

Rocketman

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=4811>

“ROCKETMAN” is a term that brings different definitions to mind. A search on the Internet reveals that it was a somewhat well-received movie about pop-singer Elton John in 2019 which included his 1972 hit single song by the same name. This article is not about that.

It is also a political term used early in the administration of President Trump to describe North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un who was busy lobbing short and medium range missiles in the direction of Japan over the Pacific Ocean – some not far from where the author lives who happens to be a U.S. federal employee and citizen abroad. This article is not about that either.

So, what is this article about? And how does the term “rocketman” apply to Audie Murphy? At the risk of making the reader impatient, the answer to this most reasonable question will be revealed shortly.

On April 1, 1921, the author received an email from one of the Foundation’s newsletter subscribers. The email said,

Hi. My name is Patsy Tweed Vaughn. My father Van James Tweed was in the Army with Audie. He said he was with Audie where the movie To Hell and Back was based on. Is there any way I can find a record of my father being there? Please let me know, Thanks Patsy, you can call me if you would like ...

Patsy also left a phone number should there be any questions. After digging around a little and consulting with historian Mike West, information was uncovered.

In its second quarterly newsletter, Spring of 1997, the Audie Murphy Research Foundation published excerpts of a July 1997 interview with “Red” Hollace Edwin Ditterline.¹ In the interview, Mr. Ditterline shared recollections of experiences he had with Audie to include

¹ Audie Murphy Research Foundation Newsletter, page 3, Volume 2, Spring 1997, https://www.audiemurphy.com/amrf/amrf_news2.pdf

mentioning other soldiers that he and Audie served with. Mr. Ditterline mentioned one such soldier named Charlie Owen. On page 5 of that interview, Ditterline recalled that

“Charlie Owen’s nickname might have been ‘Tweed’. Tweed was our bazooka man. I was the guy that carried the shells for the bazooka. I didn’t like that job because every time they had to do something like block a road or hit a pillbox, they’d call for a bazooka.”

As it turns out, Mr. Ditterline was referring to Patsy’s father and not Mr. Owens.

Patsy’s lack of information about her father’s service is understandable. Army personnel documentation for many soldiers over the last two centuries and for air force servicemen were destroyed in a horrific fire at its St. Louis records warehouse in 1973. It is estimated that perhaps 75% to 80% of all official personnel records were lost in this fire.² Sadly, many descendants of World War II soldiers and other wars have no record of their ancestor’s service. Any official document – if found – is valued and treasured.

After consulting the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)

some documentation was located. Among these was a military registration card. Filed by Mr. Van James Tweed, the card states that he was born February 16, 1915, in Greene County, Tennessee. At the time of his registration, he was living at RFD #1, Powell, (Knox County) Tennessee. He was married to a Mrs. Lavada Beatrice Tweed of the same address and was employed by Bondurant Brothers, 402 Main Street, Knoxville, Tennessee. In the accompanying “Selective Service Registrar’s Report”, also provided by NARA, Tweed is described as 5’ 8”, 160 lbs., blue eyes, brown hair, and ruddy complexion. The date appears to be October 16, 1946. The year may be an error and looks to have been overwritten in ink by hand.

More digging at NARA found an online reference which described Mr. Tweed’s



An M9 “Bazooka” Team from TO HELL AND BACK. Courtesy of Dennis Stults and Universal Studios.

² <https://www.archives.gov/personnel-records-center/fire-1973>

World War II Military Registration Card, Van James Tweed. Source: National Archives and Records Administration.

REGISTRAR'S REPORT			
DESCRIPTION OF REGISTRANT			
RACE	HEIGHT (Approx.)	WEIGHT (Approx.)	COMPLEXION
White	X 5'8"	160	Sallow
Negro	Blue	X	Light
	Gray		Ruddy
Oriental	Hazel	Brown	X Freckled
	Brown	Black	Light brown
Indian	Black	Gray	Dark brown
		Bald	Black
Philippine			

Other obvious physical characteristics that will aid in identification.....

I certify that my answers are true; that the person registered has read or has had read to him his own answers; that I have witnessed his signature or mark and that all of his answers of which I have knowledge are true, correct and full.

Registrar for Roger F. Johnson (Signature of registrar)
Powell 16 (Precinct) Knox (Ward) Tenn (City or county) Tenn (State)
 Date of registration Oct 16, 1946

SELECTIVE SERVICE LOCAL BOARD NO. 6
KNOX COUNTY
KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE
(STAMP OF LOCAL BOARD)

(The stamp of the Local Board having jurisdiction of the registrant shall be placed in the above space.)
 U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE 16-17105

Selective Service Registration Card, Van James Tweed. Source: National Archives and Records Administration.

entry at the time of enlistment. Private Tweed enlisted on November 11, 1942, at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, for the duration of the war plus an extra six months, if the President deemed those extra months necessary. Mr. Tweed was married when he enlisted, and his education level was listed as “grammar school” and his civilian occupation was “skilled mechanics and repairmen”. A link to this online document is provided in the footnote.³

With more help from “Hunter/Gatherer” Mike West, two other official documents absolutely established Tweed’s assignment to B-Company, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, during the days of World War II.

Government Morning Reports were valuable combat daily reports submitted by units which listed important changes in status of personnel. They included reporting the arrival of newly assigned soldiers, soldiers that were temporarily attached to a medical unit because of illness, wounds, or injury, and any deaths.

Two of Company B, 1-15 Infantry’s morning reports, dated November 17, 1944, and January 5, 1945, specifically mention Van J. Tweed by his name and

³ U.S. National Archives and Records Administration. See [NARA - AAD - Display Full Records - Electronic Army Serial Number Merged File, ca. 1938 - 1946 \(Enlistment Records\)](https://www.archives.gov/electronic-records/display-full-records) (archives.gov)

service number. These reports can be viewed on the last page of this article.

Unquestionably, Van James Tweed was one of Audie's fellow soldiers.

The nature of Mr. Tweed's work with the Army was probably that of an infantryman although the Audie Murphy Research Foundation hasn't located any discharge papers that can officially characterize his military occupational specialty. Mr. Ditterline did say in his interview that Tweed fired a "bazooka".

Weapons qualifications were a big part of military training and those who received specialized weapons instruction and passed a live-fire examination could receive a coveted certification which was documented in their official records. The certification meant that they could also wear a qualification badge on their dress uniform.

While we do not have the final discharge paperwork of Mr. Tweed's Army service which was lost in the 1973 St. Louis fire, there is a very good chance that he earned the "Rocket Launcher" certification and qualification badge based on Mr. Ditterline's interview.

And what about the bazooka Private Tweed fired?

Originally called the M1 Rocket Launcher, it was upgraded in 1943 to the M9 version. It included several key components including a 61-inch smooth bore rocket tube, a stock (an electrical firing mechanism), and a 2.36-inch diameter rocket.⁴ The M9 version weighed 13.25 lbs. (unloaded) and a little over 15 lbs. when armed with a rocket. When fully configured and fired it had no recoil. The 1943 version could penetrate up to 4 inches of armor.

According to the U.S. Army document which specifies exactly what an Infantry Rifle Company in World War II was authorized, an Infantry Rifle Company was authorized five M9 Anti-Tank Rocket Launchers⁵. The arrangement of the five firing teams was probably one for each of the three rifle platoons, one for the heavy weapons platoon, and one for the headquarters platoon.

A soldier who was assigned to fire the M9 had a very dangerous job. Carrying an M9 Rocket Launcher usually meant the firer – and his ammo bearer – were placed as far forward as possible – sometimes with little cover and in an exposed position. When fired, the rocket

⁴ U.S. War Department, Technical Manual TM 9-294, "2.36-Inch A.T. Rocket Launcher M1A1" dated 27 September 1943.

⁵ U.S. War Department; Military Table of Organization and Equipment (MTOE) No. 7-17, dated February 26, 1944; <http://www.militaryresearch.org/freebies.htm#Army%20WWII>

left a smoky contrail that traced a path back to its point of origin too. Rocketmen had to quickly shoot and move to minimize risk.

A rocketman did not work alone. An ammo bearer accompanied him and carried extra rockets. The ammo bearer may or may not have been qualified to fire the M9. The ammo bearer was also responsible for loading the missile into the tube's rear while the firer aimed at the target. Firing positions included prone, crouching, and standing. Sometimes both the firer and the ammo bearer carried extra tubes, so they didn't have to waste time re-loading between firings.

Rocketmen and their ammo bearers probably possessed nerves of steel as they fired on advancing enemy armor and machinegun-infested pillboxes. The job was not for the squeamish.

In the case of Mr. Tweed, it seems that Mr. Ditterline was his ammo bearer – at least on occasion.

Mr. Van James Tweed died in 1982 at the age of 67, according to an obituary in *News-Sentinel* (Knoxville, Tenn.). Patsy was listed as one of the surviving family members. A photo of Private Tweed in uniform was located on Ancestry.com.⁶

After compiling this information, I attempted to call Patsy, and emailed her several times hoping for more information. Unfortunately, I was not able to connect with Patsy again. Even still, it is the Foundation's hope that Patsy receives this article and now knows more about what her father did during World War II. The documentation proves that her daddy was one of those amazing men with B Company, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment and that he served with Audie Murphy.

It also continues our efforts to honor Audie's wish that we do not forget the soldiers he served with – the ones Audie always said were the real heroes.

- *Richard Rodgers*



Private Van James Tweed, circa 1942-1945. Photo source: Ancestry.com

⁶ <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/99665752/van-j-tweed>

SEVERAL "MORNING REPORTS"
Company B, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment
3rd Infantry Division

17 November 1944, p.3 of 5
(see Line 4 for PFC Van James Tweed)

4 January 1945, p.1 of 1
(see Line 4 for PFC Van James Tweed)

COMPANY MORNING REPORT ENDING 2400 17 Nov 44

STATION France
ORGANIZATION Co B 15th Regt Inf

SERIAL NUMBER	NAME	GRADE	CODE
36 765 134	Hardt, Harold E.	Pfc	
34 497 147	Tweed, Van J.	Pfc	
31 216 380	Daley, Daniel J.	Pvt	
31 285 104	DeLaunay, Armand E.	Pvt	
MOC C/O MOC 245			
32 477 710	Gamba, Foster R.	Pfc	
35 228 171	Donovan, Russell L.	Pvt	
30 343 653	Creason, Henry B.	Pvt	
245			
37 402 205	Brawley, Elmer C.	Pfc	
39 922 432	Hardman, Harry T.	Pvt	
26 801 128	Mireles, Nick W.	Pvt	
245			
34 581 576	Miller, George H.	Pfc	
14 000 228	Hinton, Maurice F.	Pvt	
422 245			
39 016 891	Bjordahl, Carroll G.	Pvt	
34 895 166	Blackwelder, Homer D. Jr	Pfc	
36 573 202	Hamer, Le Verne E.	Pfc	
31 409 000	McBarnett, John E.	Pvt	
245			
36 467 166	Kekran, Joseph B.	Pvt	

