilmed then transported. Later they would be reprinted and delivered. Images of are courtesy of Tom Arnoltz and the Rodino family.

Don't Look for the Roadside Marker

By Mike West

Comments? Comments are welcome. Just use the link below to our message board.
<https://www.audiemurphy.com/msgb/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=4769>

OH, THERE WAS A FIGHT, alright! Not the kind that makes the history books or is reflected on a roadside historical marker put up by the county or state. No metal plaque with colored arrows showing the movements of various opposing military units – but a fight, nonetheless.

It doesn't take the assassination of some archduke or the sudden incursion across a geographic parallel to start a fight. The spark that ignites a battle can be as simple as a hole in a pair of britches.

Frank was not a mean kid. He was simply a fun-loving eight-year-old little brother in a small Depression-era Texas town. I suspect there were many such little fellows.

On that particular day, Frank and several older boys – one being his older brother, were meandering along the concrete porch which ran the full length of the northside of the Celeste, Texas business district.

Frank, as many a young fellow was prone to do, was carrying a sharp-pointed stick likely cut from a persimmon or some other readily

available tree. The nature of the wood is not important.

Such a pointed implement could have had a multitude of uses like stirring-up an anthill or engaging in a sword fight with an opposing knight but at that very moment, Frank allowed temptation to get the best of him and it found another use.

Perhaps it was a simple act based on opportunity and spontaneity or maybe there was an element of malice of forethought. I suspect it was the former.

In a flash, Frank took that sharp-pointed stick and jabbed the older boy just ahead of him right in the "south forty". There may have been second thoughts on Frank's part, but we will never know.

Seemingly a rather innocent fun-loving prank but as I said earlier, a pair of britches were involved. It was a rare occurrence when such a prized and valuable garment could be had but especially during the Depression of the 1930s – and so they were to be protected from all undue wear and tear

and particularly from unnecessary holes.

Well, Frank's well-placed jab not only elicited the desired scream from the older boy but an unfortunate tear in the fabric of the pants which left a terrible, ill-placed hole. As you can imagine the victim of the assault turned and gave the assailant Frank a pop on the head.

Certainly, this attack on a younger sibling could not go unanswered and immediately Frank's older brother was involved. Being about 4 years Frank's senior, the older brother lit into the victim with the torn pants.

In a flash, a fight was underway on the sidewalk in front of Mr. E. D. Bickham's Grocery and Market. During the fight

the two boys rolled down the steps into the street poking and gouging all the way. I suspect with no small amount of cheering from gathering spectators. Eventually the two pugilists were separated, and no permanent damage was done to human flesh.

Frank and his older brother went one way and Leon went the other. I suspect the britches were patched – but what a place for a patch!

This is not the end of the story. Frank would someday become mayor of Celeste, Texas and his older brother, Dudley, would serve honorably from 1943 to the end of the war.

What of Leon? He would become better known as Audie Leon Murphy. You know the story.



“Battle of the Britches” location. 2018 photo of the store front where Audie Murphy as a youngster got into a fight. The store has since closed but still stands on the north side of U.S. 69 in Celeste, Texas. *Photo courtesy of [Google Maps](https://www.google.com/maps).*

“Ride, Cowboy, Ride”

By M.D. Marks

Comments? Comments are welcome. Just use the link below to our message board.
<http://www.audiemurphy.com/msgb/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=4764>

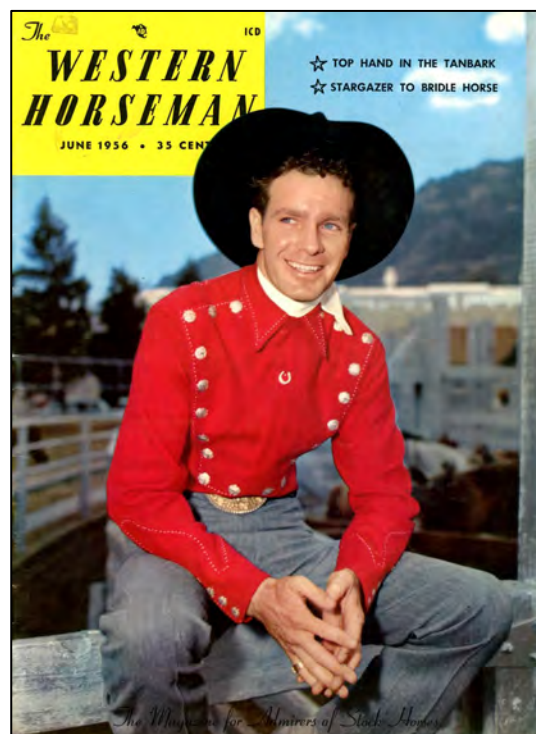
BACK IN THE SPRING of 1997, the Foundation newsletter carried a story written by Jay Fishburn, a jockey and professional horse trainer whom Audie considered a good friend. He had some great stories to tell about his days with Audie and he shared this one, too.

