

When There is More to a Picture Than What Is Seen By Mike West

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<https://www.audiemurphy.com/msgb/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=4761>

By Mike West
Hunter/Gatherer

I HAVE ALWAYS been fascinated by old pictures. Quite often when a photo is published or found in an album there is a printed caption or

maybe a sentence or two scribbled on the back which helps provide context. Even if this is so, the words of the description sometimes leave you

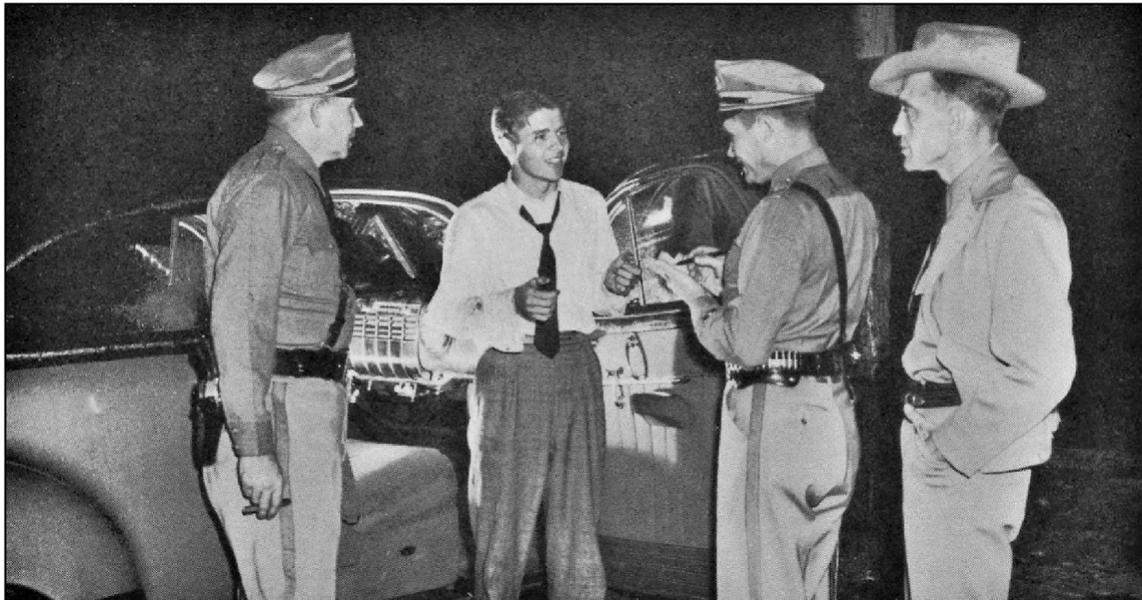


Figure 1. On December 11, 1946, Audie Murphy gives a report to Texas State Highway Patrolman Everett Brandon, while officers S.H. Denison (left) and N.K. Dixon (right) listen. Audie's clothes are spotted with blood after he finally knocked out a 190 pound, 6'2" tall would-be-car-thief in a ten-minute brawl. A much smaller Audie only weighed about 130 pounds. The photo was originally published by The Dallas Morning News and appears in Colonel Harold Simpson's *Audie Murphy, American Soldier*, pg. 328.

wondering: "Is there more to be learned? What am I missing? What am I not seeing?"

Such a picture appears at the top of page 328 in Colonel Harold Simpson's, "Audie Murphy, American Soldier."¹

To the student of Audie L. Murphy, the picture is quite familiar. This snapshot

in time captures the aftermath of a fight between Murphy and a hitchhiker just south of the Collin-Dallas County line (see figure 1).

While on an extended Thanksgiving-Christmas visit with family in 1946, Audie was returning to Farmersville from Dallas on a cold, rainy afternoon of Wednesday, December 11, 1946. He

SCORES KNOCKOUT IN 10 MINUTES

Audie Murphy, Bemedaled Soldier, Wins Another Battle, Whips 6-Footer

DALLAS, Dec. 11 (AP).—Audie Murphy, who was World War II's most decorated soldier, won another battle single-handed Wednesday afternoon when he subdued a 6-foot, 2-inch, 190-pounder who apparently attempted to steal his automobile.

The freckled kid from Farmersville said he knocked out the 25-year-old man in a rural filling station near here after a furious 10-minute battle.

Murphy weighs 130 pounds and stands five feet, seven inches tall. State Highway Patrolmen Everett Brandon and F. H. Jensen said they arrested the man and lodged him in the McKinney jail. No complaint was filed immediately.

The 20-year-old Texas hero who won the Congressional Medal of Honor and every other U. S. combat medal given in World War II, related he was driving alone when

he saw a large man limping along the highway.

"It was raining like the devil and I thought I would do the fellow a favor," Audie related. "I picked him up and we drove about a mile.

"Suddenly this guy jammed something into my ribs, slapped me across the mouth and said:

"I'm the boss now. If you won't talk, this 45 will. I can use this car."

"I admitted that he was pretty much the boss at that point and we drove about four more miles. He told me to pull into a roadside gasoline station and stop. I did and he took the keys and instructed me to slide along the seat and get out on his side of the car."

Audie said the man's left hand, hidden under an old Army blouse, was still jammed into his ribs when he decided to make a fight for it. He grabbed the man's hand, discovered he had no gun after all, struck him a blow that tumbled him from the car and onto the filling station drive.

Murphy jumped squarely on the erstwhile tough guy and started swinging.

"We fought all over the place for about 10 minutes," Audie said. "He was a pretty big fellow, all right. I finally got him, though."

J. M. Peters, owner of the gasoline station, ran into the drive and ordered both men off the premises before he knew the background, Brandon added.

Audie rushed to another gasoline station a mile north to telephone the state police and upon his return found that his attacker had recovered and gone to the home of Mrs. Park Grissom, a few hundred yards distant.

The man was scuffling with Mrs. Grissom and demanding fresh clothing to replace his bloody and torn garments when Murphy and the patrolmen overpowered him again.



Check Itching
First Application
Agonizing itching or ugly Eczema, Rash, Itch, Ringworm, Pimples, Scabies, Toe Itch is checked in ONE APPLICATION of BLUE STAR OINTMENT. Repeat as needed as nature helps heal. Money back if FIRST jar fails to satisfy. Try it today.

Figure 2: A published account of Audie's ten-minute fight with a would-be car hijacker.
Source: Associated Press and Fort Worth Star Telegram, December 12, 1946.

¹ Audie Murphy, *American Soldier*, by Harold B. Simpson, 1975, pp. 315–316. Editor's note: Simpson miscaptioned the date as 12/10/1946 when in fact the fight occurred on 12/11/1946.

offered a ride to a man wearing an old army jacket as he walked beside U.S. Highway 75 near Vickery, Texas (see figure 2). The picture appears to have been taken after dark even though the altercation took place between 2:00 and 2:30 in the afternoon of December 11². The caption gives a brief synopsis of what happened. Simpson also gives additional information concerning the identification of those pictured. Beyond this, we know little.

Clearly in the center of the picture is Audie Murphy – but what of the other three men. Is there more to these men than simply their names and that they are officers? The answer is “yes” and it is more interesting than you might imagine.

Simpson identifies them as State Highway Patrolman Everett Brandon who is taking Murphy’s statement concerning the incident from earlier in the afternoon. The other officers are identified as S.H. Denison on the left and N.K. Dixon on the right (figure 1). Here, the old adage, “A picture is worth a thousand words” comes up a little short. In my opinion, this picture sure could use a liberal infusion of some of

those words. Let me see if I can supply them.

Let us start with the brief description given by Simpson by going first to Everett Brandon. Patrolman Brandon was in fact Department of Public Safety (DPS) officer Everett Nelson Brandon, Lamar County, Texas native. Prior to serving as a DPS officer, Brandon had served in a coastal artillery unit posted in the Panama Canal Zone in the early 1930s³. He had been a DPS officer many years before he met Murphy in June 1945. The first meeting came about as the result of Brandon having been assigned to escort Murphy to Greenville, Texas on June 27, 1945 to attend that city’s celebration of Audie’s homecoming⁴.

Instead of riding in the car provided by the city of Greenville, Audie jumped into the front seat of Brandon’s patrol car. It was during this ride that a lifelong friendship developed between Brandon and Murphy. Over the next 26 years, Murphy would visit the Brandons many times and they him. In fact, Audie was to visit the Brandons in Sherman, Texas on his return from his ill-fated trip to Virginia in May 1971⁵.

² There are 3 known sources referencing the fight having occurred in the afternoon:

- (1) Courier Gazette (McKinney, Texas), December 12, 1946
- (2) The Galveston News (Galveston, Texas), December 17, 1946
- (3) Tyler Morning Telegraph (Tyler, Texas), December 17, 1946

³ Fifteenth U.S. Census, 1930, Population: Panama Canal Zone, Enumeration District No. 46, Sheet 6A, line 37, dated April 12, 1930 (see Figure at the end of this article).

⁴ *Audie Murphy, American Soldier*, by Harold B. Simpson, 1975, pp. 226

⁵ *Audie Murphy, American Soldier*, by Harold B. Simpson, 1975, pp. 226 (bottom)

There is another story found here in this friendship. The story has its origin in Audie's wartime experiences as told in his autobiography, "To Hell and Back". I suspect many people have never heard of Private Lattie Tipton. Tipton, a Tennessean, was Murphy's closest friend in the 3rd platoon, Company B. On August 15, 1944, during the invasion of southern France, Tipton was killed during an effort by Murphy and Tipton to attack a hill not far from the invasion beaches. Those familiar with the story know that Private Tipton was killed when he sought to take prisoners Germans who were only pretending to give up. As a result of Tipton's deceitful death, Audie would attack remaining German positions single handedly using a captured German machine gun. For this heroic action, he would be awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, second only to the Medal of Honor.

True, many people may have never heard of Lattie Tipton but when reading, "To Hell and Back", they will learn the name Brandon. For you see, DPS Patrolman Everett Nelson Brandon became the namesake for Private Lattie Tipton.

As Simpson reveals, the officer on the left is S.H. Denison. He is in fact DPS Patrolman, Selwyn Hogan Denson. During the great Depression, Denson tried his hand at many jobs but started his career in 1937 in the DPS. With the outbreak of World War II, he resigned to serve in the Navy for the duration of the war. At the end of the war, Denson resumed his service as a Texas Highway Patrolman and was assigned to the Collin County, Texas area ⁶.

Officer Denson would continue to serve until 1947 when he became a Texas Ranger. He would conclude his service as a ranger in 1974 after a distinguished career. Having been in the Navy, it is interesting to note that Denson would carry a card with him that read, "Selwyn Denson, Admiral, Texas Navy." The card bearing the title "Admiral" was issued by Texas Governor, Bill Clements ⁷.

As a side note, Denson's younger brother, Corporal Harold Denson, was killed in action during a bombing raid over the Japanese held island of Kishka, Alaska early in the war in 1942 ⁸.

Finally, it is time to discuss the officer on the right who is perhaps the most intriguing. At first glance, he might be mistaken for a local constable showing

⁶ Nieman, Robert. "20th Century Shining Star: Selwyn Denson 'Admiral of the Texas Navy.'" (<https://www.texasranger.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/BIO-Selwyn-Denson.pdf>)

⁷ Nieman, Robert. "20th Century Shining Star: Selwyn Denson 'Admiral of the Texas Navy.'" ⁸

⁸ <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/3653918/harold-denson>

Norman Kemp Dixon

Norman Kemp Dixon, 84, of Austin died Wednesday, September 2, 1992.

Mr. Dixon was with the Texas Department of Public Safety for 35 years serving as a Texas Ranger and chief of the Internal Security Division.

Graveside services will be held at 11:00 AM Friday at Cook-Walden/Capital Parks Cemetery.

Mr. Dixon is survived by his wife, Leona Dixon of Austin; two sons, Kemp Dixon and wife, Lea Ann, of Austin, and Ken Dixon and wife, Judy, of Temple; brother, Ronald F. Dixon of New Jersey; five grandchildren, Jennifer, Jeff, Jana, Lance and Todd; and one great-grandchild, Zachary.

Arrangements by Cook-Walden Funeral Home, Lamar location.

Figure 3: Obituary, Norman Kemp Dixon.
Source: Austin American Statesman, (Austin, Texas), Thursday, September 3, 1992

up for the photo opt but that would be a mistake. He was “no-Johnny-come-lately-to-law-enforcement” and was Norman Kemp Dixon, Texas Ranger. Not a Texan at all, Dixon was a native of Vermont. Serving for 35 years, first as a Texas Ranger from 1937 until the early 1950’s⁹ when he became the Chief of the Internal Security Division for the Department of Public Safety (see figure 3) until his retirement in the early 1980’s. Dixon served with honor and distinction and would be the subject of a biography titled, “Chasing Thugs, Nazis, and Reds”.

⁹ <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/108009122/norman-kemp-dixon>

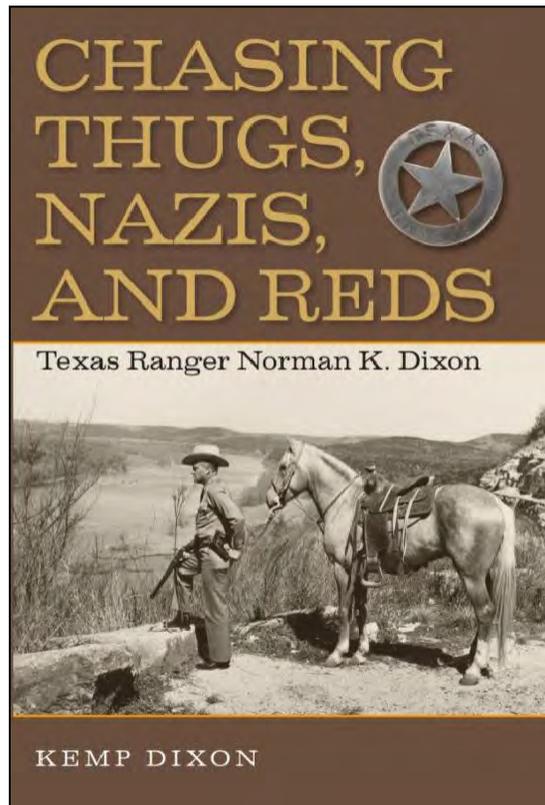


Figure 4: Chasing Thugs, Nazis, and Reds
Author: Kemp, Dixon; copyright 2015; ISBN 978-1-62349-256-4

Now you can see why I have always been fascinated by old pictures – and not just by the main subject of the photo. As we have seen, the supporting characters can have pretty interesting stories themselves.