OFFICER STRENGTH: PFC 0, CAPT 0, 1ST LT 0, 2ND LT 0, 1ST SGT 0, 2ND SGT 0, 3RD SGT 0, 4TH SGT 0, 5TH SGT 0, 6TH SGT 0, 7TH SGT 0, 8TH SGT 0, 9TH SGT 0, 10TH SGT 0, 11TH SGT 0, 12TH SGT 0, 13TH SGT 0, 14TH SGT 0, 15TH SGT 0, 16TH SGT 0, 17TH SGT 0, 18TH SGT 0, 19TH SGT 0, 20TH SGT 0, 21ST SGT 0, 22ND SGT 0, 23RD SGT 0, 24TH SGT 0, 25TH SGT 0, 26TH SGT 0, 27TH SGT 0, 28TH SGT 0, 29TH SGT 0, 30TH SGT 0, 31ST SGT 0, 32ND SGT 0, 33RD SGT 0, 34TH SGT 0, 35TH SGT 0, 36TH SGT 0, 37TH SGT 0, 38TH SGT 0, 39TH SGT 0, 40TH SGT 0, 41ST SGT 0, 42ND SGT 0, 43RD SGT 0, 44TH SGT 0, 45TH SGT 0, 46TH SGT 0, 47TH SGT 0, 48TH SGT 0, 49TH SGT 0, 50TH SGT 0, 51ST SGT 0, 52ND SGT 0, 53RD SGT 0, 54TH SGT 0, 55TH SGT 0, 56TH SGT 0, 57TH SGT 0, 58TH SGT 0, 59TH SGT 0, 60TH SGT 0, 61ST SGT 0, 62ND SGT 0, 63RD SGT 0, 64TH SGT 0, 65TH SGT 0, 66TH SGT 0, 67TH SGT 0, 68TH SGT 0, 69TH SGT 0, 70TH SGT 0, 71ST SGT 0, 72ND SGT 0, 73RD SGT 0, 74TH SGT 0, 75TH SGT 0, 76TH SGT 0, 77TH SGT 0, 78TH SGT 0, 79TH SGT 0, 80TH SGT 0, 81ST SGT 0, 82ND SGT 0, 83RD SGT 0, 84TH SGT 0, 85TH SGT 0, 86TH SGT 0, 87TH SGT 0, 88TH SGT 0, 89TH SGT 0, 90TH SGT 0, 91ST SGT 0, 92ND SGT 0, 93RD SGT 0, 94TH SGT 0, 95TH SGT 0, 96TH SGT 0, 97TH SGT 0, 98TH SGT 0, 99TH SGT 0, 100TH SGT 0

ASSIGNED: 2, 2

ATTACHED UNASSIGNED ATTACHED PW OTHER ORGN: 2, 2

TOTAL: 2, 2

APN CADET & ENLISTED STRENGTH: PRESENT 94, ABSENT 9, 103

ATTACHED UNASSIGNED ATTACHED PW OTHER ORGN: 94, 9, 103

R I ESTIMATED NUMBER OF DAY OF WEEK
A RATIONS REQUIRED FOR DATE
T WELD ATTENDANCE FOR DAY OF THIS REPORT
II BREAKFAST DINNER SUPPER
O MEN ATTACHED TO THIS BATTALION
N MEN ATTACHED TO OTHER BATTALIONS
S MEN PRESENT

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COMPANY MORNING REPORT Restricted ENDING 2400 4 Jan 45

STATION Chatanooga TN 7564 France
ORGANIZATION Co B 15th Regt Inf

SERIAL NUMBER	NAME	GRADE	CODE
34 895 361	Smith, Charles W.	Pfc	
trfd in gr to Hq Co 1st Bn this Regt since 3rd			
12 226 478	Hapenas, Frank J.	Pfc	A1
asgd to and jd Co & Regt in gr since 3rd fr 2nd Repl Depot (RTU) per Div 80W 2			
34 497 147	Tweed, Van J.	Pfc	
33 692 278	Wolf, Edward P.	Pvt	A1
above 2 KM asgd to and jd Co & Regt in gr since 3rd fr 2nd Repl Depot (RTU) per Div 80W 2			
33 490 130	Drumheller, Clyde R.	Pfc	J4
39 216 067	Santoford, Harold E.	Pfc	
above 2 KM dy to abs sk ID since 3rd and trfd to D/P 7th Army per Cir 69 87005A			

Record of events
holding and prep pes

OFFICER STRENGTH: PFC 0, CAPT 0, 1ST LT 0, 2ND LT 0, 1ST SGT 0, 2ND SGT 0, 3RD SGT 0, 4TH SGT 0, 5TH SGT 0, 6TH SGT 0, 7TH SGT 0, 8TH SGT 0, 9TH SGT 0, 10TH SGT 0, 11TH SGT 0, 12TH SGT 0, 13TH SGT 0, 14TH SGT 0, 15TH SGT 0, 16TH SGT 0, 17TH SGT 0, 18TH SGT 0, 19TH SGT 0, 20TH SGT 0, 21ST SGT 0, 22ND SGT 0, 23RD SGT 0, 24TH SGT 0, 25TH SGT 0, 26TH SGT 0, 27TH SGT 0, 28TH SGT 0, 29TH SGT 0, 30TH SGT 0, 31ST SGT 0, 32ND SGT 0, 33RD SGT 0, 34TH SGT 0, 35TH SGT 0, 36TH SGT 0, 37TH SGT 0, 38TH SGT 0, 39TH SGT 0, 40TH SGT 0, 41ST SGT 0, 42ND SGT 0, 43RD SGT 0, 44TH SGT 0, 45TH SGT 0, 46TH SGT 0, 47TH SGT 0, 48TH SGT 0, 49TH SGT 0, 50TH SGT 0, 51ST SGT 0, 52ND SGT 0, 53RD SGT 0, 54TH SGT 0, 55TH SGT 0, 56TH SGT 0, 57TH SGT 0, 58TH SGT 0, 59TH SGT 0, 60TH SGT 0, 61ST SGT 0, 62ND SGT 0, 63RD SGT 0, 64TH SGT 0, 65TH SGT 0, 66TH SGT 0, 67TH SGT 0, 68TH SGT 0, 69TH SGT 0, 70TH SGT 0, 71ST SGT 0, 72ND SGT 0, 73RD SGT 0, 74TH SGT 0, 75TH SGT 0, 76TH SGT 0, 77TH SGT 0, 78TH SGT 0, 79TH SGT 0, 80TH SGT 0, 81ST SGT 0, 82ND SGT 0, 83RD SGT 0, 84TH SGT 0, 85TH SGT 0, 86TH SGT 0, 87TH SGT 0, 88TH SGT 0, 89TH SGT 0, 90TH SGT 0, 91ST SGT 0, 92ND SGT 0, 93RD SGT 0, 94TH SGT 0, 95TH SGT 0, 96TH SGT 0, 97TH SGT 0, 98TH SGT 0, 99TH SGT 0, 100TH SGT 0

ASSIGNED: 2, 2

ATTACHED UNASSIGNED ATTACHED PW OTHER ORGN: 2, 2

TOTAL: 2, 2

APN CADET & ENLISTED STRENGTH: PRESENT 94, ABSENT 9, 103

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R I ESTIMATED NUMBER OF DAY OF WEEK
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T WELD ATTENDANCE FOR DAY OF THIS REPORT
II BREAKFAST DINNER SUPPER
O MEN ATTACHED TO THIS BATTALION
N MEN ATTACHED TO OTHER BATTALIONS
S MEN PRESENT

PAGE 1 OF 1 PAGES

Government Morning Reports from B/1-15 Infantry, 3rd Infantry Division, dated 17 November 1944 and 4 January 1945. Both specifically mention Van J. Tweed. Original source: the National Records and Archive Administrator. Contributed by Michael P. West from his private collection.

The Big Break

By Larryann C. Willis

Comments? Your thoughts are welcome. Just use the link below to our message board.
<https://www.audiemurphy.com/msgb/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=4810>

AUDIE 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.

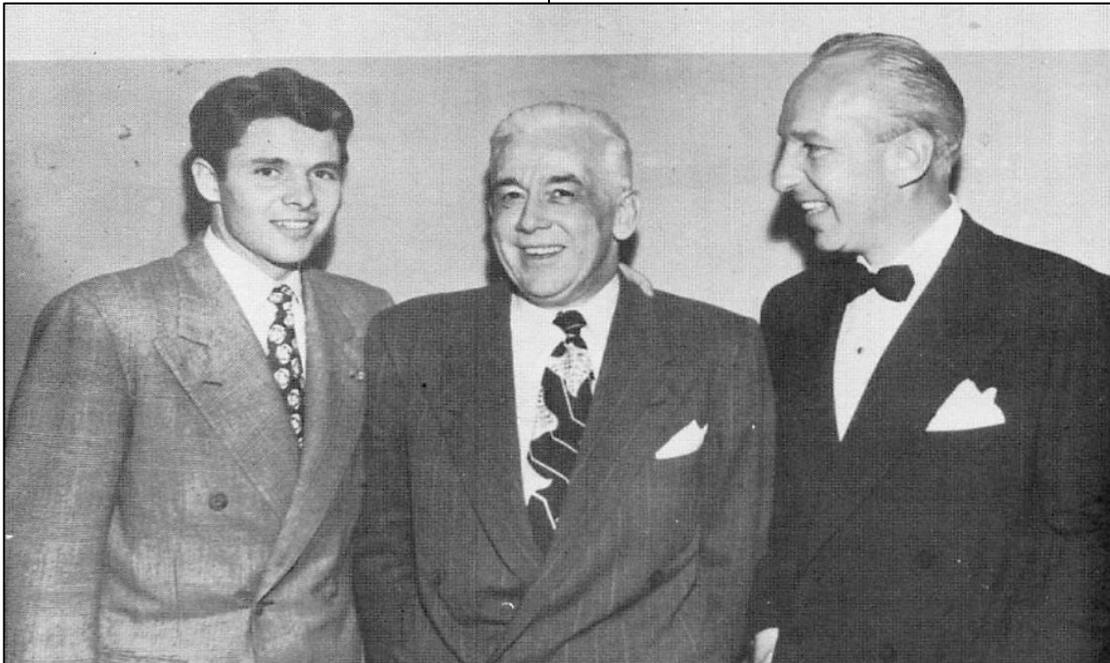
Audie's third movie, BAD BOY, was a very important film, not only because it was Audie's first starring role but because of why and how it was made. For personal reasons, this film was particularly significant to Audie Murphy.

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



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".

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

For the Record

by Richard L. Rodgers

Comments? Comments are welcome. Just use the link below to our message board.
<https://www.audiemurphy.com/msgb/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=4809>

IN THE FALL OF 1997, I received an email from an individual who wouldn't identify himself but stated he was in possession of the Audie Murphy's wallet. The unnamed person claimed he was emailing on behalf of another individual who also wanted to remain anonymous. He said they were both connected through his church. If memory serves me correctly, the person emailing me said he was the pastor of the same church too.

The sender wanted to know if I, as the webmaster of the Audie Murphy Memorial Website, or any of the website followers would be interested in "bidding" on the wallet in an auction. I immediately suspected a scam.