“When they [Audie's horses] were racing in Denver, Audie kept a stable of horses there. When the rodeo was in town, Casey Tibbs would be there, too. Casey was World Champion Cowboy, you know. He did more for the rodeo business than anybody. We went to the races every day and the rodeo every night. The three of us became really good friends.

“Audie had some good horses that made him a lot of money—Depth Charge, Quick Tide, Blen Hostess, Mackay Boy ... Audie's horses were in the black, but he had to bet eight races a day. He always bet to win, and I can recall some elaborate parlays. Thousands and thousands of dollars. But money had no

meaning to Audie, you couldn't believe how he could go through money.

“Casey was quite a gambler, himself. Why, Casey could start the morning with \$10,000 and that night not have a quarter. I remember one night at Hollywood Park he lost all his money and borrowed some from Audie. Audie took off and



Casey comes back and says,
'Hey, I let a guy take my car. You
got enough money so we can go
to dinner tonight?'

1


Tibbs had a yearning for high living,
and he was forever known as an
unrepentant gambler. In a one week
stretch of dice and poker in Las Vegas,
he gambled away \$40,000, including
oil well shares.

Both Jay Fishburn and Casey Tibbs
remained close to Audie. Both were
there for him when Audie put together
his last film, "A Time for Dying". But
besides the whole racetrack thing, just
what drew the war-hero-turned-actor
to the curly haired professional rodeo
hand who came from the hills of South
Dakota?

Maybe it was Tibbs' sense of humor.
Audie's was legendary for its
uniqueness. Here's an example of
Tibbs' as it was featured in the
"Legends of Rodeo" of Western
Horseman's "Legends" series.

"On a charter flight out of
Montana bound for Reno,
[fellow competitor Harry]
Tompkins, who'd stayed up late
the night before, confessed to
Tibbs that he didn't feel well.
Tibbs told him that he had some
airsickness pills, which he
offered to Tompkins as the
plane took off.

Ranch born...
rodeo bred



Lee RIDERS
Cowboy Pants

For Casey Tibbs, 1955 World's All-Around Champion Cowboy, it's Lee Riders, slim, trim western jeans, choice of many a rodeo headliner! Made for ranch wear, Lee Cowboy Denim is rugged as a rope, wears and wears, sanforized too! Tailored sizes for men, women, girls and boys. They'll fit better, wear longer —or you get your money back or a NEW GARMENT FREE!

THE H. D. LEE COMPANY
KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI

¹ Audie Murphy Research Foundation Newsletter, Volume 2, Spring 1997; page 1
(see https://www.audiemurphy.com/amrf/amrf_news2.pdf)



Casey Tibbs with Audie Murphy and Guy Mitchell. Good friend Casey Tibbs appears to be telling something amusing to both Audie Murphy and the co-star of their TV series *Whispering Smith* in this photo.