– Mike West

Form 13-994
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE—BUREAU OF THE CENSUS
FIFTEENTH CENSUS OF THE UNITED STATES: 1930
POPULATION—PANAMA CANAL ZONE

2751
Sheet No. 6A 168

Enumerated District No. 46

Enumerated by me on April 12, 1930, George W. Recker

Court District: Crotcha
City, town, or village: Fort Randolph Post
Name of Institution: _____

Enclosed by me on _____

Serial	Sex	Age	Race	Color	Marital Status	Education	Place of Birth	Place of Birth of Father	Place of Birth of Mother	Mother Tongue and Native Language of Person	Citizenship, Etc.	Occupation and Industry		Unemployment		
												Code	Code	Code	Code	
29	M	24	W	5	No	Yes	Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania	English	Yes	9892	W	Yes	No	29
30	M	23	W	5	No	Yes	West Virginia	West Virginia	West Virginia	English	Yes	9892	W	Yes	No	30
31	M	29	W	5	No	Yes	Missouri	Missouri	Canada	English	Yes	9893	W	Yes	No	31
32	M	32	W	5	No	Yes	Illinois	Illinois	Illinois	English	Yes	9893	W	Yes	No	32
33	M	26	W	5	No	Yes	Oklahoma	Georgia	Georgia	English	Yes	9893	W	Yes	No	33
34	M	27	W	5	No	Yes	Kentucky	Kentucky	Alabama	English	Yes	9893	W	Yes	No	34
35	M	23	W	5	No	Yes	Mississippi	Mississippi	Mississippi	English	Yes	9893	W	Yes	No	35
36	M	21	W	5	No	Yes	Massachusetts	Massachusetts	Massachusetts	English	Yes	9893	W	Yes	No	36
37	M	21	W	5	No	Yes	Texas	Texas	Massachusetts	English	Yes	9893	W	Yes	No	37
38	M	24	W	5	No	Yes	Rhode Island	Rhode Island	Massachusetts	English	Yes	9893	W	Yes	No	38
39	M	22	W	5	No	Yes	Ohio	Ohio	Ohio	English	Yes	9893	W	Yes	No	39
40	M	22	W	5	No	Yes	New York	Kentucky	Tennessee	English	Yes	9893	W	Yes	No	40
41	M	15	W	5	No	Yes	Illinois	Illinois	Illinois	English	Yes	9893	W	Yes	No	41
42	M	25	W	5	No	Yes	Illinois	Illinois	United States	English	Yes	9893	W	Yes	No	42
43	M	26	W	5	No	Yes	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia	English	Yes	9893	W	Yes	No	43
44	M	27	W	5	No	Yes	Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania	English	Yes	9893	W	Yes	No	44
45	M	26	W	5	No	Yes	New York	New York	New York	English	Yes	9893	W	Yes	No	45
46	M	23	W	5	No	Yes	Texas	Texas	Texas	English	Yes	9893	W	Yes	No	46
47	M	23	W	5	No	Yes	Arkansas	Oklahoma	Oklahoma	English	Yes	9893	W	Yes	No	47
48	M	27	W	5	No	Yes	Pennsylvania	Massachusetts	Massachusetts	English	Yes	9893	W	Yes	No	48
49	M	26	W	5	No	Yes	New York	Massachusetts	Massachusetts	English	Yes	9893	W	Yes	No	49
50	M	25	W	5	No	Yes	Delaware	Delaware	Delaware	English	Yes	9893	W	Yes	No	50

Note: Lines 1 to 28 removed to provide clarity

Abbreviations to be used in columns indicated: Col. 1—Widowed, Col. 2—Married, Col. 3—Single, Col. 4—Divorced, Col. 5—Naturalized, Col. 6—Foreign born, Col. 7—Employer, Col. 8—Wage or salary worker, Col. 9—Unemployed, Col. 10—In home, Col. 11—In public, Col. 12—In private, Col. 13—In agriculture, Col. 14—In industry, Col. 15—In commerce, Col. 16—In service, Col. 17—In government, Col. 18—In other.

Figure 5: 15th Census of the United States, Panama Canal Zone. Line 37 lists Everett Brandon as a member of Battery D, 65th Coast Artillery, on April 12, 1930.

Source: National Archives and Records Administration.

Just A Cut Above

By Richard Rodgers

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<https://www.audiemurphy.com/msgb/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=4759>

WORLD IN MY CORNER was Audie Murphy's seventeenth film and released in 1956. It was directed by Jesse Hibbs, the same director of Audie's earlier block buster **TO HELL AND BACK**.

WORLD IN MY CORNER was noted for its realistic boxing matches. Sue Gossett, author of **THE FILMS AND CAREERS OF AUDIE MURPHY**, said it succinctly in the following excerpt from her book.¹

"For two solid weeks, Audie slugged it out in the ring against such accomplished professional opponents as Chico Vejar, Cisco Andrade, Baby Ike and Frank Muche. Los Angeles boxing experts, invited to the studio to watch Murphy go against Vejar, were amazed at the rugged nature of the cinematic ring warfare. Never before had they seen two 'actors' exchange such solid blows for the sake of movie cameras."

During filming, Audie suffered a cut over his left eye requiring stitches but was undazed and continued to film. In

later scenes Audie's butterfly stitches were included in some of the footage although the black eye was covered up with makeup.



Real boxing against professional fighters. Audie Murphy delivers a right after suffering a blow above his left eye. This is probably the scene where Audie earned his butterfly stitches and black eye.

– From the collection of M.D. Marks

¹ Excerpt used with written permission from Sue Gossett. Paperback and digital copies available. Copies available through Amazon.com.



Just “cruising with a bruising”. It is the writer’s opinion that Terry looks like the kind of son any daddy would be proud of while Audie looks like the kind of dad any kid would want – and a stunning Barbara Rush probably wishes both were hers.

– *From the collection of M.D. Marks*

In the second photo above, taken off camera, Audie Murphy is with the movie’s leading lady Barbara Rush and his son Terry who is about four years old. The three are in what is believed to be a Chevy Corvette. Not much else is known about the circumstances of the picture or the trio’s destination. The photo does not bear a hand-written catalog number – normally stenciled across a lower corner of a studio still – suggesting it may have been taken by some lucky freelance photographer or a news reporter.

Regardless, the picture is a rare treat and shows Audie’s black eye as it really appeared.

The third and final photograph (next page) may have been taken between scenes during filming. Audie’s eye is well on the road to recovery. Despite the small scar, Audie’s good looks and photographic appeal undoubtedly remain a cut above many other jealous Hollywood celebrities of his time – pun intended.

– *Richard Rodgers*



No permanent damage. Audie Murphy's cut shows great improvement and does not affect his appearance in the least.

- From the collection of M.D. Marks

An Unappreciated Gem – THE WILD AND THE INNOCENT

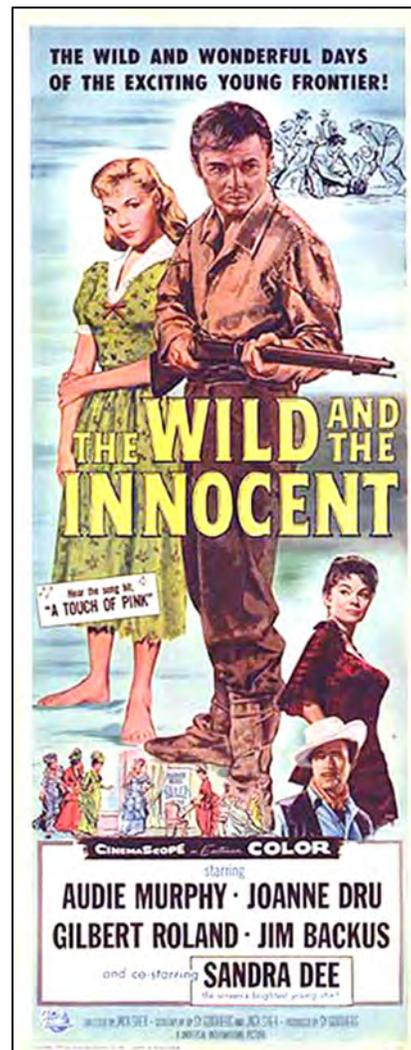
By Richard Rodgers

Comments? Comments are welcome. Just use the link below to our message board .
<https://www.audiemurphy.com/msgb/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=4758>

CHARM AND HUMOR are aspects film goers may not associate with an Audie Murphy movie. This is understandable since Audie is primarily associated as a man carrying a gun – whether on actual World War II battlefields, in Hollywood westerns, war movies, or other cinematic or television dramas. Nevertheless, charm and humor are hallmarks in Audie Murphy’s film “THE WILD AND THE INNOCENT” (1959).¹

The movie was directed and written by Jack Sher. An experienced columnist, screen writer, director, producer, and lyricist Sher wrote for both the big screen and television. His credits include writing for one of the greatest western movies ever made – SHANE.^{2, 3}

In THE WILD AND THE INNOCENT, Sher wisely casts Audie Murphy with teenage actress Sandra Dee. The chemistry between the two is unmistakable. Audie’s laconic, shy boyish manner originating from his early



¹ The WILD AND THE INNOCENT can be viewed free without commercial interruption on the Internet at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ibP05c1yuDQ>

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_Sher

³ https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0792042/?ref=fn_al_nm_1

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



Sandra Dee in 1959. Born in 1942, Ms. Dee would sadly pass away in 2005 after a lifelong battle with anorexia nervosa and kidney disease.

Photo source: Wikipedia

impoverished years in northeast Texas was well suited for the innocent and vulnerable Ms. Dee who was only sixteen at the time of filming.

In the movie, Audie Murphy plays Yancy Hawkes, an inexperienced, young, accordion-playing mountain boy who must travel to the nearby Oglesby trading post on behalf of an injured uncle to sell a load of furs. Confident that he is up to the task, Yancy sets out with several pack mules laden with furs and a list of goods he is supposed to bring back.

Yancy arrives at the trading post but discovers it has been accidentally burned down by intoxicated Indians. The Indians were given “green whiskey” by a weaselly, Kentucky drifter, failed business owner, and moonshiner named Ben Stocker – brilliantly played by Strother Martin. Stocker is on his way to Oregon with a wife and six ragamuffin children to open a store – or so he says.

In a hilarious scene, the unscrupulous Stocker shrewdly sizes up Yancy when they meet. Stocker attempts to trade his wild-haired, unkempt daughter, Rosalie – played by Sandra Dee – to Yancy for half of his cargo of beaver pelts. The dialog between the two is noteworthy.

Stocker [calling to his daughter]:
Rosalie! Rosalie!

Stocker [introducing Rosalie to Yancy]: My Rosalie. I hate giving her up but for – say, half them furs – you’ve got yourself a fine wife!

Yancy: *A wife?!*

Stocker: Sure thing. She can cook, she can sew, she can even plow. And uh, she’s perty – cleaner.

Stocker [annoyed, pulls Rosalie by the arm]: Well, come closer so he can see ya!

Stocker [turns to Yancy and snickers] See? She don’t talk



Dealin' and dickerin'. Ben Stocker, played by Strother Martin, attempts to trade his daughter Rosalie for beaver pelts to a surprised Yancy Hawks who wants nothing to do with the deal.

much – eat much either. Huh?
What do you say? Deal?

Yancy: People can't get married like this!

Stocker: Why not?

Yancy: Well - they've got to love each other – that's why!

Stocker [laughing]: *Love?!* That's a good one. Now who told you that mush?

Yancy: Never you mind!

Stocker [still laughing]: Well, believe you me – it's a lot of hog wash!

Yancy [pushing Stocker]: Get away from me!

Stocker [apologetically while backing off]: Now, hold on. Hold on. Uh, maybe I's wrong. Maybe half of them furs is too much fer her. I'm willin' to dicker!

With disgust, Yancy shows no interest and sends Stocker packing.

Unfortunately, with the trading post burned down, Yancy is now forced to



Devastated. Rosalie is stunned as she listens to her father trying to trade her to a stranger for a pile of beaver pelts.

Photo source: screen capture.

extend his journey by an extra week. Having never visited a town before, he pushes forward toward Casper where he has been told he can trade his furs at the general store located there.

In the meantime, Rosalie runs away from her family – knowing her father is now willing to trade her off to any stranger he can profit. She backtracks at night to a sleeping Yancy who she hopes will help. When Yancy wakes up at his camp in the morning he is startled to discover Rosalie trying to be useful by starting a fire and making him breakfast.

Not accustomed to being near young girls Yancy is distressed and demands that Rosalie explain herself. With a lot of stammering, Rosalie manages to finally ask Yancy if he will let her ride along to Casper where she can find a job and earn her own keep.

Yancy firmly refuses while Rosalie – with large sad tear-filled brown eyes – stays quiet. Even still, Rosalie’s troubled and innocent stare seem to unsettle Yancy. He struggles to find an adequate reason not to take her to Casper.

Yancy: Stop looking at me like that. I said stop it! Look – I can’t take you. I never took a girl anywhere before. What’d I do with you? And another thing – you’re awful dirty!

Rosalie: We had soap, but the baby ate it!