I replied that as a teacher of limited means, I was sure I could never afford such a rare item but I would check around and be in touch. I assured him the website and Foundation had an excellent fan base – some with deep pockets. My hope was that he would not break contact with me and the website.

After concluding and sending my reply, I immediately forwarded the original email and my reply to Ms. Larryann Willis, the executive director of the

Audie Murphy Research Foundation who was also an attorney. She quickly responded and said the wallet had been stolen from the Brush Mountain plane crash site. She stated there were a number of federal laws that were broken and that she was contacting the investigative branch of the Federal Aviation Administration.

She did too.

An attempt to flush out the thief was made. Ms. Willis and Federal investigators began an effort to locate the wallet and the person trying to sell it and anyone else related to the scam.

Some of you will remember that in the 1998 Winter edition of the AMRF newsletter, an announcement was made ...

"The Foundation has just been contacted via the internet by an individual who illegally took Audie Murphy's partially burned wallet from the scene of the fatal plane crash and wants to sell it back to his widow and sons for a ridiculous amount of money. The thief has provided proof that he/she is indeed in possession of the wallet Audie Murphy was

carrying when he was killed. However, this wallet does NOT belong to the individual trying to sell it. It is listed as stolen by the FBI and is still the legal property of Audie's family. Yet this unscrupulous individual has informed the family that he/she thinks Audie's wallet is worth \$1.5 million and that they intend to sell it to the highest bidder. The thief has refused to provide his/her name, address or phone number. If the family wants Audie's wallet back, they have been instructed to submit a bid via the internet. If the thief finds it acceptable, the family is supposed to meet this person at an undisclosed location and exchange cash for the wallet. This extortion attempt is a federal offense because the thief used the internet and US Mail to deliver his/her demands. The taking and selling of Audie Murphy's wallet also constitutes the crimes of theft, unlawful conversion and interference with a Federal NTSB investigation. Anyone who purchases Audie Murphy's wallet and/or any of its contents will be receiving stolen property.

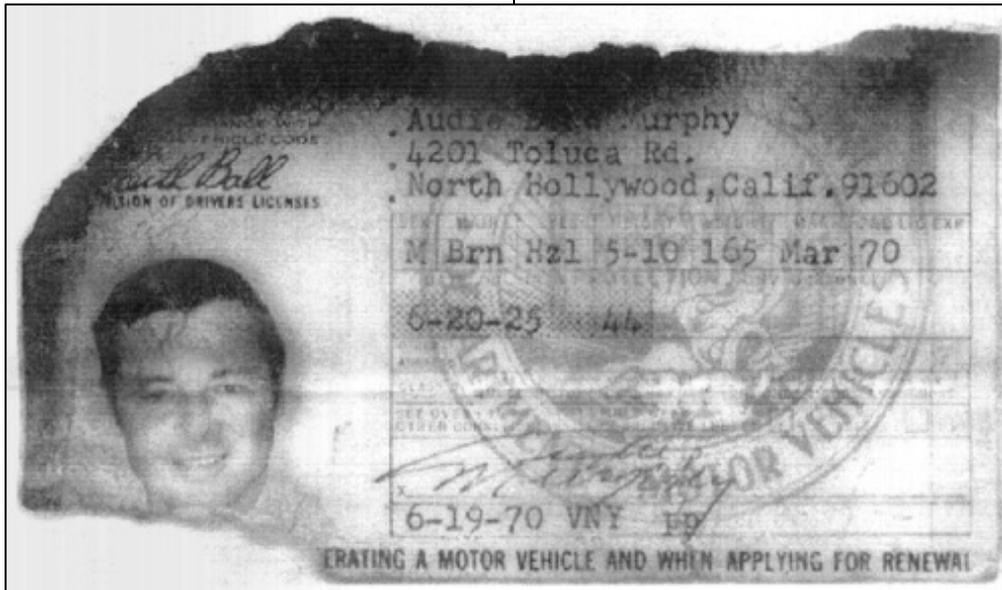
"The FBI, U.S. Attorney, and the NTSB are pursuing the case and attempting to recover the wallet for the Murphy family. If you have any information regarding the identity and/or whereabouts of this individual and/or Audie's

wallet, please contact us. We would also appreciate your help in notifying autograph and memorabilia dealers, museums, libraries, etc. in your area, warning that they may be offered this stolen property (which includes Audie's driver's license) and asking them to contact us immediately if the wallet and/or contents should be offered to them."

"Also missing from the crash site is a derringer that Audie was carrying. If you have any information on either the wallet or the derringer, please call us toll free at 1-888-314-AMRF."

The intent of the announcement was to warn fans and potential buyers of the situation and to get the word out that the wallet was in the possession of a criminal. It was our hope that anyone the thief contacted would immediately alert the Foundation and law enforcement agencies. We knew that Audie fans were – and still are – very loyal to Audie and his family. The announcement accomplished its purpose.

Not long afterwards, the wallet arrived in the mail addressed to the Audie Murphy Research Foundation. There was no return address and the post mark and packaging provided no clues to its origin. Again, if memory serves me correctly, it was sent from Ohio ... not too terribly far from the crash site



Original 1998 black and white scan by the Audie Murphy Research Foundation of Audie Murphy's stolen and later recovered California driver's license. (Copyright 1998, 2021 Audie Murphy Research Foundation, all rights reserved.)

– but probably dropped in a mail box far, far away from where the thief lived. Apparently, the thief had become frightened. Even still, the derringer and cash were never recovered.

Those familiar with this story know that the wallet, contained Audie Murphy's driver's license which was later used to establish his true birth year as June, 20, 1925 – not 1924. The Foundation published a photo copy of the driver's license in 1998 in a follow-up newsletter and the same image is now available on the website.

The Foundation was pleased that we recovered wallet through a website and fan-based effort. We were also proud that we could publish a scanned image of the driver's license which was

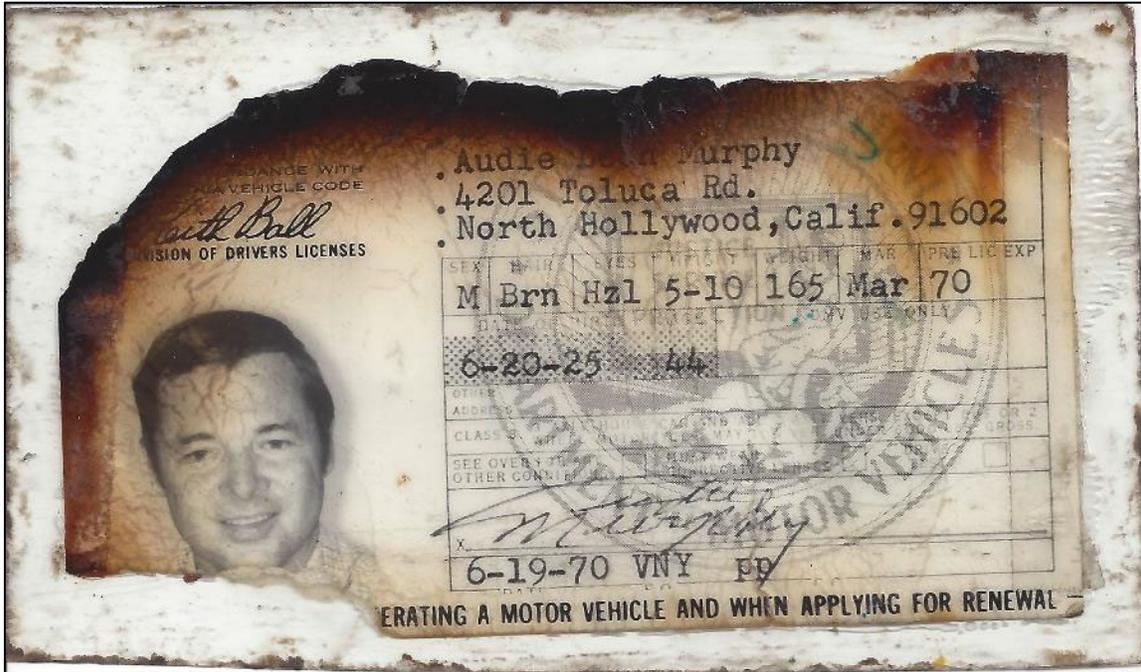
probably the most valuable part of the recovered wallet.

Recently, I asked Ms. Willis if she could provide a fresh scan of the driver's license – but this time in color and using better resolution.

Ms. Willis did not disappoint and did just that.

While the information surrounding the stolen wallet isn't really new, the story is still a good one. But the real purpose of this article isn't the retelling of the story. The story is just background information. The purpose is to introduce the new high-quality color images of the driver's license - both front and back side (see the last page).

- Richard Rodgers



- From the archives of the Audie Murphy Research Foundation
Audie's 1970 California Driver's License, front view, full color. Stolen from the 1971 plane crash site at Brush Mountain, Virginia and later recovered in 1996. Copyright 1998, 2021 by the Audie Murphy Research Foundation, all rights reserved.



- From the archives of the Audie Murphy Research Foundation
Audie's 1970 California Driver's License, rear view, full color. Copyright 1998, 2021 by the Audie Murphy Research Foundation, all rights reserved.

Now We Know

By Richard Rodgers

Comments? Your thoughts are welcome. Just use the link below to our message board.
<https://www.audiemurphy.com/msgb/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=4805>

IN A FEATURE ARTICLE that was published September 27, 2020 in the 3rd Quarterly 2020 Audie Murphy Research Newsletter¹ titled “When Was It?” a careful study to the question of what year Audie Murphy was really born was made. In it, key pieces of evidence were examined including ...

- the Murphy Family Tree (page 6 of Colonel Harold B. Simpson’s biography AUDIE MURPHY, AMERICAN SOLDIER.
- excerpts of the 1930’s and 1940’s Federal Census which listed the Murphy family household members and ages.
- a replacement birth certificate, used by Audie Murphy to enlist, which declared Audie’s birthyear to be 1924 and which replaced the “lost” original.
- a legal guardian’s sworn, and notarized affidavit made by Audie’s older sister in 1942 which stated he was born in 1924 and eligible to enlist in the Army;
- other Army enlistment records showing a birth year of 1924.
- numerous published references by magazines, newspaper articles, and gossip columns of interviews with Audie Murphy which stated he had “lied” about his birth year.

- interviews made with friends and family members claiming Audie had lied about his birth year.
- and a 1970’s California Driver’s License issued to Audie Murphy with a 1925 birth year listed.

While some of the collected evidence suggested Audie lied about his age, the question was never completely answered because irrefutable proof in the form of a 1925 birth certificate had not been found.

On June 21, 2021, in an email sent by Ms. Larryann Willis, the executive director of the Audie Murphy Research Foundation, to the author of this article. Ms. Willis stated that in 1998, the Foundation unknowingly obtained a copy of a corrected 1925 birth certificate after filing a Freedom of Information Act request with the U.S. State Department for Audie Murphy’s passport records.

The State Department documentation consisted of 12-pages of passport paperwork which, when quickly glanced at, appeared to contain no new information of value. The U.S. Passport paperwork was then filed away by the Foundation.