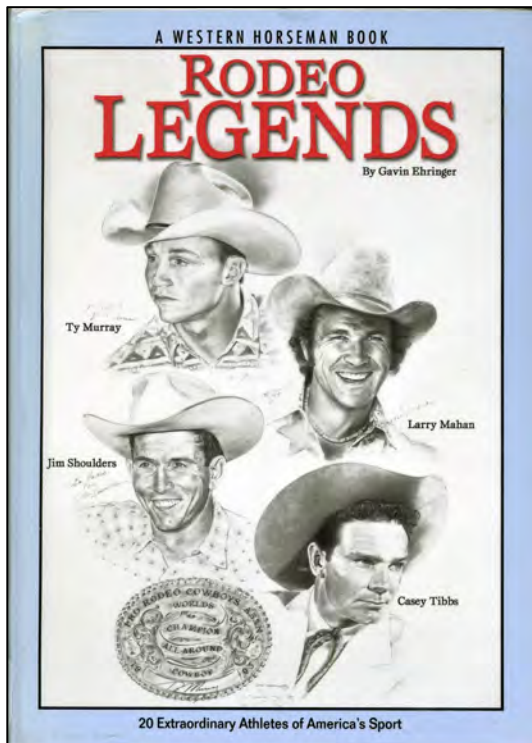
“I asked for one. He told me I needed two. Well, they turned out to be laxatives. For the whole flight, I had to go to the bathroom in a paper sack,” said Tompkins, who was hesitant to fly with Tibbs from that day onward.

Tibbs was indeed a spark plug.

“If you were standing by him, he'd throw a firecracker at your feet. With Casey, there was never a dull moment,” said Tompkins.”²

In an interview with Tibbs, conducted by his friend, Rusty Richards, Casey told of the day he met Audie Murphy for the first time in a steam room at

² Ehringer, G. (2001). *Rodeo legends: 20 extraordinary athletes of America's sport*. Colorado Springs, CO, Colorado: Western Horseman Magazine.



Front cover of RODEO LEGENDS. This publication provides a close look at many great rodeo stars to include Casey Tibbs.

Universal Studios. This was during a lull in Tibbs's rodeo career, in 1951, when he was working on a picture for Budd Boettcher, called *THE BRONCO BUSTER*, so Tibbs was granted "steam room privileges" in the Studio.

Since everyone was scantily attired, as is the custom in steam rooms, Audie's war wound was very apparent when he stood to walk out. Tibbs noticed that a large portion of Murphy's right buttock area was missing. Tibbs boomed out "Hey Murphy, if you're such a great war hero, how come half

your ass is missing like you was running away?"

An understandable hush hit the room, and everyone was prepared for Audie to go off on the newcomer. But, instead, Murphy burst out laughing and thought it was one of the funniest things he'd ever heard.

"We started running around together, bought some racehorses together, and we dated some of the same women. He'd tell the ladies he was Casey Tibbs, and I'd tell them I was Audie Murphy. Audie and I spent a lot of time together."³

From that moment until Audie's death, Casey and Murphy remained close.

The two "Irish boys" enjoyed a lot of wild times together and had a lot of laughs, but Casey also knew the soft side of Audie. In the same interview, Tibbs told Rusty Richards ...

"Little things would bother Audie, though, like the time he backed out of the driveway and ran over a kitten. It just tore him up.

"He got about half hot at me, once, because I was invited to the governor's one-shot antelope hunt, and I wanted him to go with me. But [Audie]

³ Rusty Richards was a good friend of Casey Tibbs often conducting taped interviews with the rodeo star. In the late 1990's Larryann Willis of the Audie Murphy Research Foundation interviewed Mr. Richards who allowed Ms. Willis to listen to and make copies of the tapes.



Ride 'em cowboy! Casey Tibbs shows how to “sit a horse” displaying great control and form in while riding Old Grey Mare in the early 1950's. Photo Source: Capital Journal (Pierre, South Dakota) https://www.capjournal.com/news/casey-tibbs-daughter/article_61ab08fe-475c-11e7-b56c-7742711a7677.html

refused, answering, ‘I don’t want to kill any animal.’⁴

Tibbs was a bit younger than Murphy and missed the whole World War II event. In 1929, he was the tenth child born to ranchers John and Florence Tibbs, on their ranch near Fort Pierre, South Dakota. His Irish forefathers

were some of the early pioneers who came west, seeking better opportunities.

Casey learned to sit a horse⁵ early in life. Not necessarily by choice, but by necessity. He was five miles from the one room schoolhouse on the Dakota plains. Some mornings, he would go

⁴ Rusty Richards’ taped interviews.

⁵ According to Google, the expression means much more than to 'sit upon a horse': it means to adopt and maintain a correct posture and fluidity of motion while riding a horse. It is usually encountered with a qualification, as: She sits a horse very well, very well indeed.