Yancy: I don’t care what the baby did! I’ve got to go to Casper and be back in a week and – I told you to stop staring at me like that. Don’t just stand there. If you’re gonna cook breakfast before we go, then go ahead and cook it!

Soon the two start their journey to Casper together. On the night before arriving at Casper, A more relaxed Yancy, while playing his accordion, unknowingly enchants Rosalie as she quietly cooks. As the last note of his accordion fades out she says ...

Rosalie: That’s prettier than anything I’ve ever heard. Where’d you learn it?

Yancy: Uncle Lije⁴. We play it most every night.

⁴ A shortened form of Elijah.



Mesmerized. In this movie lobby card, Rosalie, shortly after finding Yancy on the trail, is captivated by his music and the discovery that he can read.

Rosalie: Oh, that must be wonderful. We never had no music at all.

Yancy: Not even singing?

Rosalie: No. Pa don't hold much for singing 'cept when he runs across a prayer meeting maybe... [she sighs] but I could listen to it all the time. I don't know why.

Yancy: Music's wine for the thirsty soul.

Yancy [pauses and shyly looks away from Rosalie]: I read that in a book once.

Rosalie [moves closer to Yancy asking incredulously]: You – you *can read too*?

Yancy [thoughtfully]: Some. I read the bible. Pilgrim's Progress and Ivanhoe twice. There's beautiful things in books.

Rosalie [closes her eyes]: Oh, I wish I could read!

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



An eager reading student? Rosalie learns that Yancy is literate and that she doesn't care how long it will take for him to teach her to read. *Photo source: screen capture.*

Yancy: Maybe you can learn someday.

Rosalie: Oh, I'd like to – mightily!

Yancy: It aint easy. Uncle Lije taught me my letters from printing on snuff cans.

Rosalie: Could *you* teach somebody to?

Yancy: I guess so if there's enough time.

Rosalie: Oh, *I wouldn't care how long it takes Yancy!*

Realizing the unexpected direction their discussion is taking, Yancy abruptly ends

the conversation. Even still Yancy is kindhearted and is becoming more comfortable being with Rosalie. The two are developing a friendship.

Yancy and Rosalie arrive the next day amazed at the wild and bustling western town of Casper on the eve of a raucous 4th of July celebration. Neither have the maturity or experience needed to recognize or deal with the public laughter directed at them – or the dangers that await.

Yancy and Rosalie are quickly targeted by the locals and manage to survive a fight with bullying cowboys. Rosalie also catches the lecherous eye of the town boss and saloon owner – who happens to be Sheriff Paul Bartell. Sheriff Bartell seems nice enough, but Rosalie's



Can you help me? Rosalie seeks Yancy's help lacing up a corset. Neither Rosalie or Yancy know what the purpose of the garment.

demeanor suggests she may be suspicious of the lawman.

After selling his pelts at the general store and buying the requisite supplies listed by his uncle Yancy purchases a nice suit from St. Louis for himself and – on a whim – a pretty dress for a pleased Rosalie but, as he quickly explains, only to help her find a job. Back at the hotel, both Yancy and Rosalie struggle to put on their fancy clothes which neither have any experience wearing. In a memorable scene, Rosalie walks into Yancy's hotel room where Yancy is standing in front of a mirror trying to decide if he looks good

in his worsted suit, shiny shoes, and derby hat. Surprised, Rosalie exclaims ...

Rosalie: Oh Yancy!

Yancy [expecting criticism]: All right. Go ahead and say it.

Rosalie: *You look beautiful!*

Yancy [surprised]: Beautiful?

Rosalie: Oh, yes!

Yancy [pleased]: Do you think so?

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

Rosalie: Oh, I do indeed! Why, I aint ever seen anybody that looks the way you do!

Yancy [approvingly to his image in the mirror]: Yeah. Why, I guess I don't look so bad at that!

[Yancy turns away from the mirror and sees Rosalie struggling with the lacing of her own clothing.]

Rosalie: Can - can you help me? I can't tie this.

Yancy [pulling some strings]: What is this thing?

Rosalie: Well, Mrs. Forbes calls it a corset.

Yancy: What's it fer?

Rosalie: Well she said its to hold you up.

Yancy: Hold ya up where?

Rosalie: I don't know – she didn't say.

[Rosalie exits the room]

Yancy [to himself]: Women sure dress foolish.

[Rosalie soon returns in a well-fitting yellow dress. Yancy is astonished.]

Yancy: What did you do?!

Rosalie: Do?

Yancy: Yeah! You're – you're – *so clean!*

Rosalie [lowering her head but smiling]: Do you like my dress?

Yancy: Yeah! You look pretty.

Rosalie [happily]: *You mean it?*

Yancy: One thing, though.

Rosalie: What?

Yancy: You ought to take that corset off. It sure makes you bulge in places.

Oblivious to Rosalie's growing affection toward him, more mayhem quickly ensues when Yancy becomes infatuated with a well-dressed but older woman.

Yancy intends to ask a dance hall lady to go with him to the 4th of July Celebration. He tells Rosalie he doesn't want her "tagging along." Yancy fails to recognize the disappointment that registers on her face but magnanimously gives her five shiny silver dollars and tells her to spend them anyway she wants during the festivities. The coins do not cheer Rosalie.

About this time, there is a knock on the hotel door and Yancy invites into the room a well-dressed, buxom woman



Sizing Rosalie Up. Ma Ransome, played by Wesley Marie Tackitt, sizes Rosalie up and decides to hire her for dancehall work.
Photo source: screen capture.

claiming she heard Rosalie was looking for work.

Without understanding the repercussions, Yancy unwittingly introduces Rosalie to the town madam – Ma Ransome – who secretly has come at the directions of the saloon owner – Sheriff Bartell. Rosalie remains quiet while Yancy explains her domestic talents which include cooking and cleaning – duties Ma Ransome states Rosalie will not need to perform.

Ma Ransome hires the silent Rosalie on the spot after one quick look. Yancy, satisfied that his referral has done some good, departs to find the other saloon girl. Yancy fails to recognize that his own behavior is not too terribly unlike Rosalie's father's – although Yancy's motives are different. A reluctant and depressed Rosalie is led away by Ma Ransome.

Despite Yancy's failure to see the danger he places Rosalie in, Yancy has a redeeming quality: he is a man of his

word and is determined to keep his promise to Rosalie. He will not leave her until he sees she is in a stable situation and capable of taking care of herself. Unfortunately – not knowing the specific details of the dancehall industry – Yancy is satisfied that Rosalie is now gainfully employed and has good prospects and a bright future.

It does not take long for Yancy and Rosalie to discover that city folk dressed in fancy clothes, jewelry, or wearing a sheriff's badge are not always what they appear to be. They learn that sometimes would-be benefactors have evil intentions and are prepared to exploit others. Before the night is out this reality becomes apparent. After a series of disappointments and violent encounters during the evening's celebration Yancy



Gainfully employed. A miserable Rosalie begins working at the local dance hall dressed up in fancy clothing and jewelry provided by the sheriff.



Lecherous eyes on the prize. Sheriff Paul Bartrell, played by Gilbert Roland, sips his whiskey as he watches Rosalie get fitted for her dancehall dress.

Photo source: screen capture.

finally wises up. To his shock, he learns the truth about the life he has committed Rosalie to. Without hesitation he goes to the dancehall to rescue her just as she falls into the clutches of the ogling sheriff – who is actively trying to wine and dine her into submission.

At the film's conclusion, all things work out for the better, villains are vanquished, and Yancy sets things right and keeps his promise to Rosalie.

In just a few days Yancy and Rosalie have learned much about themselves and the world. Yancy atones for his earlier mistake by helping Rosalie find reputable employment as a clerk with the Casper general store owners, Mr. Forbes and his wife. On the other hand, Yancy still fails to openly acknowledge the strong feelings Rosalie has developed for him – and that he may have for her.



New employment. Mr. and Mrs. Forbes, played by Jim Backus and Betty Harford, owners of the general store, provide a reputable source of employment to Rosalie at the end of the movie.

Photo source: screen capture.

In an emotional farewell outside the general store, Yancy tries to say his goodbyes to a silent Rosalie while tears brim in her eyes.

Yancy: You better get on back inside. They'd be needing you.

[Rosalie remains silent – her eyes pleading.]

Yancy: Mrs. Forbes said she'd teach you how to read and write and maybe you can even write me a letter. All right?

[Still silent, Rosalie is on the verge of crying.]



Broken hearted and miserable. Rosalie tearfully watches Yancy as he tells her goodbye. This scene has elements similar to the conclusion of SHANE and is emotionally powerful.

Photo source: screen capture.

Yancy: Now you stop that! No need for you to be bawling – none at all.

[Heartbroken, Rosalie remains silent and only stares at Yancy.]

Yancy: And don't you look at me that way! I got a long ways to go to get home and I don't have nothing on my mind except getting there. Didn't you hear what I said? Just stop looking at me like that!

[Rosalie tries to blink back her tears but one escapes and rolls silently down her cheek.]

As the scene closes, the audience feels as devastated as Rosalie. Only one more brief scene remains before the film concludes and things do not look good.

Without completely revealing what happens, THE WILD AND THE INNOCENT concludes in a manner fitting to the finale of SHANE where the young Brandon De Wilde – who absolutely worships the heroic figure Shane – watches the hero depart. The youngster calls to him over and over as Shane rides off into the distance never looking back. In Rosalie's case, it is her eyes that does the calling.



Jack Sher gets dunked. In a light-hearted moment between scenes, director/writer Jack Sher is the victim of Audie Murphy's practical joke. The director is lifted and placed into a bathtub of water during the filming of one of the movie's scenes.

Photo from the collection of Darlene Gorcyca.

There is no doubt that the level of emotion in the ending of the two films are worth comparing and it is no accident the same writer helped create both scripts. But there are significant differences too and writer/Director Sher includes one extra unexpected twist to *THE WILD AND THE INNOCENT*. When he does, even a family of humorous skunks are satisfied with the finish.

In summary, the movie is well made and has never received the full credit it

deserves. Billed as a low-budget film, *THE WILD AND THE INNOCENT* never fails to keep the audience's interest. Anyone watching will likely become emotionally invested in the growing relationship between the naïve, honorably intentioned Yancy and the innocence and vulnerability of Rosalie. Jack Sher does well by casting the two together. While the storyline may have some limitations and could have been better developed in places, the light-hearted nature of the script, its great

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

theme song “A Touch of Pink”⁵ and the endearing performances of the thirty-three-year-old Audie Murphy and the sixteen-year-old Sandra Dee – deftly and competently managed by Director Sher – are more than enough reason to watch this movie again and again.

- *Richard Rodgers*

⁵ The original lyrics of this song were written Jerry Wallace, one of Audie’s good friends. The two often collaborated when writing songs. To hear Wallace’s recorded version of “A Touch of Pink”, follow this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_z_U9gbf3k

Stamping out the Red Tape

By Richard Rodgers

(My personal account on how Audie got his stamp).

Comments? Comments are welcome. Just use the link below to our message board.
<https://www.audiemurphy.com/msgb/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=4757>



Audie L. Murphy website graphic.

Created by Richard Rodgers based on an early 20th century USPS stamp design.

IN THE EARLY 1970's I became an avid stamp collector, a passion which I have since not been able to completely break free of – or want to. While I no longer spend money on stamps, you can see my passion for them at the bottom of every page of the Audie L. Murphy Memorial Website. I will make it easy on you – you can see it here too.

I was drawn to the artwork (pun intended) of old-fashioned stamps because of the engraving process. The

yester-year intaglio engraved images found on old-timey single or dual-colored stamps were inspiring and gorgeous. The wavy lines of raised ink on high quality paper and the stories they represented never failed to amaze me. They were things of beauty designed to provoke interest.

One evening, as a 10th grader in 1972, I watched Audie Murphy's movie TO HELL AND BACK for the first time on television. I was stunned. I lived on a naval air base in Millington, Tennessee with my father who was an active duty hospital corpsman and a non-commissioned officer. He was himself a decorated war hero¹ from World War II, the Korean, and the Vietnam wars. Dad spotted me watching the movie and said matter-of-factly that Audie came from the same part of northeast Texas as our own family did and that we were practically neighbors too. Audie was born about thirty miles southwest of my hometown. Boy did that get my attention. Afterall, there

¹ My father, Joe N. Rodgers earned the Distinguished Navy Flying Cross, personally awarded by the Secretary of the Navy, Dan A. Kimball, as a Hospital Corpsman attached to the 1st Marine Corps Air Wing during the Battle of the Chosun Reservoir, 4 to 6 December 1950.

are parts of Texas where you might have to travel farther just to get a loaf of bread. I was instantly hooked and could not get enough of my new hero. We shared a connection.

Not long afterwards, after doing a little research in the Millington Central High School library, I mailed a handwritten letter to the U.S. Postmaster General, Elmer T. Klassen, and asked him to issue a stamp honoring Audie Murphy. I carefully laid out my reasons why the stamp was deserved and was certain Mr. Klassen would slap his head and say “DUH” for missing something that had to be obvious to everyone else (pardon the use of a modern teenager’s vernacular). I was certain Mr. Klassen would quickly agree that Audie would make a great subject for an upcoming stamp.

I could not have been more wrong.

Not long afterwards I received an uninspiring form letter from the US Postal Service (USPS) which politely stated that the USPS’s Citizen’s Stamp Advisory Committee – not the Postmaster General – decided which stamps would be approved and released. The letter explained the rigorous selection process used to choose future stamps – all of which was based on fair-minded and unbiased scrutiny. Proposed stamps were chosen according to specific

criteria which included historical significance, educational value, and other esoteric qualities deemed important to our country. Submissions were welcome – but please follow the guidelines.² Later, after becoming an adult, I learned that the selection process was not an entirely honest one and was tainted by the hope of profit – a factor never mentioned by the USPS in their correspondence. But in 1972, at the tender age of 15, I accepted what they had to say on face value and in doing so believed the message.