¹ See https://audiemurphy.com/articles/2020-10-31_3rdQtrNewsletter.pdf

**1925 Birth Certificate
of Audie L. Murphy.**

The birth certificate may have been used in 1942 for the purpose of enlisting which could explain why it was signed and notarized in Affidavit B on March 6, 1942. It was absolutely used in 1948 for the purpose of obtaining a U.S. Passport prior to Audie Murphy's departure to France.

THIS CERTIFICATE MUST BE PREPARED AND APPROVED AS REQUIRED BY THE LAW PRINTED ON THE REVERSE SIDE

PLACE OF BIRTH STATE OF TEXAS		TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS CERTIFICATE OF BIRTH	
COUNTY OF <i>Wheat</i>		CITY OR PRECINCT NO. <i>Kingston White Rock</i> TULSA	
2. FULL NAME OF CHILD <i>Audie Leon Murphy</i>			
3. SEX <i>Male</i>	4. TWIN, TRIPLET, OTHER	5. NUMBER, IN ORDER OF BIRTH <i>1-3</i>	6. LEGITIMATE? <i>Yes</i>
8. FULL NAME <i>Emmitt Murphy</i>		14. FULL MAIDEN NAME <i>Jessie Killian</i>	
9. RESIDENCE AT TIME OF THIS BIRTH <i>Kingston, Tex</i>		15. RESIDENCE AT TIME OF THIS BIRTH <i>Kingston, Tex</i>	
10. COLOR OR RACE <i>White</i>		16. COLOR OR RACE <i>White</i>	
11. AGE AT THIS BIRTH <i>35</i> YEARS		17. AGE AT THIS BIRTH <i>33</i> YEARS	
12. BIRTHPLACE (STATE OR COUNTRY) <i>Texas</i>		18. BIRTHPLACE (STATE OR COUNTRY) <i>Texas</i>	
13A. TRADE, PROFESSION OR KIND OF WORK DONE <i>Farmer</i>		13B. INDUSTRY OR BUSINESS IN WHICH ENGAGED <i>"</i>	
19. TRADE, PROFESSION OR KIND OF WORK DONE <i>Housewife</i>		20. INDUSTRY OR BUSINESS IN WHICH ENGAGED <i>Home</i>	
20. NUMBER OF CHILDREN BORN TO THIS MOTHER, INCLUDING THIS BIRTH <i>4</i>		21. NUMBER OF CHILDREN BORN TO THIS MOTHER, AND NOW LIVING <i>4</i>	
1. I HEREBY CERTIFY TO THE BIRTH OF THIS CHILD WHO WAS BORN ALIVE AT _____ O'Clock _____ M. ON THE DATE STATED ABOVE.			
22. SIGNATURE <i>P. S. Pearson m.d.</i>		ADDRESS <i>Brownville, T. X.</i>	

AFFIDAVIT A

STATE OF TEXAS
COUNTY OF _____

BEFORE ME ON THIS DAY APPEARED _____ KNOWN TO ME TO BE THE PERSON WHO SIGNED THE CERTIFICATE ATTACHED HERETO, WHO ON OATH DEPOSES AND SAYS THAT THE FACTS STATED IN THE FOREGOING BIRTH CERTIFICATE OF _____ ARE TRUE AND CORRECT TO THE BEST OF HIS KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF, AND THAT HE WAS ACQUAINTED WITH THE FACTS AT THE TIME OF THE EVENT.

SIGNED: *P. S. Pearson m.d.*

SWORN TO AND SUBSCRIBED BEFORE ME, THIS _____ DAY OF _____ 19____

(SEAL) NOTARY PUBLIC IN AND FOR _____ COUNTY, TEXAS

AFFIDAVIT B

STATE OF TEXAS
COUNTY OF *Wheat*

BEFORE ME ON THIS DAY APPEARED *Audie Leon Murphy* KNOWN TO ME TO BE THE PERSON WHO SIGNED THIS AFFIDAVIT, WHO ON OATH DEPOSES AND SAYS THAT THE FACTS STATED IN THE FOREGOING BIRTH CERTIFICATE OF _____ ARE TRUE AND CORRECT TO THE BEST OF HIS KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF, AND THAT HE IS ACQUAINTED WITH THE FACTS AND THAT HE IS NOT RELATED TO THE INDIVIDUAL BY BLOOD OR MARRIAGE.

SIGNED: *P. S. L. Springfield*

SWORN TO AND SUBSCRIBED BEFORE ME, THIS _____ DAY OF *May* 19*42*

By *Belgrave Lewisson* *Clay Messers* County Clerk

(SEAL) *Deputy* NOTARY PUBLIC IN AND FOR *Wheat* COUNTY, TEXAS

STATE OF TEXAS
COUNTY OF _____

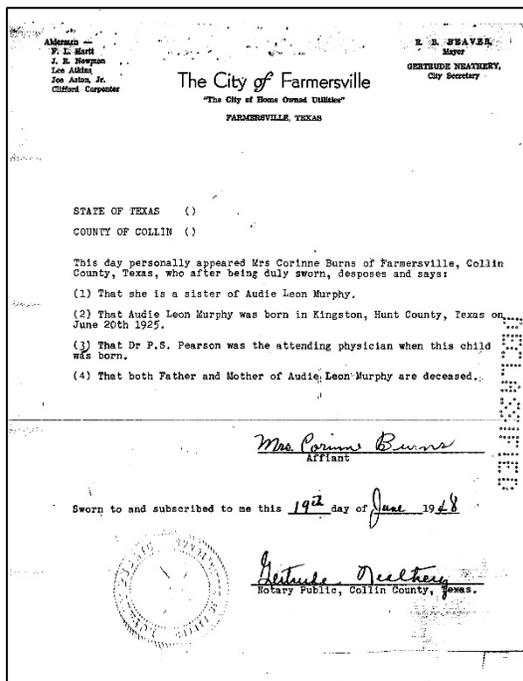
THE BIRTH CERTIFICATE OF _____ ATTACHED HERETO, WAS SUBMITTED TO THIS COURT, AS PROVIDED FOR IN H. B. No. 614, 46TH LEG., R. S. 1939. IT IS THE ORDER OF THIS COURT THAT THIS RECORD _____ BE ACCEPTED _____ BY THE STATE REGISTRAR FOR FILING IN THE STATE _____ BE NOT ACCEPTED _____

- U.S. State Department and the Audie Murphy Research Foundation.

Recently, Ms. Willis retrieved and reviewed the passport application and discovered a 1925 birth certificate buried in the middle of the passport paperwork which had been overlooked.

But there was more.

Behind the 1925 birth certificate was a 1948 affidavit made by Audie's older sister Corinne, swearing that 1925 was the true year of birth. Apparently, several years after the war ended, Audie wanted to set the record straight and Corinne assisted her brother by executing a second affidavit.



- U.S. State Department
1948 Affidavit from Corinne Burns submitted
by Audie Murphy with a 1948 application for
a U.S. Passport.

The 1948 affidavit was needed for two reasons:

1. Audie had no more interest in lying about his age and wanted to correct the official record; and
2. Audie needed a U.S. Passport in 1948 when he and his close friend David "Spec" McClure visited France.

Comparing the 1924 and 1925 versions of Audie's birth certificates is interesting. In the 1925 version, A. L. Springfield appears then swears in front of the Hunt County Clerk and a notary on March 6, 1942 that Audie Murphy was born in 1925. A.L. Springfield was a close family friend. Mike West, Audie Murphy Researcher states in a message sent to the author that,

"Alfred Lardner Springfield was the patriarch of the Springfield family that lived southwest of Floyd, Texas. Audie Leon Murphy did in fact work for them. A.L. died in 1946 after they had moved to Van Alstyne, Texas. I am not sure when they moved but Audie visited them shortly after the war."

We also know, according to the Simpson biography, AUDIE MURPHY: AMERICAN SOLDIER, that Murphy occasionally wrote letters to Beatrice Springfield during the war.

Less than a week later, a newer version of the birth certificate with a birthyear of 1924 was submitted to the courthouse with a date of March 12, 1942. On this one, Dr. P.S. Pearson – not A.L. Springfield - appears in the Hunt County Clerk's office attesting that 1924 was the correct year.

Why did Audie get the 1925 birth certificate notarized on March, 6, 1942 with Mr. Springfield's help only to six days later get a second version with a birthyear of 1924 – this time presented by Dr. Pearson?

A possible explanation could be that Audie originally tried to enlist with the 1925 birth certificate. With the help of Mr. Springfield who swore the information on the birth certificate was true – which it was - Audie had his 1925 birth certificate notarized at the county courthouse and then later presented it to a recruiter only to discover he was underaged for military purposes and could not legally enlist.

Audie, at this point, must have realized he needed a new plan and a different birth

Texas Department of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics
Contributed by David Williams

Filed March 25, 1942

Birth Certificate, Audie Leon Murphy

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS
CERTIFICATE OF BIRTH

1. PLACE OF BIRTH
STATE OF TEXAS
COUNTY OF Hunt
CITY OR PRECINCT NO. Kingston 366825

2. FULL NAME OF CHILD
Audie Leon Murphy

3. SEX Male 4. TWIN, TRIPLET, OR QUINUPLET NO 5. LEGITIMATE Yes 6. DATE OF BIRTH June 29, 1924

7. FULL NAME OF FATHER Emmitt Murphy 8. FULL MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER Jessie Hillman

9. RESIDENCE AT TIME OF THIS BIRTH Kingston, Tex 10. COLOR OR RACE White 11. AGE AT TIME OF THIS BIRTH 35 YEARS 12. BIRTH-PLACE (STATE OR COUNTRY) Texas 13. TRADE, PROFESSION OR BUSINESS IN WHICH ENGAGED Farmer 14. TRADE, PROFESSION OR BUSINESS IN WHICH ENGAGED Housewife

15. RESIDENCE AT TIME OF THIS BIRTH Kingston, Tex 16. COLOR OR RACE White 17. AGE AT TIME OF THIS BIRTH 33 YEARS 18. BIRTH-PLACE (STATE OR COUNTRY) Texas 19. TRADE, PROFESSION OR BUSINESS IN WHICH ENGAGED Farmer 20. INDUSTRY OR BUSINESS IN WHICH ENGAGED Housewife

21. NUMBER OF CHILDREN BORN TO THIS MOTHER, INCLUDING THIS BIRTH 4 22. NUMBER OF CHILDREN BORN TO THIS MOTHER, AND NOW LIVING 4

1. I HEREBY CERTIFY TO THE BIRTH OF THIS CHILD WHO WAS BORN ALIVE AT 1 P. M. ON THE DATE STATED ABOVE.

23. SIGNATURE OF PHYSICIAN D. P. Pearson M.D. ADDRESS Greenville, Tex

MEDICAL ATTENDANT'S AFFIDAVIT

STATE OF TEXAS
COUNTY OF Hunt
Before me on this day appeared D. P. Pearson M.D.
(Name of Physician)
known to me to be the person who signed the foregoing certificate of birth, who on oath deposes and says that he was the medical attendant at the birth of Audie Leon Murphy, and that the facts stated in the certificate attached hereto are true and correct to the best of his knowledge and belief.