A boys' day out. Terry Murphy and James Murphy sit with rodeo legend Casey Tibbs, their father Audie Murphy, and actor Guv Mitchell.

pick out an unbroken horse from the herd his dad kept, at times well over 1,000 head, and ride the bronc to school. He would have to start out a bit early, because he never knew which direction it was going to take in the beginning. Tibbs was breaking horses for a living by age 10 and at 14 he had launched his rodeo career.

As a kid, Tibbs also was drawn to boxing, with dreams of becoming a prizefighter. He installed his own "equipment" in his dad's barn. Casey commented in the "Legends" article that he would get his own chores done and then do his brother's, too. It was the only way he could get his brother to put on the gloves and go a few rounds with him. It turned out to be a good investment, since Casey felt the practice helped a lot later on when he

got into street fights with the other cowboys.

When Casey hit age 13, he had finished eighth grade. He walked away from schooling and headed for the rodeo circuit. He got turned down by the rodeo bosses because of his young age and he headed back to the ranch for another year. By the time he hit age 15, he was an accomplished bronc rider.

Casey's reputation as a bronc rider grew among the established rodeo cowboys, as well as that of his sense of humor. The others who did not share that style of humor, as well as those who put high regard on their own personal safety learned to stay clear of the curly haired Irish kid.

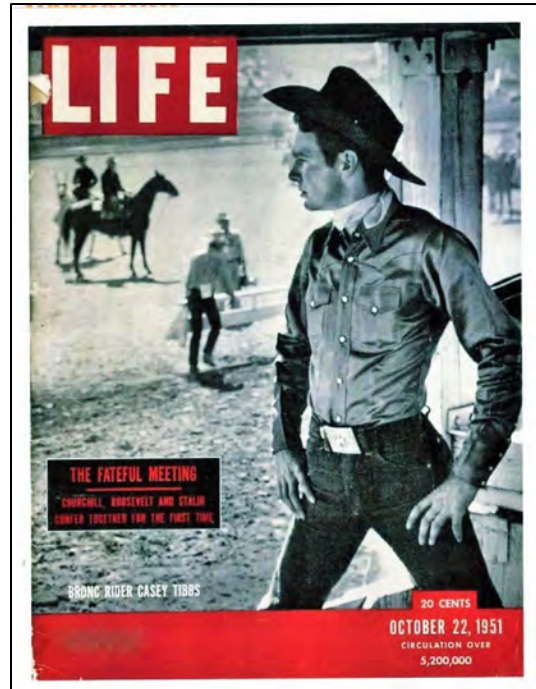
At age 17, Tibbs was competing full-time in the Rodeo Cowboys Association, later known as the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA), and in his first year, wound up 5th in the saddle bronc standings. The next year, after his father's death, Casey hit the circuit with a fresh sense of purpose and won his first saddle bronc riding championship at the age of 19. At the time, he was the youngest world champion in Rodeo Cowboys Association history.

While a lot of professional cowboys are slight built and compact, Casey was tall and slender. He brought a new style to competitive riding. The whole term “made his eight seconds” is the common thought behind the success of a rider, but it is not true. Riders in all rough stock competition, which are those featuring bucking stock, are not only scored on the time element, but their riding style and various other rules. Their feet must be in a certain position when they leave the chutes and the motion, they display during the ride is not only key to their staying on, but how high they score.

If anyone could have been compared to a dancer in rough stock competition, it would be Casey Tibbs. He brought in a new style for bronc riding, one which showed gracefulness and a developed form. It had come naturally to him with all those days on the South Dakota ranches of working broncs for \$5 a head.

In 1951, Tibbs took world titles in bareback riding, saddle bronc riding and the all-around cowboy championship. That year, like his well-known Irish friend, Audie, had done before him, Casey graced the cover of Life Magazine. In 1954, he set an unsurpassed record for winning consecutive saddle bronc world titles with four to his credit.

There were rodeo experts who believed Tibbs could ride as well as he did because of his cat-quick reflexes, extraordinary coordination, and



exquisite sense of timing. These were the same abilities that had often been applied to Audie Murphy.

By this time, with a pocket full of cash winnings, Tibbs was living the good life. This began to draw some criticism from some of the less successful competitors. They resented his lifestyle of Cadillac and Lincoln convertibles and the fact that he could stay in the best hotels while traveling the circuit.