While I do not remember everything in that letter, I do recall that it described a bureaucratic process that in my mind amounted to an unsurpassable quagmire of red tape. It was clearly designed to discourage naïve Texas teenagers living on a military base in Tennessee. Disappointed, I concluded the USPS was uninterested.

In 1980, I began an active-duty enlisted career in the Army which later progressed to a commission as a young officer. Unfortunately, in 1993 my active duty ended unexpectedly when President Clinton reduced the military forces. It had nothing to do with performance. It had everything to do with beating swords into plowshares and balancing the federal budget. During this drawdown more than 100,000 active military service members lost their jobs. It was brutal

² Since my 1972 letter and after the Audie Murphy Stamp Petition drive (1995 – 1999) the rules governing the proposal of stamp topics have been adjusted by the USPS giving the agency more leeway in the selection process. Current procedures and selection criteria are available at <https://about.usps.com/who/csac/>

turn of events for many young soldiers hoping to make a career – and I was one of them.

Sixty days later – and suffering from a huge reduction in pay and benefits – I was teaching at Copperas Cove High School, Texas – just outside of Fort Hood. Another officer I had served with at Fort Hood had also been given his presidential pink slip and was teaching with me in the same school. It was a depressing time for both of us and misery loved company. We needed something to get our mind off our troubles. My friend found a small cheap piece of land with an old farmhouse and started to repair it on weekends. And me? Audie came to my rescue.

In 1996, I happened to read an article in the Dallas Morning News reporting a visit of Terry Murphy – Audie’s oldest son – and Larryann Willis to the Hunt County area in northeast Texas. They were conducting research and interviews for the recently established Audie Murphy Research Foundation. Although I did not have the opportunity to take off from work and meet them, the article provided an email address to the foundation and encouraged anyone interested in Audie Murphy to write. There were no catches to the invitation. The foundation just wanted people who were interested to contact them. Maybe you had a story to tell. Maybe you knew Audie. Maybe you wanted a free newsletter. These were all good reasons to write. After knocking aside my doubts I decided to do so and knew

what I could write about for an icebreaker.

I wrote the foundation a note stating that, in my opinion as a high school teacher and as a former active-duty soldier, a website devoted to Audie Murphy was needed. I pointed out that at that time there was nothing factual or reliable on Audie Murphy on the Internet. I then volunteered to create a website for the foundation. I omitted the part that I had never built a website and did not know how to do it.

To my shock and surprise, the foundation quickly replied and asked that I do so.

To help, Ms. Willis, the foundation’s executive director and attorney, mailed photos, articles, and other information – some of which had never been seen by the public. This became the core for the original website.

In a mild panic, I sent my wife and two small children to Six Flags Over Texas and to visit family in the Dallas area. In turn, I stayed home and spent the next three days studying up on the protocol and nuances governing the use of the “Hypertext Markup Language” (a.k.a. HTML) – the computer language of the infantile CompuServe, Netscape and Internet Explorer browsers.

At the end of my family’s 3-day trip to Dallas, they came back home with an assortment of souvenirs, photos, and stories. When it was my turn to share, I was able to show off a 17-page website. It was bright red in color with gold titles, black text, and lots of pictures. As luck

would have it, the family and foundation both expressed approval. They seemed genuinely impressed despite the bright red hue the computer screen cast on our living room's white walls. Secretly, I was worried that both parties were just being polite. Fortunately, the website would quickly improve. I started by changing its color scheme.

I was also concerned that more content was needed. I tried to think of ways to increase website interest and visitor traffic. This was when the idea of an Audie Murphy Commemorative Stamp resurfaced from my teenage past. I emailed Ms. Willis and proposed that an internet-based stamp petition be created.

In the foundation's reply, Ms. Willis encouraged me to pursue the idea and suggested I might want to contact two retired individuals from northeast Texas who had already begun a local brick-and-mortar petition effort for an Audie Murphy stamp. Maybe I could throw in with them or get some advice. I followed Larryann's suggestion.

As background, James and Diane Bates Thomason, were from Quinlan, Texas and were well-known to the Hunt County community. Their interest in an Audie Murphy Commemorative Stamp began in late 1995 after they read an article in the Greenville Herald Post titled "Murphy Should Be On A Stamp"³.

The article discussed newly approved and soon-to-be released 1996 stamps just

announced by the USPS. Ms. Ferguson noted that Audie Murphy – a local town hero – was not on the list and deserved his own stamp. The article concluded by printing the address of the Citizen's Stamp Advisory Committee. Ms. Ferguson encouraged local readers to rally and write the USPS for the purpose of requesting a stamp on Audie's behalf.

The article struck a nerve with the elderly James and Diane. Both were physically challenged. Despite their age and limitations, they decided to act. In no time, they were spearheading a grassroots effort to secure a stamp. With the energy and drive of a pair of marathon runners, James and Diane were frequently seen in front of a Walmart, a Piggly Wiggly or any other agreeable business armed with their homegrown petition, a few pens, and a folding card-table. No shopper who strolled into their line of sight managed to escape their attention. All were accosted and asked to support the Audie Murphy Stamp petition.

James happened to also be the commander of the local Veteran's for War (VFW) Post #17 in Greenville, Texas. With every opportunity, Diane and James mustered the VFW's enthusiastic help to increase the petition's visibility. Soon multiple tables manned by vets donned in threadbare, pin-bedecked caps started simultaneously populating the landscape of local retail

³ "Murphy Should Be On A Stamp" by Carol Ferguson; Greenville Herald Banner, November 13, 1995.
https://www.audiemurphy.com/newspaper/news055/ghb_13Nov95.pdf

parking lots and busy store fronts on weekends. Optimism was high and local support was strong.

Despite everyone's excellent "can-do" spirit 1995 was a slow year for the petition. Diane and James scraped together about seven thousand signatures. Being new to the activity and not knowing any better they were impressed by the volume of names collected. Hoping they were enough, the Thomasons boxed the petitions and sent them – certified mail of course – to the U.S. Postmaster General Marvin Runyon accompanied with a hopeful letter – probably not too unlike the letter I wrote in 1972.

To Diane's and James' dismay their petition – like mine – was flatly turned down. The USPS's reply stated that no more stamps would ever be approved or issued for Medal of Honor recipients. The letter reasoned that because a 20-cent "Medal of Honor" commemorative stamp had already been issued in 1983 for all Medal of Honor recipients, Audie had previously been honored. For this reason, the case was closed – end of discussion – no stamp for Audie – nada – get over it – not happening.

Or so thought Marvin Runyon and his committee of advisors.

Diane Thomason and James were unimpressed by the rejection's eloquence and its fancy letterhead stationary. The husband-wife team refused to quit. I can



1983 Medal of Honor stamp issued by the USPS which became part of the official argument that Audie Murphy had been honored with a commemorative stamp.

personally state for the record Diane was a real firecracker when someone made her mad – and Marvin Runyon made her mad. Really mad. *Nothing* was going to stop her from getting that stamp for Audie. To James great credit, he knew better than to discourage his wife. He later told me the secret to his marriage with Diane was not getting in her way and to do everything as a team. I believed him.

The fact is that Diane was a force to be reckoned with. In 1998, while getting petition materials made, Diane fell and broke her hip and from that point forward, required a walker to move around. Even still, there were no obstacles she could not overcome. Neither she or her husband would take "no" for an answer – and especially from Marvin Runyon.⁴

It was December of 1996 – or early 1997 that I wrote my first letter to Diane and

⁴ "Audie Murphy fan stamps out doubt in quest" by Bob St. John; Dallas Morning News, April 24, 1999. (See the entire newspaper clipping is included at the end of this article.)

James. After introducing myself and letting them know I was working with the foundation, I proposed to extend the petition beyond the local Hunt County community by promoting it globally.

The concept was simple. I suggested that Diane and James both continue their local efforts and remain the official voice for the petition. In turn, I would create a digitally based internet form that anyone could fill out and electronically submit when visiting the Audie L. Murphy Memorial Website from anywhere in the world. When a website petition was completed, it would automatically be forwarded to my email address. I would then print the form hard-copy and temporarily store it.

Later, when the printed stack of petitions appeared tall enough to my militarily calibrated eyeball, I would hand deliver them by loading them up in my 11-year-old Jeep Cherokee and transport them from Copperas Cove to Greenville – about a 150-mile trip. Diane and James could then consolidate them with theirs into a single package and forward them to the USPS as a unified effort.

In their response to me, Diane and James enthusiastically agreed to my idea and I was welcomed as a new member of the team. We exchanged email addresses and phone numbers. The petition drive had officially gone global.

As planned, I periodically met the Thomasons at the VFW post to deliver boxes of petitions. Everyone at the bar never failed to greet me warmly and drinks were always on the house. Not

wanting to be unsocial, I would always politely accept an unadulterated Dr. Pepper with a plastic straw – it was a long drive back home and I needed to be ready to teach the next day.

The electronic petition started to work wonders. The volume of support began to increase exponentially – especially after a newspaper caught wind of the expanded effort. They wrote an article. The story was picked up by other newspapers. Online news media began doing the same. This happened a lot in the early days of the Internet.

Even still, I thought we could do better. I suspected petitions alone were not going to be enough. After all, we were dealing with federal government officials. They were not always the brightest bulbs in the land. We needed some political clout.

An idea came to mind and the website petition form was soon augmented with a few new pages. They contained the email and standard mailing addresses of the U.S. President, every U.S. congressman, senator, and all state governors. In the early days of the Internet, bona fide political online contact information was not hard to reference – I found it on other websites. Politicians were not yet receiving enough email to be concerned about spam or crackpot messages.

So, with the magic of “copy/paste” macros embedded in my computer’s operating system and with the help of a keyboard, text-editing software, and my blossoming skills in the HTML language I quickly fashioned a new set of website pages designed to give the petition some

extra “umpf!” in Washington D.C. and in the fifty state capitols.

In early 1997 elected officials started receiving a steady barrage of petition requests emailed from constituents all over the country. Occasionally, someone from out of country would email them too for good measure – after all, Audie was an international treasure. To everyone’s delight, politicians and governors began to respond. The nature of the petition was one practically all political figures could agree with regardless of which side of the aisle they sat on. Audie Murphy was truly a bi-partisan matter.

The greatest congressional supporter of the proposed stamp was Congressman



Honorable Ralph M. Hall (1923 - 2019). Congressman Hall served from 1981 until 2013 as congressman to the 4th Congressional District, Texas. At the age of 91, he was the oldest person to have served in congress.

Ralph Hall from the 4th Congressional District in Texas with local headquarters in Greenville, Texas – part of Audie’s home “stamping ground”⁵. Congressman Hall immediately began applying pressure at the federal level on Marvin Runyon. In my view, Congressman Hall was unusually accessible. He was never hard to reach when we needed him. He personally answered mail we sent to his office and he personally spoke to Diane, James, and me on his visits to Greenville between 1996 and 1999 – especially during “Audie Murphy Day” events. Congressman Hall always brought everyone up to date with what he was doing for the stamp on these visits. It was a priority.

Meanwhile, Diane and James routinely boxed up the growing numbers of petitions and sent them to the USPS Citizen’s Stamp Advisory Committee with a polite but unequivocally written letter requesting approval of the stamp. All of this happened under the watchful eye of Congressman Hall who periodically weighed in with the USPS on the petition’s behalf.

By the end of 1998 – 3 long years after starting the petition - the replies from the USPS became more carefully worded. Diane, James, and I began to think that our efforts were gaining traction.

It was in 1996 that the USPS unwittingly committed its greatest blunder as it publicly announced that an agreement had been struck between the USPS,

⁵ An example of a clever and deliberately placed double entendre appropriate to the context of this article.

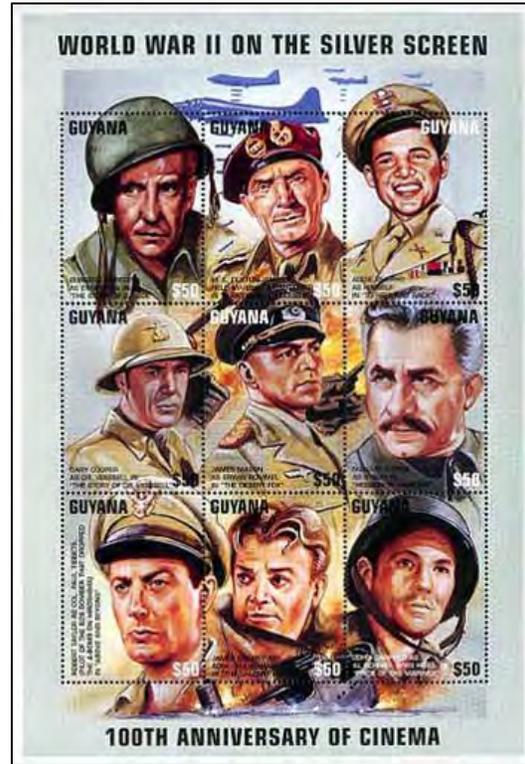


1997 Bugs Bunny Collectible Pane.

This collectible pane with a single stamp attached to the upper left corner became a source of criticism for the USPS with the large numbers of supporters of the Audie Murphy Stamp Petition.

Warner Brothers, and major retailers to issue commemorative Bugs Bunny stamps, key chains, stuffed animals, and other USPS sponsored Looney-Tune cartoon-based stamp memorabilia beginning in 1997. Daffy Duck, Elmer Fudd, and other characters were being planned for future releases too.

To the USPS's great surprise and dismay, an immediate backlash came from Audie's fans and interested political circles. Ironically, Marvin Runyon was



1997 Collector's Sheet from Guyana.

Issued one year after the USPS Bugs Bunny stamp was announced, Audie is on the top row. Did the Guyana recognize something that the USPS did not?

born in Fort Worth, Texas⁶ - just down the road from Greenville. Many felt he should have known better. Shame on him!