Signature of Physician D. P. Pearson M.D.
Sworn to and subscribed before me, this 12 day of Mar, 1942

Notary Public Hollis Cathey
in and for Hunt County, Texas

STATE OF TEXAS
COUNTY OF Hunt
THE BIRTH CERTIFICATE OF Audie Leon Murphy
attached hereto, was submitted to this Court, as provided for in H.B. No. 614, 46th Leg., Ch. 23, 1939.
It is the order of this Court that this record be accepted by the State Registrar for filing in the State Bureau of Vital Statistics.

Signature W. C. Parker, Judge
Date March 12, 1942 of Hunt County

Falsified 1924 Birth Certificate of Audie Leon Murphy

This document was filed and approved by the Hunt County (Texas) County Courthouse with the help of the original attending physician, Dr. P.S. Pearson on March 12, 1942 which was six days after the original birth certificate was notarized in 1942.

certificate. If so, it seems reasonable to believe that Audie would be reluctant asking Mr. Springfield to help him obtain another birth certificate by lying about a different birthyear. So, Audie found someone else to help.

Six days later, on March 12, 1942, Dr. Pearson, the doctor who delivered Audie, appeared at the Hunt County Courthouse and submitted the requisite paperwork

needed for the 1924 birth certificate. Dr. Pearson probably did not remember the exact year of birth and relied on Audie to help him with that critical piece of information. As luck would have it, a different notary public – Hollis Cathey, the deputy Hunt County Clerk - anointed the paperwork with an embossed seal and the final blessing was soon applied by W.C. Parker, County Judge.



Source: Ancestry.com
Hollis Cathey, Deputy Clerk Hunt County



Source: www.findagrave.com
Judge W. C. (William Chandler) Parker,
Hunt County, Texas



-Marjorie Davis
Dr. Preston Shadrack Pearson, attending
physician to Audie Murphy's birth.

Mike West provided extra details regarding Mr. Hollis and Dr. Pearson which *could* be related to the appearance of their signatures. He says,

Hollis Cathey was the deputy clerk for Hunt County, Texas. It may have been more than a coincidence that Cathey notarized the second certificate. Hollis Cathey and Audie may have known each other. Cathey lived exactly one block north of the little apartment that Audie and Bill Bowen shared on Wesley Street, Greenville, Texas. Cathey lived at 4030 Wesley ... I am not suggesting collusion, but Audie may have seen a familiar face and asked him to come over and help ... The good Dr. Pearson lived only a short distance from the Bowen Radio Shop [where Audie

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

worked] ... [Dr. Pearson] was still practicing medicine.

Shortly afterwards, Audie provided the second birth certificate to the U.S. Army recruiter who accepted it. But there was a hitch: The Army required an additional affidavit from a parent and legal guardian stating that Audie had no dependents and was old enough to serve his country. Of course, Audie wasted no time and also produced that document with his oldest sister's help, Corinne Burns, who was his legal guardian. She swore out an affidavit on June 26, 1942, stating that Audie was born in 1924 and had no legal dependents.

The irony is that all the effort and subterfuge could have been avoided. Audie could have enlisted with the 1925 birth certificate. On June 20th, 1942 he turned 17 years old and could have taken the oath of enlistment without a falsified birth certificate if a parent or legal guardian consented in writing to waive the age requirement. Since a second affidavit from the parent or guardian would still be required concerning age and dependent status, this approach seems the more efficient solution.

Some wise sage once said – perhaps during a Sunday church sermon – that patience is not a virtue of youth. Maybe Audie was worried the war would be over before that 17th birthday.

The process of speculating on the two versions and their differences does provide some entertainment value and reminds us how determined Audie was to enlist regardless of the obstacles placed before him.

Regardless, in the final analysis what is important is that a corrected 1925 birth certificate now exists and Corinne Burns on an affidavit in 1948, has attested to its authenticity. The mystery is solved and this chapter is now closed.

Now we know ... 1925 was the year.

-Richard Rodgers

David McClure's¹ Second Letter to Col. Red Reeder² dated April 20, 1964

From the Stan Smith Collection, Historical Research Center, Texas Heritage Museum, Hill College, Hillsboro Texas

Comments? Comments are welcome. Just use the link below to our message board.
<https://www.audiemurphy.com/msgb/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=4803>

“DEAR COLONEL REEDER:
I received your book “The Northern Generals”³, which I found good reading as well as informative. Thank you very much. I had no idea that you had written so much. Where do you find the time? After thirty years of trying, writing still comes hard to me. It's like a plague, which I can't quit and I can't beat. I'm stuck with it. Incidentally, Audie Murphy's oldest son, Terry, is a real student of the Civil War, although he is only eleven. I think that he would very much appreciate an autographed copy of your new book. Audie is too restless to do much reading outside the racing form. I call that his financial sheet. Fortunately his astounding memory enables him to pick up much at a glance.

Editor's note: Colonel (Col.) Russell Potter “Red” Reeder, author of notable historical works including *Medal of Honor Heroes* was a West Point graduate, class of 1926, who served on active duty until 1946. He later became a West Point instructor (<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/80690926/russell-potter-reeder>). Based on an inquiry, David McClure – Audie Murphy's friend, writer, and biographer – responded with two letters. A copy of McClure's responses were later given by McClure to Stan Smith, Audie Murphy National Fan Club President, who communicated with McClure and often shared other information. Smith's collection of documents were later turned over to the Heritage Museum of Hill College with his recent passing in 2021.

¹ David C. McClure was a World War II veteran who later became a writer and columnist in Hollywood. McClure and Murphy became friends after the war. McClure transcribed and edited Murphy's biographical account *To Hell and Back* as Audie Murphy dictated the story to him. McClure and Murphy's friendship continued through the years until Murphy's death in a plane crash in 1971.

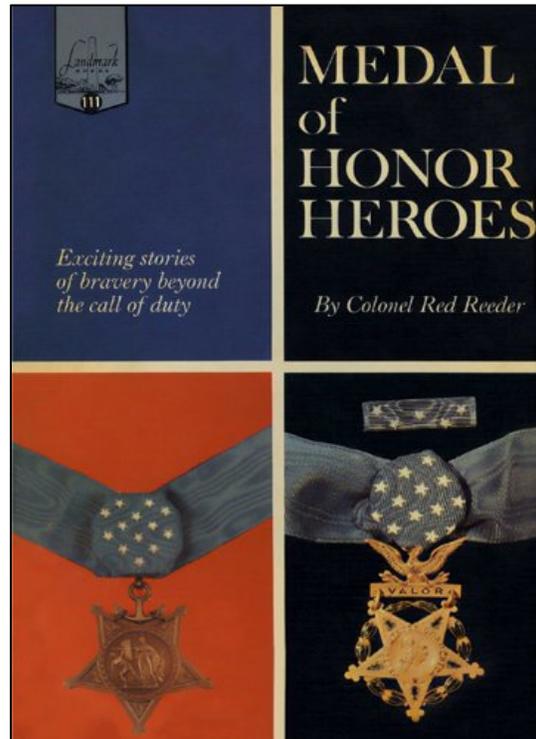
² Reeder, R. P., & Walker, G.-. (1965). *Medal of Honor Heroes*. Random House.

³ Reeder, R. P., Reeder, R., & Glattaver, N. (1964). *The Northern Generals*. Duell, Sloan and Pearce.

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

"I was glad that I could be of help in straightening out his Medal of Honor record. I wish that I could do the same for every man to whom that Medal was awarded. I did not know, until Frank McCarthy told me, that you were aiming your book at the younger generation. This is most important. Living as you do in a military world, you may be unaware of how ignorant most people are of the significance of military medals, and especially the Medal of Honor. I hope you make the meaning entirely clear. Today there seems to be an insidious, but very knowing, attack on the army. Especially is this true in motion pictures. I know a number of the men involved; and almost to a man they have a history of "liberal" or left-winged politics. I cannot believe that their anti-war sentiments are accidental, but rather deliberate attempts to undermine the public faith in our military.

"On the other hand, the military seems to fail just as badly when it has control of the propaganda. It tends to show war in an idealistic light, which destroys a value that truth might preserve and enhance, I do not for a minute believe that the soldiers at Valley Forge spent that dreadful winter in discussing the ideals of democracy or walking around in the snow with bare and bleeding feet. They probably cursed, raved, "liberated" anything that wasn't nailed down, drank, wenched if possible, moaned, groaned, and complained such as soldiers have

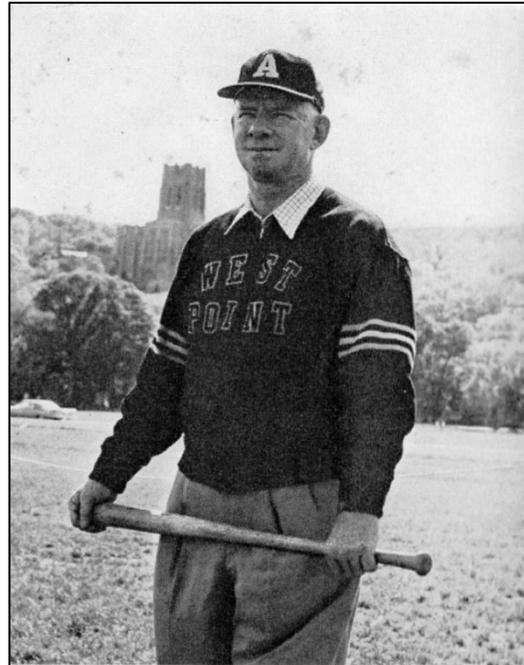


-Photo from Amazon.com
Book cover from "Medal of Honor Heroes"
written by Colonel "Red Reeder"

always done since the beginning of recorded time. The important thing is that they did endure and they did fight with a strength and heroism, almost beyond themselves, when they went into battle. This is also true of soldiers everywhere. It is an awesome experience to see ordinary men start measuring up to the great challenge. It is even more awesome to feel one's self measuring up to heights he did not know he possessed - and heights that he very possibly will never reach again. There is a line from an Emily Dickinson poem which goes: "We do not know how tall we are until we're called to rise."

“I had twenty seven months in Europe during World War II with a small highly mobile Signal Corps company. I still do not know what the hell we did or what exactly we were supposed to do except keep moving and follow orders. I never got beyond the rank of corporal, but I did get deeply involved with the war; so deeply that I was never able to free myself from it. It was an experience far beyond anything I had ever imagined or could possibly imagine without the experience. I saw the incredible nobility of men, the incredible sacrifice, the incredible courage that conquered fear, and the incredible will to survive and keep driving. Yet I never knew one man who could tell me exactly why he fought beyond surviving as long as he could and keeping his unit going. I personally felt in time that the war had no beginning and it had no end. We were all going to die; and that did not matter. Some other men would be there to take our place and keep the unit driving. Many veterans have since told me that they had the same feeling, but none of us discussed it during the war. It was a very personal feeling as well as a group feeling. One simply did the best he could and after that the hell with everything. The best was often beyond all imagination.

“When I study a Medal of Honor record - I can hardly believe it; yet I know that somehow it is true. Then I get busy and try to figure out in realistic terms how a man was able to do whatever he did.