Rodeo champion Jim Shoulders is quoted in the “Legends of Rodeo” as saying, “I’d hear the complaints, and I would say, ‘Look at how the media wants to put him in the paper.’ A lot of

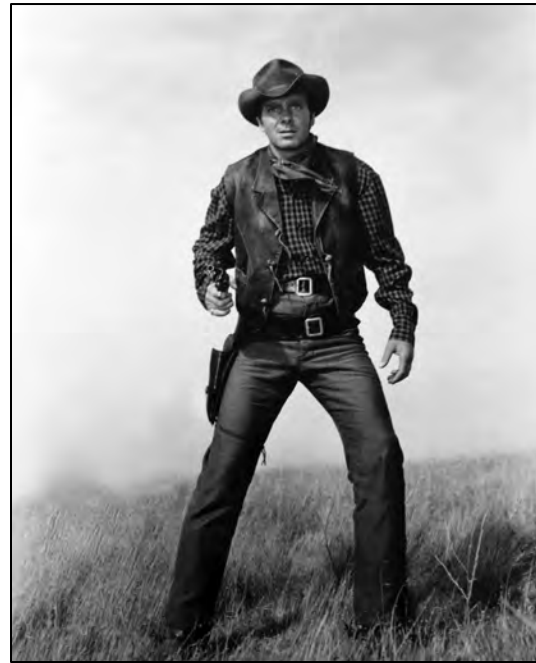
media wouldn't even have talked about rodeo without Casey.”⁶

Between 1949 and 1959, Tibbs won nine championships and was twice World Champion All-Around Cowboy. In 1956, he announced his retirement from full-time competition to look into movies and film parts. In 1957, with no great success in the movie industry, he returned to full-time competition.

In 1959, he earned his sixth and final title as World Champion saddle bronc rider, which set a record for saddle bronc world titles that remained intact through the end of the 20th century. It was a hard road, and somehow, he managed to continue to compete despite the broken bones. A lot of hastily taped up injuries and just plain guts are what got him down that road and to those titles.

In the middle of it all, Tibbs developed a hobby of working with 4-H clubs. He helped establish programs which aided the 4-H programs in South Dakota. Casey started his 4-H project to help underprivileged kids, but eventually opened it up for all kids to participate in.

Eventually, Tibbs ventured into Hollywood, again. He appeared as a stuntman and a second unit director in more than 25 movies and two



A Hollywood gunslinger. Casey Tibbs in a studio photo from the 1958 movie WILD HERITAGE. Tibbs acted and performed film stunt during filming.

television series. He has ridden horses with the likes of Gary Cooper, John Wayne, Ben Johnson, Dale Robertson and, of course, Audie Murphy.

In an article for the Los Angeles Herald Examiner, dated August 23, 1975, Casey listed his top movie stars who could really ride.

“Ben Johnson is the best,” he said. “I'd have to rate Joel McCrea second, followed by Audie Murphy, Dale Robertson and James Caan. I know

⁶ Ehringer, G. (2001). *Rodeo legends: 20 extraordinary athletes of America's sport*. Colorado Springs, CO, Colorado: Western Horseman Magazine.

Gary Cooper was good, but I didn't see him that much."

Out of that list, it should be pointed out that both Ben Johnson and Dale Robertson were professional cowboys and horse trainers before coming to Hollywood. James Caan actually competed in professional rodeos in between acting jobs, skills he demonstrated in the movie "Comes a Horseman".

In that same article from the Los Angeles Herald Examiner, it was mentioned that Tibbs was in town to promote his Bicentennial Trail Ride, which began at the San Diego Country Estates and wound through the San Vicente Valley, along an old Pony Express trail, across the Cleveland National to Cedar Falls Lake on the Barona Indian Reservation. It was an encore of an earlier ride that former President Gerald Ford's son, Steven had taken Tibbs on.

During the Los Angeles Herald's interview, Casey stuck up for Steve Ford, pointing out that his ability as a horseman was no publicity gimmick. "No, sir," Casey commented in the article. "This young man can do it all. He can work on any man's ranch. He's got the natural ability to be a good cowboy."⁷

This would establish the fact that Steve Ford could function in Tibbs's world, but what made Steve believe that Tibbs could function in the world of a President?