Newspaper articles were quick to pick up the story and the angle was always the same: Audie Murphy's stamp was disapproved but Bugs Bunny's stamp was not. What in the world was happening to America? Congressman Hall wasted no time jumping into the fray. He publicly threatened in Washington to launch a congressional investigation into the cozy relationship between USPS officials,

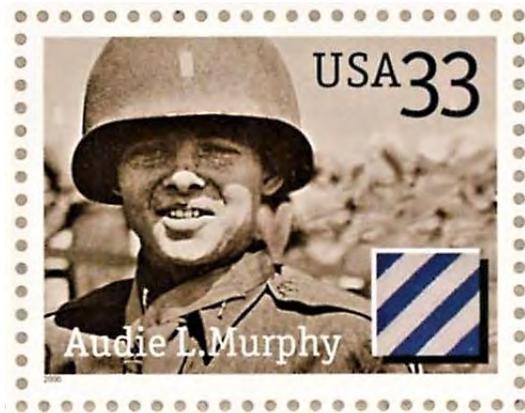
⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marvin_Travis_Runyon

Warner Brothers, and retailers. Other politicians began to sound out too.

The volume of support world-wide against Bugs and for the Audie stamp rapidly accelerated. More and more people signed the petition. Other countries sensed a marketing opportunity and issued their own Audie stamps. Figuratively, it seemed that the USPS had ripped the back of its britches wide open and the entire world was pointing at their embarrassment – an expression appropriate to northeast Texas and one that Diane and James Thomason would approve of today.

Was Marvin Runyon backed into a corner? Is it possible the USPS had miscalculated? Was the ever-financially-strapped USPS's hopes of a profit windfall threatening to become a major liability? Maybe the USPS should look for a way to control the damage.

Whispers of a possible stamp honoring Audie began to be heard by Diane, James, and myself. The letters of reply sent by the Citizen's Stamp Advisory Committee with the delivery of each box of petitions seemed to strike a more hopeful tone. We analyzed every word and read between each line. While the USPS was not explicitly committing to a stamp their replies were more thoughtfully crafted. They no longer rejected our proposal. They began inserting words to their messages that Audie Murphy was now being "considered for a future stamp".⁷



Diane, James, and I cautiously agreed that there appeared to be a thawing in the USPS's tone. Had their position changed? Maybe. Were we seeing the fabled "light at the end of the tunnel?" We hoped so. Encouraged, all efforts were redoubled. We push forward while the volume of support continued to grow on all levels.

Finally, in mid-1999 the USPS announced a new series of commemorative stamps for distinguished military service members. Accordingly, three distinct block sets with four different stamps in each were to be issued every several years. The first block was to be printed and sold in the year 2000. It would commemorate four distinguished U.S. Army soldiers. Included was Audie L. Murphy.

Several years later, a second set would be issued in the series to honor famous Marines. Later still, another set commemorating noteworthy members of the Navy was to be released.

⁷ "Audie Murphy fan stamps out doubt in quest" by Bob St. John; Dallas Morning News, April 24, 1999. (Article is found in its entirety on the last page of this story).



Dallas unveiling of Audie's Stamp. Left to right are Congressman Sam Johnson, Senator Phil Gramm, Nadine Murphy, Congressman Ralph Hall, Billie Murphy Tindol, Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnston, Diane Thomason, and USPS representative Carl January as the Audie Murphy commemorative stamp is unveiled in Dallas, Texas on October 24, 1999. *Photo by Richard Rodgers.*

On October 24, 1999, an unveiling took place in Dallas, Texas at the city's main post office. The USPS hosted the ceremony and flew representatives from Washington D.C. to the Lone Star State for the unveiling. Audie's two sisters, Beatrice "Billie" and Nadine were present along with the stamp petition organizers, James and Diane Thomason, and me. Distinguished guests, friends of the Audie Murphy family, and the local community were also invited. Remarks were given by Congressman Ralph Hall and Texas Senator Phil Gramm. As it turned out, I was the only person that had a camera – a Kodak digital pocket camera – so by default I became the official photographer.

Later, everyone agreed that the petition, which took much longer than we ever envisioned, was well-worth the effort. Collectively, 7,000 signatures were



Mission accomplished – objective achieved. A beaming Diane and James Thomason stand next to the unveiled stamp. *Photo by Richard Rodgers.*

gathered that first year. During the second year, the total increased to 20,000. By the end of third year – 40,000. At the time of the Dallas unveiling in the fall of 1999 over 105,000 signatures total had been collected. Fans and admirers of Audie from 25 countries participated. The Internet petition remained active until December 31, 1999 – a fitting conclusion to the millennium.

The stamp was finally released for sale at post offices across America on May 3, 2000.

So, what did it all mean?

On the surface, not too much when considering the problems of today. After all, who needs a stamp? Why not just send an email, tweet, or do a Zoom conference or a Facetime on social media? What's the big deal? Is a stamp really needed to honor Audie Murphy? Is his legacy damaged without a stamp? Probably not.

On the other hand, determination is not a characteristic reserved exclusively for heroes like Audie. Spunk, grit, and perseverance can be part of everybody's skill set. Even little old white-haired grandmothers shuffling along with a broken hip assisted by a devoted husband can possess these qualities. The herculean effort needed to acquire Audie's stamp brought this feature out in a lot of simple people. I hope you think so. I know I do.

On a broader scale, the petition had a positive impact far beyond what the petition organizers originally intended. In academic circles this is called "synergy". To be clear, the sum of our combined efforts far exceeded the expected outcome of the organizers had we acted alone.

Think of it. The public outcry became so widespread – particularly over the Bugs Bunny versus Audie Murphy public relations debacle – that the USPS could not afford any more negative press or political pressure. It wanted no more to do with angry old ladies hobbling about on walking devices, veterans wearing garrison caps decorated with tarnished military pins, schoolteachers holding open cans of Dr. Pepper impaled with a bent soda pop straw, or concerned voters contacting elected politicians. These folks were getting in the way of the USPS's plans to make badly needed money at a time when profit margins were razor thin. Worse, it was being written about in the newspapers while other countries were beginning to capitalize on an opportunity the USPS very nearly missed.



The truth of the matter is that simple every day citizens figured out a way to bend Washington bureaucrats to their will. There was no doubt that the outcome was much bigger than we ever intended. Yes – there was synergy.

Let us just say it: to everyone's great surprise not only was Audie commemorated, *eleven other courageous military heroes were also so honored*. Audie-petitioners had a direct hand in this unexpected bonanza. It was truly a bountiful harvest. You are welcome to disagree.

If you are unconvinced think of it from a different perspective. While Audie would probably not have liked the fuss about having his face being planted on a postage stamp, he would certainly approve that eleven other military heroes were. He would also appreciate how petitioners locked arms to achieve this outcome.

Are you still not satisfied? Then ask yourself this question. If Audie needed a stamp would he reach for Bugs or would he plunk down 33 cents for a first-class Sergeant York? I think he would go for Sergeant York. I will go out even further on the proverbial limb and hypothesize that Audie would have passed out a petition or two to help us get the Sergeant York, Chesty Puller, Doris Miller, and any of the other stamps too.

And what about Bugs Bunny? Let us not forget him. There are lessons aplenty here too.

As it turns out, Bugs got his stamp – and then some. In 1997, Bugs received his first – one of many which would later follow. In his most recent batch, ten different Bugs images on a single sheet of twenty stamps were released in 2020. This may make him the most commemorated figure in USPS philatelic



history. And to be fair, Bugs is a very popular and widely collected stamp figure.

In the minds of the USPS is Bugs Bunny historically more significant than Audie and anyone else ever commemorated on a stamp? Let us hope not. Maybe Bugs is just more recognizable because we grew up watching cartoons every Saturday morning long before we were old enough to appreciate the significance and complexities of Audie Murphy. Bugs Bunny can have a place in our hearts too.

Admit it: Bugs helped teach us all – including the bureaucrats at the USPS – a valuable lesson in civic duty. Sometimes the common citizen needs to be reminded

that it is their responsibility to tell the government who works for who.

It seems we still need a lot of that even today.

Look a little closer. If you have not already examined Bug's set of 2020 stamps you should now. The last stamp in the series of ten depicts Bugs Bunny in a World War II Army uniform with the rank of a staff sergeant – Audie's highest enlisted rank.



Could this be a symbolic nod of respect and an olive branch extended toward Audie and all other service members past and present? Is the USPS and Warner Brothers tipping their hat in our direction acknowledging a nearly 5-yearlong battle once waged with Audie fans about the importance of a stamp selected by actual citizens? Maybe Staff Sergeant Bugs Bunny is meant to suggest an apology or truce for a poorly handled set of events leading up to the final approval of the Distinguished Military Service Member series of commemorative stamps. I will leave it to you to decide.

- *Richard Rodgers*

The Dallas Morning News

Saturday, April 24, 1999

Audie Murphy fan stamps out doubt in quest



BOB ST. JOHN

OUR TEXAS

GREENVILLE — With her head held high, Diane Bates Thomason, limping slightly, walked through the door of American Legion Post No. 17 as if she were a person with a purpose.

Indeed she was.

The spunky, white-haired woman has been undaunted by long hours of work, bureaucracy and a broken hip in her relentless quest to get a commemorative stamp honoring Audie Murphy.

She came fully armed to our meeting at the local post of the American Legion, an organization which strongly supports her campaign. She brought Audie Murphy T-shirts and stamps, which she had made and hopes people supporting her effort will place beside official stamps on their mail. She also had a huge portfolio of information about the Hunt County native, who became our most honored World War II hero. He later was in numerous movies, starring in a film based on his biography, *To Hell and Back*.

"I used to jitterbug, polka and dance up a storm," Diane said as we sat at a table near the legion's empty dance floor. "But I've slowed down after breaking my hip. For now."

Down but not out

She fell while entering a store to have copies made of Audie Murphy material.



Audie Murphy



Diane Bates Thomason

TEXAS & SOUTHWEST

Woman continues quest for Audie Murphy stamp

The accident occurred last year before the annual Audie Murphy Day celebration on May 23. It was on that day in 1971 that Audie, 46, was killed in a plane crash. Diane said to heck with pain that the hip caused because "the thing that hurt most was my broken heart because it caused me to miss that celebration and this year's too."

Nothing has kept her from collecting and sending signed petitions to the U.S. Postal Service in Washington, D.C., asking that the stamp be made. She also has sent numerous registered letters to Postmaster General William Henderson, his predecessor Marvin Runyan and other postal officials. They haven't replied, but she said, "They know I'm here."

So far, she has mailed 72,297 signed petitions and has gotten the interest of Gov. George W. Bush and members of Congress. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison and Rep. Ralph Hall have even written to postal authorities on her behalf.

Furthermore, members of the media have joined her fight. When Richard Rodgers, a teacher from Copperas Cove, learned about her effort, he started a Web site (www.audiemurphy.com). Now, New Yorkers and Californians have begun collecting signatures on petitions, and supporters have been heard from 18 countries, including Canada, Great Britain, Italy, Spain, France, Germany and Japan.

Husband helps effort

"Just get me started, and I'm a fighter!" said Diane. "I am surprised how well this has gone. It makes me proud. I'm not looking for fame or glory but just trying to get something done that should already have been done."

"Let's face it. We've got commemorative stamps for everybody from Marilyn Monroe to Mickey Mouse and not for Audie Murphy. I don't intend to stop trying until we do."

Diane said her husband, James, a for-

mer commander of the local Legion post, helps out and always picks her up when she's down. She laments that the only information she's gotten is that an Audie Murphy stamp is being considered by the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee, which makes recommendations for future stamps. U.S. Postal Service spokesman Don Smeraldi would only confirm, "An Audie Murphy stamp has been taken under future consideration by the committee."

Diane helps with costs of the campaign, which she otherwise pays for, by selling Audie Murphy T-shirts and stamps. She conducts business out of her home in the nearby community of Cash. However, her address and phone number are listed in Quinlan, which has the nearest post office (903-883-2211, 1378 Deer Lane, Quinlan, TX, 75474).

I would imagine there are people in Washington wondering who this persistent woman is. "Just describe me as being old enough to have learned most things about life and young enough to still enjoy it," said Diane, who grew up in South Dakota as the eldest of eight siblings. "I tell my brothers and sisters that, as the first born, I'm the love child and that they're all accidents."

Diane was a military wife who lived in Hawaii and later San Antonio for some 40 years. Her first husband, Ted Bates, was an Air Force pilot who was killed in 1968, leaving her with three teenage sons to raise. One son died four years ago.

But she's a determined, resilient person. She has authored a book about spices and herbs, *Spicy Talk*, and has had several successful business ventures. In the mid-1960s, Diane and her sons, spotted by a film crew while they were at poolside in a Corpus Christi hotel, did national commercials for Post Bran Flakes.

She met James, from this area, and they married in 1991. At first some local residents mistook Diane for then-Gov. Ann Richards. They know who she is now. The idea for her campaign began on a November day in 1995 when she read an editorial in the *Greenville Herald Banner*, which questioned why there wasn't an Audie Murphy commemorative stamp. Diane became very upset, and the more she learned about him the more she became determined to try to correct the obvious oversight.

"One of these days I'll hit the right nerve of the right person and it'll be done," she added.

Then with her head held high, limping slightly, she walked away as if she expected to find that right person around the next corner.

Introduction to “The Boy in the Snow” By Richard Rodgers

Comments? Comments are welcome. Just use the link below to our message board.
<https://www.audiemurphy.com/msgb/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=4753>

On that day, January 26, 1945 only five months remained until the surrender of German forces in World War II and the end of the war in Europe. There were many lives still to be lost.