-US Army photograph

Then I am overcome with a sense of awe and reverence at the capability of men; at the enormous nobility that might lie within anybody; at the cynic who will give his life in order that something and somebody might go on living. This is why I get sick when the army apologizes for itself; restricts information that would make heroes lesser than gods. They actually are greater than gods because they have battle human frailty while winning the greater battle.

“I also get deathly sick of those actually know nothing about war, yet presume to speak for it. When I was returned home and saw that the war had meant little or nothing to the people who had not shared it, I knew that we had lost; that all of the madness, death, and sacrifice had gone for nothing. So I cracked up and

never really recovered. I have always felt that the tragedy of war is not in the death of millions, but in the death of a single man for whom humanity will not take credit. If we can not truly assume the responsibility of the death of that one man, how can we assume it for millions? It seems to me that the atomic bomb is the workings of a divine justice. Any soldier knows that the bomb can kill him no deader than can a rifle bullet or a small piece of shrapnel. But for untold ages the forces of darkness have been held back by a thin, bloody, muddy line of lost men. They suffered, sacrificed, and died. And for the most part they were soon forgotten. Now nuclear weapons have put everybody on earth in the front lines. So suddenly the people are afraid. They forget, if they ever knew at all, than the men always sent out to die for them were also afraid; that they loved life as dearly as anybody else; but nevertheless they died. So to me it seems the supreme judgment that if we can not live together, we now must die together.

"I have tried to get somebody interested in doing a television series on the Medal of Honor. My idea of a format was this. A regular narrator would tell each story, first showing actual scenes of where the Medal-holder grew up: his home, his church, his school, his streets. Then have professional actors - reenact the deed that brought him the medal, ending with a brief pictorial account of what the man

is today. If he's in a grave, show that in stark close-up to let people know what victory in war really costs. As I read the numerous citations, it seemed to me that they contained great action and drama as well as representing the highest living ideals that we have produced in America - or even in mankind. I wanted the stories picked so that they would show that these men came from every walk of life; every race, every creed, every color that make up America. It would be a cross-section of a living democracy at its noblest. But I could never get anybody interested in the series. Almost nobody to whom I talked even understood the significance, or even the meaning, of the Medal of Honor.

"Not long after the war, Hollywood began to make a series of pictures against anti-Semitism, naturally dramatizing intolerance. When I saw these films, I felt like I was being hit over and over with a dead cat. So I tried to give some producer a story that I had picked up in the war. One day there appeared in the "B Bag" section of "The Stars And Stripes" a letter signed by four nurses. It was simply a letter written with great devotion and selflessness to tell the G.I.'s just how the nurses felt about the boys who were brought into them, frequently covered with mud and blood; and of the boys who might never be brought in but who they knew were still out there fighting. It was such a wonderfully simple, direct letter that it

had a great effect upon me. Hundreds of guys wrote "The Stars And Stripes" about it. I was in Belgium when the second part of the story was released. On the very night that letter was mailed, the hospital area came under German fire, and one of those four nurses was killed. She just happened to be Jewish. The story ended with just this line "She was buried among the fighting men she served, the Star of David at her head."

"Now here I saw a great positive story for the Jewish race. I wanted a producer to go back and pick up her life, showing how she grew up, how she loved the earth, how she loved love, how she loved life - and how in the end she gave it all up, because she loved humanity greater. I had a finish for the picture wherein the camera panned over a military cemetery, pulled to a close-up on that one grave with the Star of David, linger for a minute, and move on. There would be no preaching, no overt message. The final truth lay in that grave; in the entire cemetery where all had died for a common cause. I wanted the producers, if the parents of the girl needed money, to pay them for the story. If they did not need the money, then to establish a perpetual medical scholarship in that girl's name. That was all I wanted. I wanted nothing to do with writing or making the picture. But I could not get a single producer, many of whom were

Jewish, interested in the story. They wanted to continue to make the pictures damning intolerance and showing the question up in its worst light; and to my mind a very exaggerated light.

"I did not show Audie my letter to you until some days after it was mailed. He had been out of town. But upon reading a copy of the letter, he said it was the first time he could study the details of that action objectively as the letter seemed to have been written about somebody else, and not him. So he set me straight on a couple of points. From all accounts, it appeared that Company B was in an isolated position on that Holtzwihr front. The only thing I ever found in the records was that the Third Battalion was fighting to the south of Company B. So I assumed [sic⁴] that two units were connected, at least, loosely. But Murphy upon reading the account immediately recalled that his left flank was covered by a battered Company A, of the First Battalion. A unit of the 3rd Recon, Troop was supposed to have moved up and covered his right flank, but it never arrived, leaving that flank exposed. I have been trying to get this information out of him for seventeen years; but not until he saw the story in writing did he correct that point. He also said that he and Captain Coles actually ran into that group of armed, and still fighting Germans, upon turning a bend in

⁴ *assumed*

a rod. There was no village; and he still thought there were about four hundred of the Germans. There was no possible way to escape them except by bluff. So they took a long shot gamble and bluffed their way right through what could have been a trap with no escape.

“Since you have the battle record, we might as well try and straighten out Murphy's background, which has also been so distorted that nobody seems to know the truth. Audie was the sixth of nine living children. Two more died while babies. By birth Audie is almost pure Irish in blood except of a streak of Indian which he inherited from his mother, Josie. Murph was twelve, not sixteen, when his father left the family. Since the older children had either married or otherwise left home, Audie was the oldest one left at home. As such, he became the male head of the family at the age of twelve. He quit school before finishing the eighth grade to devote his entire time to work; and he never received any more formal education.

“His family had been share-croppers; that is, they worked other people's land for a share of the crops. This was a very common procedure in my boyhood. I also grew up as a share-cropper. On Murphy's discharge papers, his civilian profession is listed as “farmer”, meaning he was unskilled in any other form of labor. But since farm work is seasonal, Audie took other jobs to fill out the year.

He worked as a helper in a combination filling-station and grocery store - one of those little institutions that serve the rural South. His final job before entering the army was that of an unskilled helper in a radio shop in Greenville, Texas. Previous to induction, he had never made more than sixteen dollars a week. From his wages he paid his own way and helped his mother all that he could.

“Murphy began hunting for game, chiefly rabbits and squirrels, when he was a small boy. Although he enjoyed hunting, it was also a deadly serious business with him. The game was always needed to feed his family. Since he could afford little ammunition for lack of money, he did the next best thing. He learned not to miss his target. Thus he developed a deadly aim which came easily with his natural ability with weapons. He used both a twenty-two rifle and a shotgun. His ability with guns, thus developed, came in handy during the war.

“Audie was born on a farm near Kingston, Texas. He actually had no town, but worked in several briefly. Thus several claimed him after he became famous. He returned to Farmersville after being brought back from Europe only because his sister, Corrine, and her family lived there. All these - Greenville, Celeste, Kingston, Farmersville - are small towns in a farming area northeast of Dallas. I have never been able to find Celeste and Kingston on the map.

“When Murphy was sixteen, his mother died of cancer. At the time of her serious illness, she and the three younger children were living in Farmersville with Corrine. Audie was living and working in Celeste when he received word of her grave condition. It was then that he went to Farmersville. After his mother's death, the three younger Murphy children were put in an orphanage. Corrine, already overburdened with her own family, was unable to take care of them. And Audie was in no position to be both father and mother to them. He went to Greenville, where he got the job in the radio shop, and earned enough money to pay for his mother's funeral. He was in Greenville when the war broke out with Japan.

“On December 7, 1941, Audie met a man on a road who told him that the Japs had bombed Pearl Harbor. Murphy did not know what or where Pearl Harbor was. As his seventeenth birthday approached, he tried to enlist in both the Marines and Paratroops, but was turned down because of being underweight. I told Murph that I wanted to straighten out this age business for good. He said that he enlisted in the army on his seventeenth birthday, not his eighteenth. At his insistence, Corrine testified that he was eighteen. According to Murphy, his birth registration was destroyed in a court-house fire.

“In 1948, believe it or not, he had difficulty getting a passport, because he

could not prove that he was born in America. I was with him through this whole routine. So again Corrine had to testify that he was American-born so he could get a passport for his trip to France to receive the Legion of Honor.

“Audie enlisted in the army in Greenville, Texas - not Dallas - on June 20, 1942. But he did not report for active duty at Camp Wolters until ten days later. He had to wait until the army got enough recruits together to justify sending a bus-load for a distance. I do not know his weight and height upon enlistment; but his discharge papers, dated September 21, 1945, give his weight at 138 pounds and his height as five feet 7 1/2 inches. A former member of Company B told me that when he first saw Audie in North Africa, he was sure that the draft boards had scraped the bottom of the barrel. “To me Murphy looked like an underweight Boy Scout”, he said.

“During an early session of close order drill at Camp Wolters, Audie, weak from inoculations, fainted cold on the drill ground. He acquired the nickname of “baby”; and his company commander tried to send him to a cooks and bakers school. Murphy swore he would go to the guardhouse first. The co gave in and Murphy was trained as an infantry rifleman.

“At Fort Meade, Maryland, which served as a P.O.E. for Audie's group, Murphy

worked in the PX. His kindly superiors, still trying to save him from combat, offered him a permanent spot on the cadre at Fort Meade. Audie declined. He was made an acting sergeant on the boat to North Africa; and spent most of the time suffering from deathly seasickness. He also went to the latrine one night, lost his bunk, and did not find it until the next day. Left on board as a ship guard at Casablanca, Audie took a brief AWOL to see the town. He began breaking army rules early.

“Once in combat, he was still denied an opportunity to fight. His CO kept him in the rear as a runner, still trying to spare him. But Murphy slipped off on so many combat patrols that the CO gave in. He promoted Audie to corporal and sent him to the front, where he remained for most of the war. He went through seven battle campaigns and fought in all of them except the Tunisian one. When he joined Company B in the battle area, fighting was still going on but ceased before Audie's unit could go back into combat. Murphy was discharged as a first lieutenant and now holds the rank of major in the inactive reserves.

“I forgot to mention how much Murphy believed in weapons. When going into combat, he threw away all excess poundage, keeping his raincoat, a few rations, and all of the ammunition and grenades that he could carry. As a liaison officer, he had the usual fifty calibre

machine gun mounted on his jeep. He also carried several rifles, two German machine guns, and case of grenades. Strangers seeing this heavily armed and extremely youthful young soldier thought he was trying to play war.

“Since you are aiming your book at a young audience, I know you wish to give as visual a picture as possible. But I believe you made a few minor technical errors which I hope you don't mind my calling your attention to. In your sketch you say that Company B had shrunk from “198 to 55 men” since the landing in Southern France and the Holtzwihr battle. Actually the company was decimated and rebuilt time and again. Murphy thinks the unit was down to thirty-four men when he joined it, after hospitalization for malaria, on the Anzio beachhead. He arrived just in time to get in on three murderous days of assault designed to extend the beachhead. The 3rd Division history says that in this terrible battle some companies were reduced to twenty men. Audie, still weak from malaria, fought through the entire battle without getting a scratch. He was knocked briefly unconscious by a heavy shell concussion. That same concussion killed a friend just a few yards from Murphy. When Audie regained consciousness, he scrambled over the man. He found him stone dead without a single mark from metal.