The younger Ford invited Tibbs to come to dinner with him at the White House, at that time the home of Gerald and Betty Ford, his parents. The residence was filled with secret servicemen, and the conversation had turned toward some recent assassination attempts made against the President. Casey took note of that and commented, "I don't know why anybody would want to shoot you, you never done nothing when you was President."

Betty Ford did not appreciate Tibbs's humor, as Audie always had, but fortunately, Gerald Ford did. He really found the comment humorous and had a good laugh. Betty accepted that and was just starting to settle down when Casey decided to demonstrate a lesser known Rodeo custom and promptly ate one of Betty Ford's wine glasses.

It is not known how the Secret Service handled that.

Along with his other endeavors, Tibbs continued to compete in rodeo until 1964, but a broken leg suffered in 1960 ended his abilities to stay on top. It was

⁷ Page, D. (1975, August 23). Tibbs Back On Trail. *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, p. 1. (See the last page in this story for the entire newspaper clipping)

then he decided to make his return to Hollywood. In 1967, Tibbs was offered a part in a television commercial which was going to feature a cowboy. Reminiscent of Murphy's experience with playing a war hero in *TO HELL AND BACK*, Tibbs was told by the director he "didn't look the part" of a cowboy. They were interested, however, in the use of Tibbs's name.

This Hollywood slight angered Tibbs and he ended up winning the next ten rodeos he entered.⁸

About this same time period, Casey was involved in the production of a documentary film, called *BORN TO BUCK*. The story was centered around a bucking horse roundup on the Lower Brule Sioux Indian Reservation. While filming, Tibbs nearly drown while trying to swim 400 horses across a flooded river. This would have been another circumstance he could have discussed with Audie who also nearly drown in a lake in Mexico while filming *THE UNFORGIVEN* for John Huston.

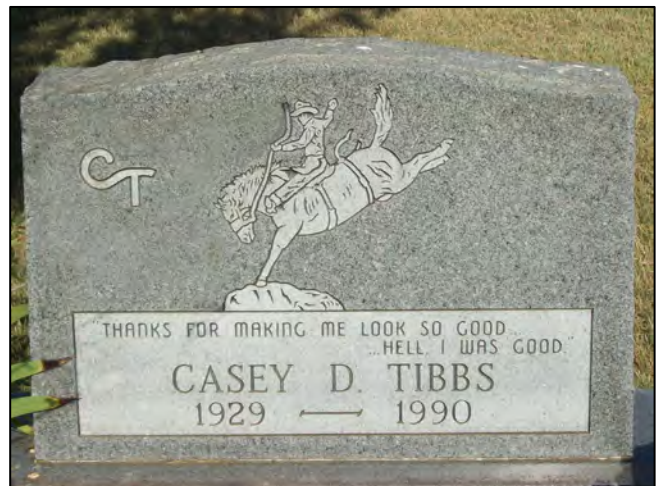
Early in 1989, Tibbs was diagnosed with bone cancer. He was able to be present for the dedication and unveiling of a statue erected in his honor at the Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame in August of 1989. At the unveiling, the sculpture's creator, Edd Hayes,

revealed a secret. While casting the statue of "The Champ", he had inserted a heart shaped plaque inside the cowboy's chest which read, "Ride, Cowboy, Ride".

Tibbs addressed the crowd by saying, "Thank you all for making me look good." He paused and then said, "Hell, I was good."

Tibbs died five months later at his home in Ramona, California. – M.

– M.D. Marks



Final resting place. Casey Duane Tibbs was interred in the family plot at Scotty Philip Cemetery, Fort Pierre, South Dakota. *Photo by Susan Wiedemer Jones.*

Source: www.findagrave.com/memorial/7076739/casey-tibbs

⁸ Ehringer, G. (2001). *Rodeo legends: 20 extraordinary athletes of America's sport*. Colorado Springs, CO, Colorado: Western Horseman Magazine.

Tibbs Back On Trail

By **DON PAGE**
Herald-Examiner Staff Writer

He's eaten more dust than a cattle driver and been in more saloon fights than John Wayne.

