

# The Big Break

By Larryann C. Willis

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**A**UDIE MURPHY'S acting career did not happen overnight and Audie had a tough time breaking into starring roles. Although Audie had lines in his first two movies, BEYOND GLORY and TEXAS, BROOKLYN AND HEAVEN, his roles are minor and his appearances brief.

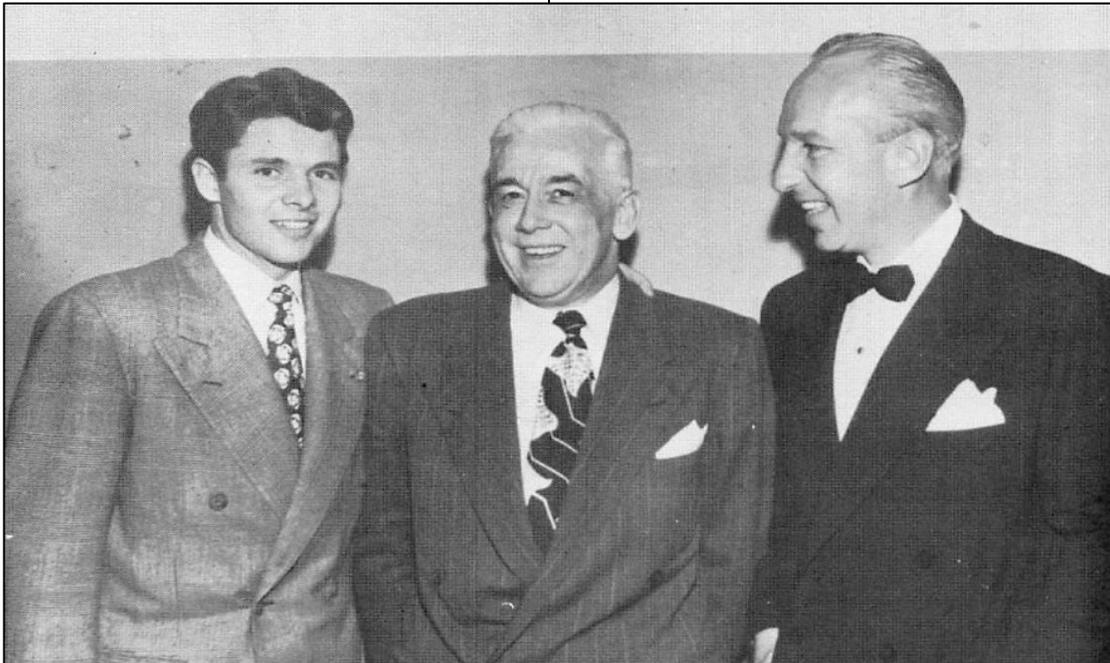
Audie's third movie, BAD BOY, was a very important film, not only because it was Audie's first starring role but because of why and how it was made. For personal reasons, this film was particularly significant to Audie Murphy.

After returning home from World War II, Audie bought a house in Farmersville, Texas for his oldest sister Corinne, her husband Poland Burns, and their three children. The idea was that Audie's three younger siblings, Nadine, Billie, and Joe, who had been living in an orphanage since Audie's mother's death, would also be able to live with Corinne and Poland and would become part of a family again. Unfortunately, six children under one roof created too much stress on everyone. The arrangement didn't work out as smoothly as expected, particularly

with Nadine and Joe, so Audie came and picked them up.

Of course, Joe and Nadine wanted to stay with Audie, but Audie himself was having a hard time surviving. Despite a lot of post war publicity and James Cagney's help, Audie's acting career had gone nowhere. He was broke and sleeping on the floor of his friend Terry Hunt's gymnasium. Audie's oldest brother Buck and his wife agreed to take in Nadine but Audie didn't know what he was going to do with Joe.

Audie went to James "Skipper" Cherry, a Dallas theater owner who had previously befriended Audie, and asked Mr. Cherry for his advice. Mr. Cherry was a member of a consortium of Texas theater owners who were part of Variety Clubs International and was involved with the Variety Clubs International Boy's Ranch, a 4,800 acre ranch near Copperas Cove, Texas. Mr. Cherry arranged for the Boy's Ranch to take Joe in. Fortunately, Joe loved it there and Audie was able to visit him and Skipper Cherry on a frequent basis.



Audie Murphy stands to the left of James 'Skipper' Cherry (center) and film star Lloyd Nolan. The movie premiered on February 16, 1949. *Photo source: Audie Murphy, American Soldier by Harold B. Simpson, p. 291.*

During one of these visits, Audie confided to Cherry that even with Cagney's help and acting lessons, he wasn't getting anywhere in Hollywood. In a 1973 interview, Cherry recalled, "He was discouraged and somewhat despondent concerning his movie career." The kind-hearted Texan realized that Audie Murphy himself needed as much help as his brother Joe.

As it turned out, the Variety Clubs was financing a film called BAD BOY to help promote the organization's work with troubled children. Cherry called Texas theater executive Paul Short, who was producing the film, and suggested they consider giving Audie a significant role. With the help of these two men, a movie screen test was set up.



For more information visit the Audie L. Murphy Memorial Website at [www.audiemurphy.com](http://www.audiemurphy.com)



A recent photo of the old Variety Clubs International Boys Ranch, in Copperas Cove, Texas. The Boys Home was the setting of Audie Murphy's third movie, BAD BOY. Today, the Boys Home has been converted into a set of apartments. It's address is 3156 Boys Ranch Road, Copperas Cove, Texas and can be found at the following Google Map link: <https://goo.gl/maps/gtHXXBUBTwA6dDXv6>

*Photo contributed by Mr. Ernest Tipton.*

Audie looked good in the screen test, but unfortunately, the president of Allied Artists did not want to cast someone with so little acting experience in the role of a major character. However, by this time, Cherry, Short, and the other Texas theater owners had decided that Audie Murphy was going to play the lead, or they would not finance the film. Their money talked and Audie Murphy was cast as the lead. As it turned out, he turned in such a fine performance that the Hollywood powers were forced to finally recognize his talent. As a direct result of this film Universal signed Audie to his first seven-year studio contract.

So, while it was true that James Cagney introduced Audie to Hollywood and taught

him to act, in all likelihood he would never have made it as an actor if it hadn't been for some good-hearted and generous Texans who wanted to help Audie Murphy as much as they helped his brother Joe and other kids in trouble. Audie Murphy himself is probably one of Variety Clubs International's biggest success stories, although most of the world today does not realize this. But Audie Murphy knew it and never forgot it. Which is why he named his second son James Murphy after James Cherry and always called him "Skipper".

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