"I pointed out that the Germans during the Holtzwihr attack were wearing snow capes. Thus their greenish grey uniforms were hidden. Incidentally I could not recall ever seeing a German tank with swastikas painted on them. So I asked Murphy about [sic⁵] it. He said that the Iron Cross, or a modification of it, was used on the tanks. I believe that the swastika was a political symbol, while the Iron Cross was a military one. Both Audie and I might be wrong about this matter; so you might check it.

"If memory serves, I believe that all weapons, including bayonets, had a dull finish for the express purpose of avoiding the reflection of sunlight. Otherwise they would have given positions away. I feel somewhat like a fool in telling a man of your rank and background of these possible small corrections. But you strike me as a man who wants things, even small details, right. So you might check out the above suggestions.

"Now back to Murphy's early background. Audie has seldom discussed his family with me. I thought for a long time that his father was dead; and he never told me the cause of his mother's death. I learned that from a family friend. He said that she died from cancer of the womb. This probably explains Audie's bitterness toward his father. He told me that his mother's bearing too many children too fast undoubtedly hastened

her death. Of course, the big thing between Murph and his father was the "desertion."

"How Audie actually feels towards his family, I don't know. He had a younger brother, Dick, who lived near Los Angeles. But I never met him. He died several years ago. Audie not only took care of the funeral, but served as a pallbearer for his brother. The latter is unusual. I was sick at the time, but Murphy came by my house after the burial. "I never asked God for much," he said, "but I did pray for Him to give Dick a chance. They opened his head and that was all - cancer of the brain. He never had a chance." You will understand why I don't question him much about the family.

"Now on the record we have very grim picture. But in all fairness to truth, it should be examined further. It is wrong to say that his mother supported eleven - or nine - children. I grew up on a share crop farm myself, and it was customary for the children to pitch in and help all they could as soon as they were old enough. I started working in the fields at the age of nine, which was not considered unusually young. Audie did tell me that his earliest memory is that of hanging from a tree swing on the edge of a field and watching his mother hoe cotton under a sweltering sun. By use of one of those escape-proof baby swings,

⁵ *about*

she could keep an eye on baby Audie while she worked. Naturally Mrs. Murphy's toil had to be endless. Besides the field work, she had to take care of her home and children. Murphy said that when he was going to school, his mother washed his denim pants every night. They shrank so much that the other kids called him "short- britches," which got him into many fights.

"Mrs. Murphy surely worked all the time that she had time and strength for. My mother, who was a widow, did the same. In retrospect I do not see how she stood up under the grueling years, but she did. We even had a lot of fun; and I was never conscious of being mistreated. I thought everybody worked as hard as we did. My point that is that Audie's boyhood, as grim as it was, could not have been entirely bleak. We often have laughs in recalling things that happened in our childhood. Incidentally taking younger children to the fields and allowing them to play in the shade while the elders worked was customary among the poor when I was a boy. There was simply no time for baby sitters.

"I never met Audie's father, but I have heard about him from people not related to the family. I make no brief for any man who deserts his family; but I try to look at him fairly. Being Irish, Mr. Murphy evidently had no sense of responsibility. Having come from generations of Irish, I know whereof I speak. "I liked the

father," said a friend, "but he had no more sense of responsibility than the wind. He had the heart of the Irish. He might, for instance, buy a load of groceries for his family and give them all away before he got home, thinking somebody else needed them more." My own grandfather was exactly like that. He deserted two families evidently without much thought as to how they would get along. But when he got ready to die, he simply crawled into an empty house and died alone. Through him I developed an understanding for wastrels.

"God knows Audie had hardship and poverty enough; but for a fair picture there has to be a modification. It is much to his credit that after he became famous, he also became broke and virtually homeless again. But he never allowed himself to be used by pink politicians; and they certainly tried to use him. Believe it or not, a magazine editor offered me a price to write an article explaining why Audie could not marry Wanda Hendrix because they could not afford it financially. I happened to know that between them, they were making around seven hundred dollars a week at the time; and I knew the editor was trying to use me. So I told him off in a very heated manner. He did not ask me to write further articles for him. I cite this as an example of how those boys tried to use Murphy with no desire to help him.

“If you don't mind my suggestion, I think the situation can be cleared without losing impact something like this. “One of nine living children born to a poverty-stricken sharecropper and his wife, Audie Murphy has faced adversity from the time he came into the world. At twelve, he had to assume the responsibilities of a man, became his father disappeared, leaving the family to exist as best it could in a shack in rural Texas. His mother toiled endlessly in cotton fields and at home to care for her brood. But the task was greater than her strength. Audie left school in the eighth grade to help out all that he could. He worked as a far hand, a helper in a filling station, and an errand boy in a radio shop, never earning more than sixteen dollars a week. To supplement his wages, he hunted game for the family. Since he could not afford to buy many shells, he learned never to miss his target. The skill he developed with a gun when hunting for food was later to pay off in the army.”

“This is a suggestion. Please take it as such. On his discharge papers, Murphy has “none” listed as his dependents. This is not accurate either, but I suppose Audie wanted [it] that way. Upon his return from the war, the people of Farmersville gave him a check for \$1750 as an expression of gratitude. Murphy used the money to make a down payment on a house for Corrine on the condition that she and her husband take back the three younger children. One of

his first acts on arriving home was to have the kids removed from the orphanage. He was always sending money to Corrine to help support the children and her own family in the early years that I knew him.

“There is something else that should be straightened out. As far as I have been able to determine, Audie is one of the two soldiers who was awarded every medal for valor in World War II. The other was Captain Maurice Britt, also of the 3rd Infantry Division. Britt got the British Military Cross, which was not given to Murphy. But Audie moved ahead of Britt with the Legion of Merit; the French Legion of Honor Chevalier; the French Croix de Guerre with Silver Star; the French Croix de Guerre with Two Palms; and the Belgium Croix de Guerre with Palm. I do not believe that Britt got a cluster for his Silver Star; or was awarded more than three Purple Hearts. It is silly to quibble about two such brave and able men. But just for the record, I am convinced that Audie Murphy was the soldier most decorated for valor in World War II or, possibly any other war in which America has engaged. Murphy never knew; and never give a damn. I did the checking.

“In closing, Colonel Reeder, I suppose that you have guessed that I have the highest admiration for Audie. I would do nothing to detract from the status he earned with his own courage, skill, and

ability. But I want you to see both him and his record in a realistic light. Audie was a child of destiny and not pathos. He was born to go far, because he was born with unusual gifts and with a brain on fire. If he had not made it in the army, he would have made it somewhere else. He had too many dreams to be really poor; too much anger to be pathetic; and too much humor for tragedy. With all of his sentiment, he is too fatalistic to worry a great deal about circumstances he cannot change.

“His story is uncompromisingly American: So poor that he could afford only one ragged pair of pants, he accomplished more by the time he was twenty-one than most people do in a life time. In tribute to his courage, he was given a standing ovation by both the Congress and the Senate. His portrait hangs by Sam Houston's in the State Capitol Building of Texas.

“James and Bill Cagney did bring him to Hollywood and put him under contract. But they did not make a star of him. He was never used in a picture by the Cagneys. In his first film, “Beyond Glory”, he played a small part as a West Point cadet. I got him a bit in his second film.

He was paid five hundred dollars and given four shirts for it. He gave me two of the shirts, remarking that they “were damned near as bad as the picture.” I would go easy on that factor about stranger's sending him defense bonds and his donating to the Red Cross. I doubt whether this was true. With the money he was sending to help out Corrine and his means of getting rid of cash, he had a hard time making ends meet for years.

“He once told me a story of picking black-eyed peas on a percentage basis. That is, he was paid off in peas. He started home with a sack full. But he met a man who traded him a thirty pound watermelon for his peas. Now the peas would have made some solid eating for the family; he the watermelon was a more generous gesture for the children.

“This is the story of your life,” I said. “Every time you get hold of a sack of black-eyed peas, somebody trades you a watermelon for them.” And this is about the truth.

Sincerely,
David McClure

Images of Stan Smith's Retyped Copy of Original

DAVID C. MCCLURE
12202 LA MAIDA
NORTH HOLLYWOOD, CALIF.

April 20, 1964

Colonel Red Reeder
1015 Merritt Road
West Point, New York

Dear Colonel Reeder:

I received your book "The Northern Generals", which I found good reading as well as informative. Thank you very much. I had no idea that you had written so much. Where do you find the time? After thirty years of trying, writing still comes hard to me. It's like a plague, which I can't quit and I can't beat. I'm stuck with it. Incidentally, Audie Murphy's oldest son, Terry, is a real student of the Civil War, although he is only eleven. I think that he would very much appreciate an autographed copy of your new book. Audie is too restless to do much reading outside the racing form. I call that his financial sheet. Fortunately his astounding memory enables him to pick up much at a glance. He speaks almost flawless English, having learned it simply by ear. And he can discuss with authority many subjects. He seems to know instinctively what to discard and what to retain; so, unlike me, he does not get bogged down with a lot of irrelevant facts.

I was glad that I could be of help in straightening out his Medal of Honor record. I wish that I could do the same for every man to whom that Medal was awarded. I did not know, until Frank McCarthy told me, that you were aiming your book at the younger generation. This is most important. Living as you do in a military world, you may be unaware of how ignorant most people are of the significance of military medals, and especially the Medal of Honor. I hope you make the meaning entirely clear. Today there seems to be an insidious, but very knowing, attack on the army. Especially is this true in motion pictures. I know a number of the men involved; and almost to a man they have a history of "liberal" or left-winged politics. I can not believe that their anti-war sentiments are accidental, but rather deliberate attempts to undermine the public faith in our military.

On the other hand, the military seems to fall just as badly when it has control of the propaganda. It tends to show war in an idealistic light, which destroys a value that truth might preserve and enhance, I do not for a minute believe that the soldiers at Valley Forge spent that dreadful winter in discussing

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the ideals of democracy or walking around in the snow with bare and bleeding feet. They probably cursed, raved, "liberated" anything that wasn't nailed down, drank, wrenched if possible, moaned, groaned, and complained such as soldiers have always done since the beginning of recorded time. The important thing is that they did endure and they did fight with a strength and heroism, almost beyond themselves, when they went into battle. This is also true of soldiers everywhere. It is an awesome experience to see ordinary men start measuring up to the great challenge. It is even more awesome to feel one's self measuring up to heights he did not know he possessed - and heights that he very possibly will never reach again. There is a line from an Emily Dickinson poem which goes: "We do not know how tall we are until we're called to rise."

I had twenty seven months in Europe during World War II with a small highly mobile Signal Corps company. I still do not know what the hell we did or what exactly we were supposed to do except keep moving and follow orders. I never got beyond the rank of corporal, but I did get deeply involved with the war; so deeply that I was never able to free myself from it. It was an experience far beyond anything I had ever imagined or could possibly imagine without the experience. I saw the incredible nobility of men, the incredible sacrifice, the incredible courage that conquered fear, and the incredible will to survive and keep driving. Yet I never knew one man who could tell me exactly why he fought beyond surviving as long as he could and keeping his unit going. I personally felt in time that the war had no beginning and it had no end. We were all going to die; and that did not matter. Some other men would be there to take our place and keep the unit driving. Many veterans have since told me that they had the same feeling, but none of us discussed it during the war. It was a very personal feeling as well as a group feeling. One simply did the best he could and after that the hell with everything. The best was often beyond all imagination.