On that day, 18 weary, cold, ill-equipped Americans with a teenaged commander spread themselves in hastily prepared defensive positions across a bitterly cold, snow and ice-covered woodline overlooking the town of Holtzwihr, France.

On that day, B Company 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment should have had 6 officers and 250 soldiers. The battalion should have had 4 rifle companies, a headquarters' company, and a total of about 780 soldiers. As it were, the combined strength of entire battalion was not even enough to field a single full-sized company.

On that day, with only two thinly armored, out-gunned M10 tank destroyers temporarily attached from a nearby unit and with a promise from the battalion commander that B Company would have priority of artillery fire support, the company commander led his men under the cover of morning darkness to the woodline hours before the Germans advanced.

On that day, Lieutenant Audie Murphy, who a few years earlier, had enlisted as a private at the age of 17, was now just 19,

and was the company commander. He and his men were to protect the woodline at all costs from German infantry and armored forces that occupied Holtzwihr. The strength of the enemy was estimated to be slightly less than a regiment in size. Failure to hold the woods would be catastrophic to the 3rd Infantry Division.

On that day, the entire German advance was miraculously stopped dead in its tracks with the lion share of the credit given to Lieutenant Murphy for a heroic one-man stand which later earned him the Medal of Honor. Afterwards, Audie expressed guilt about the award and continued doing so until his death in 1971. It was his view that the award had been earned by everyone – especially those that died on that day in the lonely frozen woods of Holtzwihr.

On this day, 76 years later, to those who would honor Audie Murphy, the Audie Murphy Research Foundation suggests that the best possible way to do so is to remember and credit the other soldiers who fought and perished on that now silent battlefield in Holtzwihr.

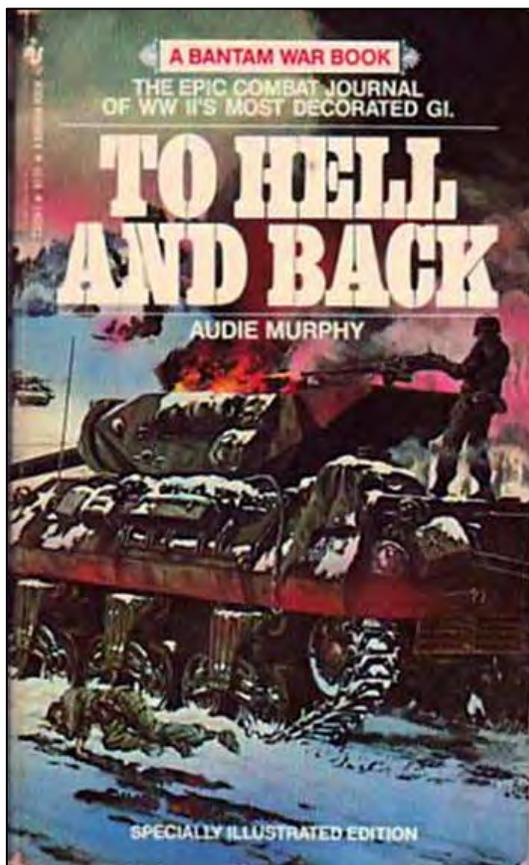
For this reason, the true story on the following pages is about one of those soldiers who – *until today* – has been all but forgotten. Read on faithful fans, read on ...

... Richard Rodgers

The Boy In The Snow

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=4753>



The Boy in the Snow is depicted in this 1983 illustration of Bantam War's published version of TO HELL AND BACK.

WE have all probably seen him. Likely, we paid him little attention. Book covers



After The Battle painting. A photo of a George Campbell painting depicting Audie Murphy and The Boy In The Snow. Created from all available information for accuracy the painting published by "After The Battle", issue 3, page 32.

See <https://www.afterthebattle.com> for more information.

for volumes of TO HELL AND BACK and illustrations in military magazines depicting Audie Murphy's famous stand on a burning M-10 tank destroyer defying a German counterattack are very familiar but lying near is the boy in the snow.

Our attention is understandably fixed on a solitary soldier standing on the

burning hulk of a tank destroyer – but what of the lifeless boy in the snow? Through an act of military necessity, certainly not one of callous indifference, he becomes simply an object who has been pushed aside “like a bag of wheat”¹ not even a footnote in the historical event taking place before us.

In terms of time, 76 years remove us from the boy’s death. In terms of distance, some 43 miles separate him from where he died to where he now rests. He was the only soldier of Company B, 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion to be killed in action during the month of January 1945 – perhaps the only one during the entire Rhineland Campaign.²

Today tourists visiting the site of Audie Murphy’s Medal of Honor action may very well stand where the boy in the snow once laid. Oblivious to the savagery of that day, visitors may in fact simply gaze at the monument depicting Murphy’s heroic stand and forget the carnage that lay about them. Men died here in this seemingly insignificant patch of timber. What on earth made it so important?

This “H-shaped” patch of woods located about a half mile north of



The “H-patch Woods North of Holtzwihr. This photo is believed to be a US Army Air Corps military surveillance photo. The M10 tank destroyer occupied a position just on the edge of the wood line where an inside roadway enters the crossbar of the “H” on its left side.

Photo contributed by Patrick Baumann.

Holtzwihr, France was to become the jumping-off place for Allied elements in their effort to liberate the towns of Holtzwihr and its neighbor Wickerschwih. With the capture of

¹ David "Spec" McClure, Edited version of Audie Murphy's Handwritten account of the MOH action. Author's collection.

² Private emails between Mike West and Victor Failmezger, author of "American Knights, the untold story of the men of the Legendary 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion; Operations Report For the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion 1 Jan-31 Jan 1945: Casualties Incurred. Author's collection.

these two towns, American and French forces would go on to take Colmar, France. For you see, this small patch of woods, known as the “Woods of Riedwihr”³, had become essential in determining who would control access to Holtzwihr and ultimately the Colmar Pocket. In the words of Lt. Col. Keith Ware,

“During the offensive which smashed the COLMAR Bridgehead and drove the German forces from their last foothold on French soil, Company “B”, Fifteenth Infantry, moved into the BOIS DE RIEDWIHR. Control of this forest had been wrested from the enemy at a heavy cost in blood. Its possession was of cardinal importance as the woods dominated the German stronghold of Holtzwihr... Accordingly, on the afternoon of 26 January 1945, the enemy launched a determined counterattack, hurling two companies and six heavy tanks at Company “B”’s position in an effort to retake the woods at any cost.”⁴

The Colmar Pocket, covering an area approximately 45 miles long and 25 miles wide, was in fact a German salient or bulge extending west from the Rhine River and its presence was a great threat to Allied efforts to cross the Rhine and take the ground-war to Germany from the west.⁵

The Third Infantry Division, at that time located 38 miles northeast of Colmar in Strasbourg, France, moved south to attack the northwest shoulder of the Colmar Pocket in an effort to eliminate it. This effort would be called Operation Grandslam.⁶

The operation began the night of January 22-23, 1945 with elements of the 7th and 30th Regiments, 3rd Infantry Division crossing the Fecht and Ill Rivers supported by the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion. Units of the 30th Regiment assaulted the German held towns of Riedwihr and Holtzwihr located respectfully east and south of the Bois de Riedwihr. Unfortunately, the tank destroyers of the 601st had to support the attack while remaining on the west side of the Ill River. Located 5.5 miles northeast of Colmar the La Maison Rouge bridge over the Ill River collapsed under the weight of a

³ Untranslated, the name of the woods is “Bois de Riedwihr”.

⁴ Keith Ware, "Statement Regarding Audie Murphy's MOH Action of 1/26/45, National Archives; Author's collection.

⁵ Victor Failmezger, "American Knights, the untold story of the men of the Legendary 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion, Paperback; (Osprey Publishing, Oxford, UK, 2018) 288-289.

⁶ For more information on Operation Grandslam visit <https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/2016/10/19/saving-operation-grandslam/>



M10 “Wolverine” Tank Destroyer. U.S. Army photo of Soldiers of the 629th Tank Destroyer Battalion huddle to the side of an M10 on January 20, 1945 at Courtil, Belgium just 235 miles northwest from where the “Boy In The Snow” would lie six days later. Conditions in both locations were similar.

Source: <https://www.worldwarphotos.info>

Sherman tank thereby stranding men of the 30th on the east side of the river without direct armor support.⁷

Initial successes by elements of the 30th Infantry Regiment had GIs in the towns of Riedwihr and Holtzwihr,

France who held the Bois de Riedwihr. These early successes were soon blunted by strong German counterattacks composed of infantry and armor. Without direct US armor support, the 30th was hard hit suffering hundreds of casualties – it

⁷ Daniel R. Champagne, *Dogface Soldiers, The Story of B Company, 15th Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division, From Fedala To Salzburg: Audie Murphy and His Brothers in Arms*, (Merriam Press, Bennington, Vermont; 2005) 118-119; Don Taggart, "The History of the Third Division in World War II (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1947) 307-310.

was a near rout. Over the next two days the fighting around La Maison Rouge, which means “the Red House”, would prove to be more savage than that of Anzio in the words of some the veterans of that long battle.⁸

The 15th Infantry Regiment, held in reserve at Guemar, France just northwest of the fighting, was called in to help stabilize the situation and continue the attacks of the 30th Infantry in an effort to retake the Bois de Riedwihr and the towns of Riedwihr and Holtzwihr. Savage fighting raged in the woods and surrounding ice and snow-covered fields. The 1st and 2nd Battalions, 15th Infantry by the early morning hours of January 26, 1945 had driven the Germans out and back into Holtzwihr. The morning of the 26th found the 1st Battalion holding the west leg of the “H-shaped” woods while the 2nd Battalion held the east.⁹

A radically depleted 1st Battalion held the west leg and much of the “crossbar” of the H-shaped woods with three companies none of which had more than 22 men. Later, in the early morning hours, two of those companies, A and C, would be removed to the rear initially leaving only Company B composed of 18 men to

cover the line. The Ammunition and Pioneer platoon would be sent to support Company B on the left but it had few men.¹⁰

During the night of January 25-26, a section consisting of two M-10 tank destroyers (TDs), 2nd Platoon, Company B, 601st moved up to support Company B, 15th Infantry. The TDs parked on the road which passed through the west woods leading north from Holtzwihr to La Maison Rouge. One TD, commanded by S/Sgt. Joseph Tardif, was positioned just to the south of the woods while the other, commanded by Lt. Thomas P. Welch was located just inside the timberline. The crewmen of both units were probably asleep until later in the morning. Among the sleeping crewmen of the Welch TD, was the soldier who would become the boy in the snow.¹¹

How did he get here?

Like many of the American soldiers of World War II, this New York City boy – whose first name was Gil - was born in the early to mid-1920s. He was the oldest child with three siblings: two sisters and a brother. His mother worked as the superintendent of an

⁸ Allyn Vannoy, "Saving Operation Grandslam, Internet, Warfare History Network; Taggart, 307.

⁹ Taggart, 307-310.

¹⁰ Harold B. Simpson, "Audie Murphy: American Soldier", (Dallas: Alcor Publishing, 1982) 153-154. 15th Infantry Battle Report for 1/26/45. Author's collection.

¹¹ David "Spec" McClure, Letter to Albert L. Pyle, dated 10/21/1986. Author's collection. Private emails between Failmezger and West.



M10 in North Africa. An M10 Tank Destroyer moves toward the battle lines At Bir Marbott Pass East Of El Guettar in Tunisia, 1943.

Source: <https://www.worldwarphotos.info>

apartment house while his father was a doorman. Later, the father would become absent from the household and the mother would take on employment as a seamstress. In 1942 the boy in the snow became employed to help support the family. He and his high school buddy, Bill, both being 18 filled out their Selective Service forms on June 30, 1942. Since both volunteered in September 1942, they could choose their specialty in the service. They went armor.¹²

This decision sent the boys to Fort Knox, Kentucky - the school of armor. Both wanted to drive tanks. After

weeks of training and along the way having endured such things as inoculations, kitchen patrol (KP) duty, calisthenics, and barracks life, they were ready. In January 1943, Gil shipped out to North Africa while Bill remained behind. They would see one another again only once. Bill would become part of the 1st Armored Division and Gil, a crewman in a tank destroyer of the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion. Bill did succeed in driving tanks, but Gil initially became a loader in the 5-man crew of the M-10 Tank Destroyer. Along the way, he would learn the skills of the gunner.¹³

Gil would fight with the 601st in North Africa, Sicily, and Salerno where in December 1943 with 70 days of combat under his belt, Gil and his buddy, Bill met again for the last time. Bill would survive the war and become an attorney.¹⁴

The 601st was attached to the 3rd Infantry Division in Italy. It would for the most part remain in support of that division until the end of the war. The hard fighting at Anzio and the invasion of southern France would test the mettle of the 601st. It was at Anzio that Gil was first hospitalized but not from wounds. It appears he was never

¹² Federal Censuses: 1930: Manhattan, New York City, New York, Sheet No. 4A, 1940: Bronx, New York City, New York, Sheet No. 12B. Various Selective Service Cards: Bronx, New York City, New York, 1942.

¹³ Edwin P. Hoyt, "The GI's War: American Soldiers in Europe During World War II, (Da Capo Press, New York, 1988). 81. William Gordon "Bill" Haemmel's obituary; Ashville Citizen Times, Sun. Oct. 7, 2012.