He's been on more horses than Willie Shoemaker and if he was a jockey, his silks would be black and blue.

It's a cliché, but it's true. Casey Tibbs was born to the saddle. He's one of the last of the real cowboys.

Between 1949 and 1959, Tibbs won nine championships and was twice World's Champion All-Around Cowboy. He's won more titles in rodeoing than any man in history.

Casey was breaking horses for a living at age 10 and by the time he was 14, he had launched his rodeo career in his hometown of Ft. Pierre, S.D.

Tibbs is a Hollywood cowboy, too, but you'll never see him carrying a bag over his shoulder. He has been a stuntman and second-unit director in more than 25 movies and two television series.

He's ridden with Gary Cooper, John Wayne, Ben Johnson, Audie Murphy, Dale Robertson and most all of the good-riding movie cowboys and he's doubled for everyone from Joan Leslie to Chuck Connors.

At 46-years-old, Casey Tibbs looks and feels fit enough to hit the rodeo circuit again . . . and he probably would if he could get back his

stock, which the Japanese government tied up when he took a rodeo there in 1972.

Meanwhile, Casey Tibbs has become a gentleman cowboy, with neatly-trimmed mustache and nails, conservative western apparel and a minimum of social drinking. And he hasn't been in a saloon fight since the old Hitchin' Post closed down in Burbank years ago.

Today, Casey Tibbs is the (ahem!) Director of Western Activities for the San Diego Country Estates, nestled in the San Vicente Valley, a plush complex which is as far from due ranching as crocheting.

"They pay me a lot of money," he said, "for a guy who's worth two dollars."

We were having brunch at the Valley Tail O' the Cock and Casey was daintily digging into Eggs Benedict — no fries or beans.

Tibbs was in town to promote his Bicentennial Trail Ride, Aug. 30-Sept. 1, which begins at the San Diego Country Estates and winds through the San Vicente Valley along the old Chester Gunn Pony Express Trail, across the Cleveland National Forest to Cedar Falls Lake on the Barona Indian Reservation.

"It's an encore of an earlier trail ride we had with President Ford's son, Steve, as our trail boss," Casey said.

President Ford's son — a good gimmick.

"No, sir," Casey said.

"This young man can do it all. He can work on any man's ranch. Steve came to me without any publicity. He wanted to get away from Washington, D.C. He's got the natural ability to be a good cowboy."

"And you know that Caan is already a good rodeo rider who can ride with anybody."

The upcoming ride is open to cowboys, cowgirls and cow-kids who are experienced riders. There'll be a chuck wagon breakfast on Sunday morning and an evening celebration featuring the Sons of the Pioneers and square dancing and all the fixins.

Tibbs has a large cattle spread adjacent to the Estates and his living is still breaking horses and working the ranch. "I'm on a horse every day," he smiled.

"You know, I watched George Blanda the other day on TV and I thought I was watching a rerun. I couldn't believe a guy his age (47) doing that. But I know I still could rodeo and win! Blanda can still do it because he never let up. I let up once, and that's why I couldn't be as good as I was in my prime."

We couldn't let Casey go without a bit of reminiscing about the bad old days. We got to talking about some of the tough saloons on the rodeo circuit.

"Well," he said, "there's two of 'em that come to mind. There's the 21 Bar in Billings, Mont. If you get tired of fight-

ing inside, you can go out on the street and fight.

"And then there's the Cowboy Bar in my hometown. We call in the 'Bucket O' Blood.' I'll tell you how tough it is. One night some guy got slit from ear to ear by a drunk Indian. Mrs. Sutley from the drug store came over and stopped up his jugular vein, then stitched him up like you'd stitch a quilt. Then she says, 'Give him water and see if he leaks.' The son-of-a-gun lived, too."

Casey then listed his top movie stars who could really ride.

"Ben Johnson is the best," he said. "I'd have to rate Joel McCrea second, followed by Audie Murphy, Dale Robertson and James Caan. I know Gary Cooper was good, but I didn't see him that much."

Does he miss the old Hollywood?

"Not a bit."

He paused.

"Except for the old crowd and the saloons."

Los Angeles Herald-Examiner Newspaper Clipping. August 23, 1975 article was cited earlier in this story and is provided here because of the interesting details and insight it offers.