¹⁴ Hoyt, 271-272.

wounded; instead, he had malaria from March 1944 until May 1944. In June after the breakout from Anzio in May 1944, Gil would have a relapse and be back in the hospital until the end of June.¹⁵

It appears that from June 1944 until January 1945, Gil served with honor and became the gunner of his tank destroyer. Along the way he received the Good Conduct Medal. There would be no time for the 3rd ID nor the 601st to rest. The 3rd, 36th, and 45th IDs would be training for the invasion of Southern France on August 15, 1944.¹⁶

The heavy fighting in France would eventually bring the 601st to Strasbourg, France just to the north of the Colmar Pocket. In late December 1944 the 601st would move to Ribeauville, France located northwest of Colmar to aid in the first phase of reducing the Colmar Pocket. Over the next few weeks the men of the 601st would be engaged in the fighting to reduce German control of the towns of Sigolsheim and Bennwihr, northwest of Colmar. With the capture of these towns, the 601st prepared for the final elimination of the "Pocket" by painting all tank destroyers white and issuing

"white jumpsuits known as spooksuits".¹⁷

The effort to eliminate the Colmar Pocket would place the 601st in the thick of battle and on the afternoon of January 26, 1945, Gil as the gunner of the soon-to-become famous TD would face an onslaught of German infantry and six tanks. Earlier in the morning, Audie Murphy fearing an attack, had awakened the sleeping lieutenant in command of the tank destroyer. Murphy suggested he move his TD off the road and into the woods for better cover. Fearing the TD would get stuck, the lieutenant declined to do so.¹⁸

Shortly after 2:30 in the afternoon, six German tanks and hundreds of white-clad infantry swarmed out of Holtzwihr moving north toward the Bois de Riedwihr in an effort to recapture the woods while driving into the rear of two American battalions with the intent to destroy them as combat units and place the entire 3rd ID in great peril. Nothing stood between them and total success but a depleted infantry company, 3 Forward Artillery observers and two tank destroyers.¹⁹

German artillery opened fire on the American line in the forward edge of

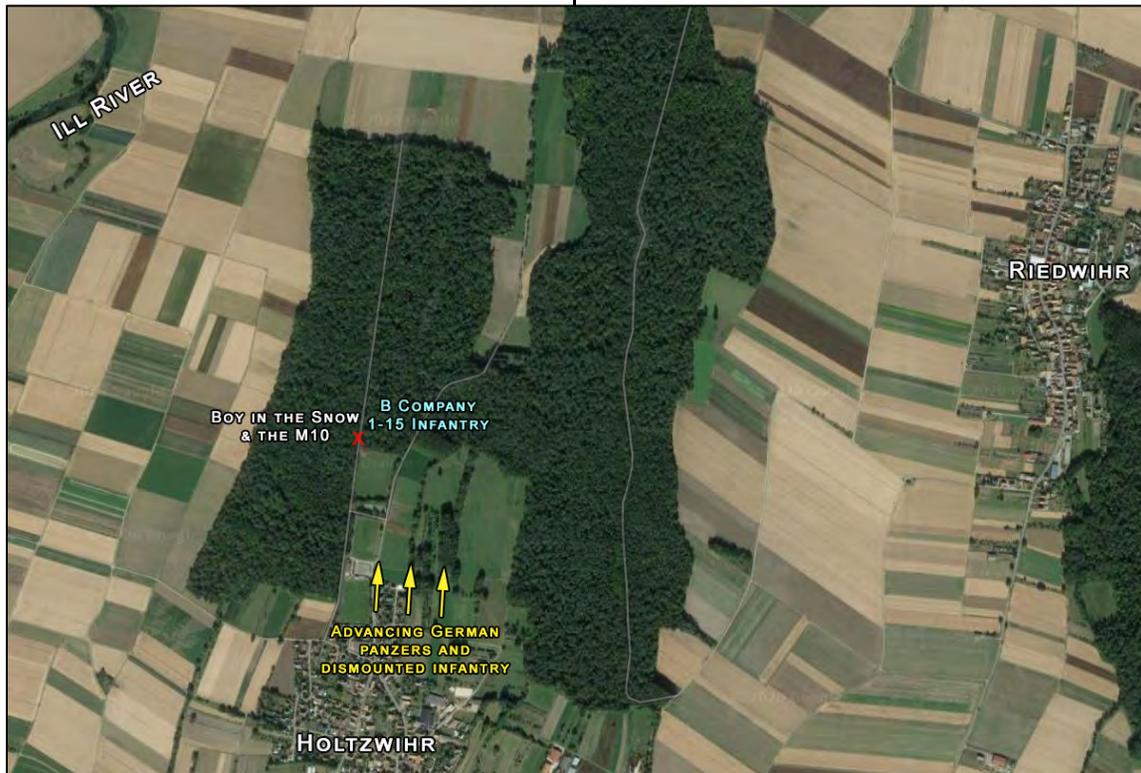
¹⁵ Taggart, 566; Ancestry.com, "U.S., World War II Hospital Admission Card Files, 1942-1954.

¹⁶ Private emails between Failmezger and West.

¹⁷ Failmezger, 295-296; 304.

¹⁸ Failmezger, 316-317; Audie Murphy, "To Hell and Back" (USA, Owl Books, 2002) 237-238.

¹⁹ Murphy, 238-239.



X marks the spot. A map showing the approximate tactical positions of Company B, 1-15 Infantry, and one of two attached tank destroyers on January 26, 1945 as German forces advanced in attack formation. The red “x” is the approximate location of the M10 with the “Boy In The Snow”.

Google Map source: <https://goo.gl/maps/pvbSGnykse9ivy4F7>

the woods. For 10 minutes, the artillery pounded the area killing soldiers, knocking out machine-guns, and creating havoc, while the German tanks began to creep forward.²⁰

As the German armor moved closer, the commander of the TD in the woods ordered the gunner to fire on the approaching tanks. Gil fired making a

direct hit and knocking out one of the German tanks.²¹

At almost the same moment, the German tanks armed with 88mm guns fired and knocked out Gil’s TD setting it on fire. All other crewmen escaped to safety. Gil, though fatally wounded, attempted to lift himself out but

²⁰ Eyewitness Accounts to MOH Action of 1/26/45. Author's collection.

²¹ David "Spec" McClure, Letter to Irving Kelley dated 10/13/1982; 15th Infantry Battle Report, 1/26/45. Author's collection.



Location of M10 and “The Boy In The Snow”. Taken in the early 1970’s this image shows where the M10 stood in 1945. In the background stands the village of Holtzwihr. To the left is the tree where the machinegun crew was killed by a German artillery tree burst. To the right is the ditch where the Germans were shot as they crept toward Audie Murphy.

Source: This photo given by [After The Battle](#) magazine to Audie Murphy’s publicist, David “Spec” McClure, who later forwarded it to Lillian Bailey who included it in her collection.

collapsed on the edge of the turret where he died.²²

The remaining tank destroyer, closer to the German attack, attempted to maneuver for a better firing position but with the road covered in ice and snow, the driver lost control and slid

into a drainage ditch next to the road. In this position, the guns were at a useless angle. The crew was forced to abandon the tank destroyer.²³

Murphy, realizing the hopelessness of the situation, ordered all the remaining soldiers to retreat. Continuing to call down artillery fire on the attacking Germans, Audie turned to leave when he saw the .50-cal. machine-gun on top of the burning tank destroyer. Climbing on top, he attempted to traverse the machinegun so as to bring it to bear on the enemy, but the body of the dead gunner prevented the weapon’s proper use. Realizing the danger, Murphy pulled Gil’s body out and let the lifeless soldier fall to the ground. He would not remain there long.²⁴

As Murphy raked the oncoming infantry, two of Gil’s fellow crewmen rushed back under fire to drag him to safety thinking he was still alive. Upon discovering he was dead they dropped him yet again in the snow.²⁵

A second effort would be made this time by one of forward artillery observers who - while under intense fire - grabbed the boy in the snow and attempted to drag him to safety. He too,

²² McClure, Letter to Kelley dated 10/13/1982; Letter to Albert L. Pyle dated 10/21/1985. Author’s collection.

²³ Simpson, 157; Murphy, 239.

²⁴ Murphy, 239-241.

²⁵ McClure, Letter to Pyle dated 10/21/1985.

upon learning that the boy was dead, left him once again in the snow.²⁶

After an hour of intense fighting, the Germans were forced back into Holtzwihr and the original American lines were reestablished and held through the night. The next afternoon, US forces attacked through the Bois de Riedwihr and captured Holtzwihr. In early February, with the capture of the city of Neuf-Brisach, the Colmar Pocket would finally be eliminated.²⁷

Audie Murphy on top of a burning tank destroyer calling down artillery fire and using a .50-cal. machinegun broke the back of a fierce and determined German assault. While all true have we forgotten the boy in the snow?

It may have slipped by unnoticed by the reader with all the mayhem going on at the time. Did we forget the sequence of events? We may want to read the account again. If we follow what Murphy said in "To Hell and Back", the boy in the snow may very well have fired the first shot in defiance of the German counterattack – and not Murphy.

The boy in the snow – just who was he?" Let us journey some 43 miles to a place west of that patch of woods. The place is called the Epinal American Cemetery

and Memorial, Epinal, Departement des Vosges, Lorraine, France. In Plot B Row 14 Grave 41, you will find the final resting place of Tec5 Gilbert J. Van Elk, the boy in the snow.²⁸



The Boy In The Snow. The final resting place of Tec5 Gilbert J. Van Elk. Killed in action on January 26, 1945 in Holtzwihr, France while serving honorably as a gunner on an M10 Tank destroyer while in support of Company B, 1-15 Infantry and Audie Murphy.

Photo by: Command Sergeant Major Dwight "Andy" Anderson.

²⁶ McClure, Letter to Pyle dated 10/21/1985.

²⁷ Champagne, 127-131.

²⁸ Technician 5th Grade (Tec5) Gilbert's final resting place is at Epinal American Cemetery and Memorial, Plot B, Row 14, Grave 41. Source: https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/56376073/gilbert-j-van_elk

Three Murphys in Boston¹

By Neal Murphy

Comments? To comment on this article, just use the link below to visit our message boards.
<http://www.audiemurphy.com/msgb/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=4749>

“**A**S an effort to help keep the memory of Audie alive – especially in a time when youngsters equate a “hero” to be an overpaid professional athlete who frequently has an issue standing for the U.S. National Anthem – I have decided to share who I think a real hero is.”

“I have enclosed a professionally taken picture of Audie with my dad, William G. Murphy who is standing on the far-right. To the far-left side of the photo is someone who I think may be the Boston Police commissioner or was associated with the Boston Police department in some capacity and whose name was also Murphy.”

“Unfortunately, I have no personal knowledge of the third Murphy. At the time there were many ranks in the Boston Police Department and the commissioners were appointed by the mayor. My wife’s uncle was a deputy police chief for many years.”

“At the time of the photo I was about fourteen years old when my dad took me and my older brother to see TO

HELL AND BACK. The photo was taken circa 1955 in Boston, Massachusetts around the time of the film’s premiere. The exact date is on the rear of photo, but I am reluctant to check it because removing the photo from the frame might damage it.”

“At the time, my dad was head of security for William Filene’s and Sons department stores in Boston which had locations throughout the northeast. Back then after the war credit charges for stores were innovative and dad was a pioneer in the collection aspect of this new form of sales. Dad performed so well that Filene’s Security Department was added to his capable hands.”

“My dad had a good relationship with the police department. He employed many Boston police officers, so he was familiar with the force. During the Christmas season the Boston Police horse-mounted police officers would help direct foot traffic and auto traffic. Of course, all of this was many years before the creation of shopping malls.”

¹ Compiled from a series of emails, dated November 10, 2020, written to the Audie Murphy Research Foundation, by Mr. Neal Murphy

“Filene’s was innovative at the time having a basement level where everything was dramatically reduced in price. If the item did not sell in a week it was reduced. If it did not sell in a month the item was donated to charity. The basement was world-

famous, and dad even had to open it exclusively for Mamie Eisenhower while Ike was President – she just wanted to witness and partake of the bargains. Discounting was a new concept at the time.”



Three Murphy’s in Boston. Shown here are the head of security for Filene’s and Son’s Department Stores in Boston, a Boston police department official and Audie Murphy. The photo was taken around the time of the city premiere of the film *TO HELL AND BACK* at Boston Massachusetts.

From Left to Right: an unknown Murphy official from the Boston Police Department, Audie L. Murphy, and William G. Murphy head of security for Filene’s and Son’s Department stores.

Photo courtesy of Neal Murphy

"I remember my Dad appearing in the television show *Route 66* where the two stars came into an exclusive fur salon and my dad was on film as the salesperson. Dad was a ham!"

"I remember my Dad being extremely impressed by Audie and his modest demeanor. I was and still am no different. Whenever I watch the film of Audie receiving his Medal of Honor it still puts a chill through my body the

same way our nation's flag does as it goes by in a parade."

So that is the story of my photo and its connection to my family. This photo proudly hung on Dad's wall and I know he would be thrilled to know it is now part of the Audie Murphy Research foundation and its website."

... Neal Murphy

Swope – From Red Mound to Anzio: Who Was This Man?

Comments? Comments are welcome. Just use the link below to our message board.
<https://www.audiemurphy.com/msgb/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=4747>

Mike West

AUDIE Murphy's autobiography, *TO HELL AND BACK* was never meant to be a historical treatise but instead the recollections of a combat soldier in World War II. The characters in the autobiography likewise were either a single individual or a composite of several who were given fictional names. One of these individuals was known as "Swope."

We are first introduced to him in Chapter 3 of *TO HELL AND BACK* as "Swope, a Cherokee Indian ... "with nerves of iron, a fine eye for targets, and a weakness for automatic weapons."¹

We will know him variously as "Swope", "a Cherokee Indian", or as "Chief." From other accounts, we see him as a cigar smoking, coffee-drinking, cold cunning killer.²

He was, in fact, James Robert Fife, a Seminole (not Cherokee) born October 20, 1913, near Little, Red Mound Township, Seminole County, Oklahoma. He was the son of Phillip Fife and Anochee Tiger. James Fife came from a farming family of a number of siblings and half-siblings. Mr. Fife's life until his enlistment in late 1942 was one of hard work and hard times.³

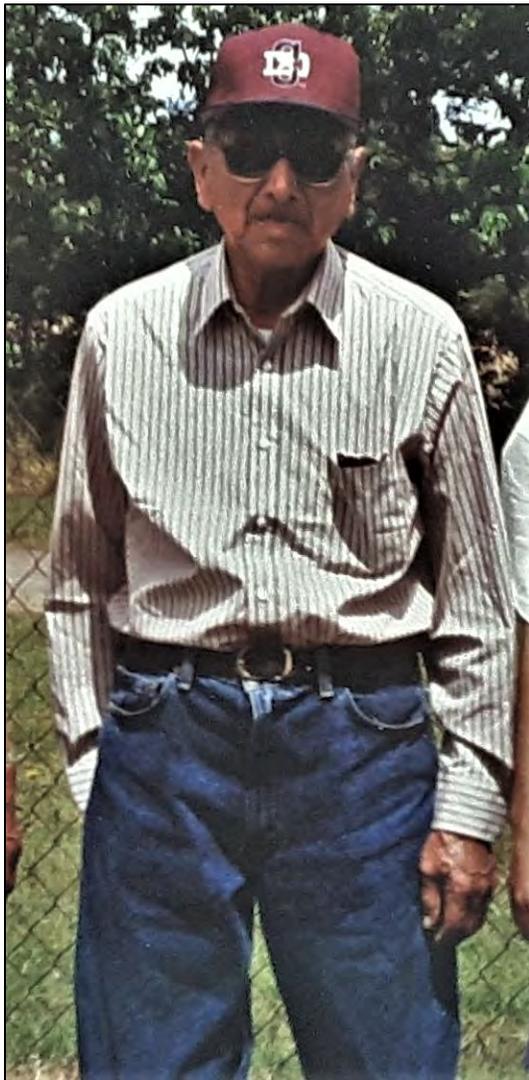
As the war in Europe intensified, Mr. Fife registered with the Selective service in November 1940. In early December 1942 he reported to Camp Wolters, Texas, for basic training.⁴ Eventually, he like many soldiers was assigned to the Third Infantry Division in north Africa. Arriving as a replacement, Fife joined the 15th Infantry, Company B in 1943. He

¹ p. 23, *TO HELL AND BACK*, Bantam Edition, 2nd printing, May 1983

² p 39, *TO HELL AND BACK*, Bantam Edition; *TO HELL AND BACK*, movie version, Directed by. Jesse Hibbs, Universal International, 1955

³ 1930 census, Seminole Co., Oklahoma, Sheet # 10b; School records, Red Mound, Seminole County, Oklahoma, Record Images 6, 7

⁴ Selective Service Record; Newspaper: *Seminole Producer* 12/15/1942



would become part of the Third Platoon and serve with Audie Murphy as a Browning automatic rifleman.⁵

After several months of training, the Third Infantry Division along with other U.S. and British units invaded Sicily, July 10, 1943. During the early morning hours of July 10, the 15th Infantry would go ashore at "Beach Yellow" just east of Licata, Sicily.⁶

On July 11, two days into the landing, Private James R. Fife would

be wounded. This would be the first of three such incidents that would earn

him the Purple Heart and two Oak Leaf Clusters. While moving to take an objective near Campobello, Fife was struck by a sniper's bullet which passed through his helmet and lodged in his shoulder. The bullet would remain there for the rest of his life.⁷

After a couple of month's convalescence, Private Fife rejoined Company B in time for the fighting in Salerno, Italy.⁸ Soon would begin a series of actions to capture a seemingly endless number of hills with merely their elevation to distinguish them one from another.

As one reads TO HELL AND BACK Murphy recounts a number of engagements to capture such hills, one being Hill 193. In the fighting near Mount Rotondo, Fife and other members of the 3rd platoon engage a squad of German infantry near that hill.

The incident is recounted in TO HELL AND BACK on page 39. As a German patrol approaches, Murphy and his men wait in ambush while

"Swope waits ... With his cold Indian cunning, he is letting them come dangerously close. ... The bronzed head snaps forward. Rat-ta-ta-ta ... twenty

⁵ Letter to author from Mr. Fife

⁶ p. 52, Taggart, HISTORY OF THE THIRD INFANTRY DIVISION, WORLD WAR TWO

⁷ B Company Morning Reports for 7/11/1943; Newspapers: Seminole Producer, 8/23/1943 and 5/1/1944; letter to author from Fife

⁸ B Company Morning Reports for 9/20/1943

James Robert Fife, circa 1994. A rare photo taken near Seminole, Oklahoma by the author.

Source and photographer: Mike West

rounds. No more. Swope is not one to waste ammunition.”⁹

It is during this time in Salerno that a second Purple Heart is earned. Mr. Fife would fall victim to shrapnel from a mortar round.¹⁰ The fragments would pass through his helmet leaving only minor wounds. Between the time of this injury and the invasion of Anzio, Italy, Fife would make corporal one day and the next day, sergeant.¹¹

Later the 3rd Infantry Division was relieved by the 36th Infantry Division on November 17, 1943 and along with other divisions, would be given more training in preparation for the invasion of Anzio.¹² After that, Audie Murphy and James R. Fife would not see each other again until early March 1949 because Murphy did not make the Anzio invasion due to a bout of influenza and Fife would be evacuated due to serious wounds suffered in the early days of the invasion.¹³

On the morning of January 22, 1944, the 3rd Infantry Division landed near Nettuno, Italy, a short distance from

Anzio.¹⁴ Several days after the landing as the division sought to stabilize its position, Fife and Joseph Sieja, one of the two men to whom Murphy dedicated TO HELL AND BACK sought cover during a German shelling.¹⁵ While seeking shelter behind an old barn near a haystack a German mortar round landed on top of them. Sieja was killed instantly and Mr. Fife received very serious wounds.¹⁶

The exact circumstances surrounding this incident are not entirely clear but that is another story for another time. James Fife would not lose his leg, as told in TO HELL AND BACK but it would be badly injured. He was also struck in the chest and both arms and would lose three fingers on his right hand. As he told the author, “This ended my combat.”¹⁷

What would follow over the next 23 months would be a series of overseas and stateside hospital stays with numerous medical procedures. Mr. Fife would first arrive in Charleston, South Carolina, where after some time while using a wheelchair, he would

⁹ Pages 35, 39, TO HELL AND BACK, Bantam Edition, 2nd printing, May 1983

¹⁰ Letter to author from Fife

¹¹ B Company Morning Reports for 1/15/1944, 1/19/1944

¹² p. 102, Taggart, HISTORY OF THE THIRD INFANTRY DIVISION, WORLD WAR TWO

¹³ Audie L. Murphy military medical records

¹⁴ Pp. 105-107, Taggart, HISTORY OF THE THIRD INFANTRY DIVISION, WORLD WAR TWO

¹⁵ Letter to author from Fife

¹⁶ B Company Morning Reports for 2/6/1944

¹⁷ Letter to author from Fife

break his badly wounded leg when the chair rolled backwards dumping him to the ground.

From South Carolina, Fife went to McCloskey General Hospital, Temple, Texas, and finally to William Beaumont General Hospital, El Paso, Texas in November 1945.

Finally, shortly before Christmas 1945, he was discharged, placed on a train bound for Wewoka, Seminole County, Oklahoma, and home. Unfortunately, fatigue and exhaustion from his period of recovery got the best of him and he slept through the Wewoka stop and ended up in Holdenville, Oklahoma. Mr. Fife completed the final leg of his homecoming in an 8-mile taxicab trip.¹⁸

As Mr. Fife told the author, “not much really happened after he got home.” Perhaps he meant not much out of the ordinary would occur – for he would settle down, marry, return to farming, and basically live an honorable and respectable life. As stated earlier, he would meet with Audie Murphy one more time in early March 1949.¹⁹

Mr. Fife and several of Murphy’s other military and boyhood friends, along with Audie’s first grade teacher and the daughter of Lattie Tipton, were invited to be in an episode of the radio

program “This Is Your Life,” honoring Audie Murphy (see photo on last page). As was expected, recollections and praise were shared between Murphy and Fife. Both recognized each other’s bravery in battle and expressed mutual respect.²⁰

This would be the last time Murphy and Fife saw one another, though Audie stopped in Oklahoma City several years later but could not contact Mr. Fife. This is, of course, not the last time we hear or “Swope”. In 1954, Audie’s autobiography TO HELL AND BACK was being made into a movie. It seems Jesse Hibbs, the director, was having a real dilemma.

In the words of Hedda Hopper,

Hibbs “can’t find an Indian to play Swope in Audie Murphy’s ‘To Hell and Back.’ Seems we’re fresh out of the right type of Indian and Hibbs won’t make up an actor to look like Swope. The guy must be approximately 25 years old and 6 feet tall.”²¹

I suspect this would have amused the 5’ 8” tall and 30-year old James Fife to think that it would require such an actor of this stature to properly portray him.

¹⁸ Letter to author from Fife. Newspaper: Seminole Producer 5/1/1944

¹⁹ Letter to author from Fife.

²⁰ Larryann Willis, The Mystery of the Mythical; 1954, *This Is Your Life* radio show.

²¹ Newspaper: The Los Angeles Times, 7/27/1954

The last years of Mr. Fife's life were spent near Seminole, Oklahoma, as a farmer; but, more importantly, they were spent as the associate pastor to the congregation of the Wewoka Indian Baptist Church. Mr. Fife passed in May 2007 and is buried in the Ross Family Cemetery not far from where he was born.²²

This writer had the privilege of meeting James R. Fife and two of his siblings. Mr. Fife was a quiet man with great dignity. It would have been uncharacteristic for him to say anything self-serving or which might draw attention to his war record, or his wounds so honorably earned, so let Audie Murphy in *TO HELL AND BACK* say it ...

But I also believe in men like Brandon and Novak and Swope and Kerrigan; and all the men who stood up against the enemy, taking their beatings without whimper and their triumphs without boasting. The men who went and would go again to hell and back to preserve what our country thinks right and decent.²³

I think we can all agree.

... *Mike West*

²² Letter to author from Fife. Findagrave: James Robert Fife

²³ p. 273, *TO HELL AND BACK*, Bantam Edition, 2nd printing, May 1983

James Robert Fife, son of Mr. and Mrs. Phillip Fife, route 3, Seminole, and Arthur L. Haigwood, son of Mrs. Mattie Lou Haigwood, Seminole, have arrived at the infantry replacement center at Camp Wolters, Texas, word from that base advised yesterday. They have both been assigned to a battery stressing rifle training, the dispatch from Camp Wolters said.

Seminole Producer, Tuesday, December 15 1942: Army hometown newsrelease announcing James Fife's arrival to basic training.

Seminole Soldier Wounded In Sicily

WASHINGTON, Aug. 28. (AP) —The War Department announced today the names of 339 United States soldiers wounded in action in various theatres of war.

The Oklahomans wounded included (North African area and Sicily) Pvt. James R. Fife, Phillips Fife, father, Seminole.

Seminole Producer, Tuesday, August 29, 1943: Local newspaper reports James Fife's wounding near Campobello, Italy resulting in his first Purple Heart.

6 Part II—TUESDAY, JULY 27, 1954 ** Los Angeles Times

HEDDA HOPPER

Claire Trevor Joins 'Lucy Gallant' Stars

Claire Trevor is the fourth star signed for "Lucy Gallant." She'll rise and shine, as always, as a shady lady in a 1940 oil boom town. Jane Wyman, Charlton Heston and Thelma Ritter round out the quartet. John Lee Mahin's script will be shot in VistaVision, with Robert Parrish directing for Pine and Thomas Hollywood discovers Claire about once every five years, and "The High and the Mighty" put her on top again.

Things have come to a pretty pass, U-I Director Jess Hibbs can't find an Indian to

more you look at her the more beautiful she becomes." But his greatest crush is Ty Power in the same picture. "He's a real pro," said Ford. "You forget it's Ty. He doesn't want to play polo, be a gentleman farmer or enter the yacht races. He just wants to act—and he does." Ford says he saw Ty's father in "The Wandering Jew" on Broadway when he and Mary were on their honeymoon years ago.

CAUGHT A THIEF

Ben Cooper lives a block from Republic Studio, where he's working in "Hell's Outpost." Finished at 11 the other evening and started walking home, still dressed in western garb complete with guns, loaded with blanks. His new convertible was parked in front of his apartment, and as Ben approached he saw a stranger standing by the car. There followed a chase that would have done any western director proud, with Ben firing and the intruder taking off like he was jet propelled. Ben didn't get his man, but, podner, that burglar will have to recover



Claire Trevor

play Swope in Audie Murphy's "To Hell and Back." Seems we're fresh out of the right type of Indian, and Hibbs won't make up an actor to look like Swope. Guy must be approximately 25 years old and 6 feet tall. Incidentally, Ft. Lewis, Wash., will give Audie the works when he starts shooting the film there. A divisional review will be given in his honor. Now that ain't no little parade, pals, it's between 12,000 and 15,000 marching men.

PRAISE FROM CAESAR

John Ford tells me Betsy Palmer will play the nurse in "Mister Roberts." He discovered her on TV and did a rave about her work in "The Long Gray Line." "She's a bombshell," he declared. "No glamour girl but can act like hell. And the

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LAST DAY

Los Angeles Times, Tuesday, July 27, 1954: Hedda Hopper article mentioning the difficulty director Jesse Hibbs was having in casting "Swope" in the movie TO HELL AND BACK.



THIS IS YOUR LIFE: Photo take in NBC Studio, Hollywood, on March 7, 1949. On that day, Ralph Edwards, master of ceremonies, made Audie the subject of a radio broadcasted episode.

Left to right, row 1: Ralph Edwards, Wanda Hendrix, Audie Murphy, Mrs. Biff Connely,
Left to right, row 2: Claudean Tipton, Monroe Hackney, Walter W. Weispfenning, Martin L. Kelley,
and James Fife.

Photo Source: from the collection of Lillian Bailey