When I study a Medal of Honor record - I can hardly believe it; yet I know that somehow it is true. Then I get busy and try to figure out in realistic terms how a man was able to do whatever he did. Then I am overcome with a sense of awe and reverence at the capability of men; at the enormous nobility that might lie within anybody; at the cynic who will give his life in order that something and somebody might go on living. This is why I get sick when the army apologizes for itself; restricts information that would make heroes lesser than gods. They actually are greater than gods because they have battle human frailty while winning the greater battle.

I also get deathly sick of those actually know nothing about war, yet presume to speak for it. When I was returned home and saw that the war had meant little or nothing to the people who had not shared it, I knew that we had lost; that all of the madness, death, and sacrifice had gone for nothing. So I cracked

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up and never really recovered. I have always felt that the tragedy of war is not in the death of millions, but in the death of a single man for whom humanity will not take credit. If we can not truly assume the responsibility of the death of that one man, how can we assume it for millions? It seems to me that the atomic bomb is the workings of a divine justice. Any soldier knows that the bomb can kill him no deader than can a rifle bullet or a small piece of shrapnel. But for untold ages the forces of darkness have been held back by a thin, bloody, muddy line of lost men. They suffered, sacrificed, and died. And for the most part they were soon forgotten. Now nuclear weapons have put everybody on earth in the front lines. So suddenly the people are afraid. They forget, if they ever knew at all, that the men always sent out to die for them were also afraid; that they loved life as dearly as anybody else; but nevertheless they died. So to me it seems the supreme judgment that if we can not live together, we now must die together.

I have tried to get somebody interested in doing a television series on the Medal of Honor. My idea of a format was this. A regular narrator would tell each story, first showing actual scenes of where the Medal-holder grew up: his home, his church, his school, his streets. Then have professional actors - reenact the deed that brought him the medal, ending with a brief pictorial account of what the man is today. If he's in a grave, show that in stark close-up to let people know what victory in war really costs. As I read the numerous citations, it seemed to me that they contained great action and drama as well as representing the highest living ideals that we have produced in America - or even in mankind. I wanted the stories picked so that they would show that these men came from every walk of life; every race, every creed, every color that make up America. It would be a cross-section of a living democracy at its noblest. But I could never get anybody interested in the series. Almost nobody to whom I talked even understood the significance, or even the meaning, of the Medal of Honor.

Not long after the war, Hollywood began to make a series of pictures against anti-semitism, naturally dramatizing intolerance. When I saw these films, I felt like I was being hit over and over with a dead cat. So I tried to give some producer a story that I had picked up in the war. One day there appeared in the "B Bag" section of "The Stars And Stripes" a letter signed by four nurses. It was simply a letter written with great devotion and selflessness to tell the G.I.'s just how the nurses felt about the boys who were brought into them, frequently covered with mud and blood; and of the boys who might never be brought in but who they knew were still out there fighting. It was such a wonderfully simple, direct letter that it had a great effect upon me. Hundreds of guys wrote "The Stars And Stripes" about it. I was in Belgium when the second part of the story was released. On the very night that letter was mailed, the hospital area came under German fire,

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and one of those four nurses was killed. She just happened to be Jewish. The story ended with just this line "She was buried among the fighting men she served, the Star of David at her head."

Now here I saw a great positive story for the Jewish race. I wanted a producer to go back and pick up her life, showing how she grew up, how she loved the earth, how she loved love, how she loved life - and how in the end she gave it all up, because she loved humanity greater. I had a finish for the picture wherein the camera panned over a military cemetery, pulled to a close-up on that one grave with the Star of David, linger for a minute, and move on. There would be no preaching, no overt message. The final truth lay in that grave; in the entire cemetery where all had died for a common cause. I wanted the producers, if the parents of the girl needed money, to pay them for the story. If they did not need the money, then to establish a perpetual medical scholarship in that girl's name. That was all I wanted. I wanted nothing to do with writing or making the picture. But I could not get a single producer, many of whom were Jewish, interested in the story. They wanted to continue to make the pictures damning intolerance and showing the question up in its worst light; and to my mind a very exaggerated light.

I did not show Audie my letter to you until some days after it was mailed. He had been out of town. But upon reading a copy of the letter, he said it was the first time he could study the details of that action objectively as the letter seemed to have been written about somebody else, and not him. So he set me straight on a couple of points. From all accounts, it appeared that Company B was in an isolated position on that Holtzwihr front. The only thing I ever found in the records was that the Third Battalion was fighting to the south of Company B. So I assumed that two units were connected, at least, loosely. But Murphy upon reading the account immediately recalled that his left flank was covered by a battered Company A, of the First Battalion. A unit of the 3rd Recon, Troop was supposed to have moved up and covered his right flank, but it never arrived, leaving that flank exposed. I have been trying to get this information out of him for seventeen years; but not until he saw the story in writing did he correct that point. He also said that he and Captain Coles actually ran into that group of armed, and still fighting Germans, upon turning a bend in a road. There was no village; and he still thought there were about four hundred of the Germans. There was no possible way to escape them except by bluff. So they took a long shot gamble and bluffed their way right through what could have been a trap with no escape.

Since you have the battle record, we might as well try and straighten out Murphy's background, which has also been so distorted that nobody seems to know the truth. Audie was the sixth of nine living children. Two more died while babies. By birth Audie is almost pure Irish in blood except of a streak of Indian

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which he inherited from his mother, Josie. Murph was twelve, not sixteen, when his father left the family. Since the older children had either married or otherwise left home, Audie was the oldest one left at home. As such, he became the male head of the family at the age of twelve. He quit school before finishing the eighth grade to devote his entire time to work; and he never received any more formal education.

His family had been share-croppers; that is, they worked other people's land for a share of the crops. This was a very common procedure in my boyhood. I also grew up as a share-cropper. On Murphy's discharge papers, his civilian profession is listed as "farmer", meaning he was unskilled in any other form of labor. But since farm work is seasonal, Audie took other jobs to fill out the year. He worked as a helper in a combination filling-station and grocery store - one of those little institutions that serve the rural South. His final job before entering the army was that of an unskilled helper in a radio shop in Greenville, Texas. Previous to induction, he had never made more than sixteen dollars a week. From his wages he paid his own way and helped his mother all that he could.

Murphy began hunting for game, chiefly rabbits and squirrels, when he was a small boy. Although he enjoyed hunting, it was also a deadly serious business with him. The game was always needed to feed his family. Since he could afford little ammunition for lack of money, he did the next best thing. He learned not to miss his target. Thus he developed a deadly aim which came easily with his natural ability with weapons. He used both a twenty-two rifle and a shotgun. His ability with guns, thus developed, came in handy during the war.

Audie was born on a farm near Kingston, Texas. He actually had no town, but worked in several briefly. Thus several claimed him after he became famous. He returned to Farmersville after being brought back from Europe only because his sister, Corrine, and her family lived there. All these - Greenville, Celeste, Kingston, Farmersville, are small towns in a farming area northeast of Dallas. I have never been able to find Celeste and Kingston on the map.

When Murphy was sixteen, his mother died of cancer. At the time of her serious illness, she and the three younger children were living in Farmersville with Corrine. Audie was living and working in Celeste when he received word of her grave condition. It was then that he went to Farmersville. After his mother's death, the three younger Murphy children were put in an orphanage. Corrine, already overburdened with her own family, was unable to take care of them. And Audie was in no position to be both father and mother to them. He went to Greenville, where he got the job in the radio shop, and earned enough money to pay for his mother's funeral. He was in Greenville when the war broke out with Japan.

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On December 7, 1941, Audie met a man on a road who told him that the Japs had bombed Pearl Harbor. Murphy did not know what or where Pearl Harbor was. As his seventeenth birthday approached, he tried to enlist in both the Marines and Paratroops, but was turned down because of being underweight. I told Murph that I wanted to straighten out this age business for good. He said that he enlisted in the army on his seventeenth birthday, not his eighteenth. At his insistence, Corrine testified that he was eighteen. According to Murphy, his birth registration was destroyed in a court-house fire.

In 1948, believe it or not, he had difficulty getting a passport, because he could not prove that he was born in America. I was with him through this whole routine. So again Corrine had to testify that he was American-born so he could get a passport for his trip to France to receive the Legion of Honor.

Audie enlisted in the army in Greenville, Texas - not Dallas - on June 20, 1942. But he did not report for active duty at Camp Wolters until ten days later. He had to wait until the army got enough recruits together to justify sending a bus-load for a distance. I do not know his weight and height upon enlistment; but his discharge papers, dated September 21, 1945, give his weight at 138 pounds and his height as five feet 7 1/2 inches. A former member of Company B told me that when he first saw Audie in North Africa, he was sure that the draft boards had scraped the bottom of the barrel. "To me Murphy looked like an underweight Boy Scout", he said.

During an early session of close order drill at Camp Wolters, Audie, fank from incultations, fainted cold on the drill ground. He acquired the nickname of "baby"; and his company commander tried to send him to a cooks and bakers school. Murphy swore he would go to the guardhouse first. The CO gave in and Murphy was trained as an infantry rifleman.

At Fort Meade, Maryland, which served as a P.O.E. for Audie's group, Murphy worked in the PX. His kindly superiors, still trying to save him from combat, offered him a permanent spot on the cadre at Fort Meade. Audie declined. He was made an acting sergeant on the boat to North Africa; and spent most of the time suffering from deathly seasickness. He also went to the latrine one night, lost his bunk, and did not find it until the next day. Left on board as a ship guard at Casablanca, Audie took a brief AWOL to see the town. He began breaking army rules early.

Once in combat, he was still denied an opportunity to fight. His CO kept him in the rear as a runner, still trying to spare him. But Murphy slipped off on so many combat patrols that the CO gave in. He promoted Audie to corporal and sent him to the front, where he remained for most of the war. He went through seven battle campaigns and fought in all of them except the

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death. I learned that from a family friend. He said that she died from cancer of the womb. This probably explains Audie's bitterness toward his father. He told me that his mother's bearing too many children too fast undoubtedly hastened her death. Of course, the big thing between Murph and his father was the "desertion."

How Audie actually feels towards his family, I don't know. He had a younger brother, Dick, who lived near Los Angeles. But I never met him. He died several years ago. Audie not only took care of the funeral, but served as a pallbearer for his brother. The latter is unusual. I was sick at the time, but Murph came by my house after the burial. "I never asked God for much," he said, "but I did pray for Him to give Dick a chance. They opened his head and that was all - cancer of the brain. He never had a chance." You will understand why I don't question him much about the family.

Now on the record we have very grim picture. But in all fairness to truth, it should be examined further. It is wrong to say that his mother supported eleven - or nine - children. I grew up on a share crop farm myself, and it was customary for the children to pitch in and help all they could as soon as they were old enough. I started working in the fields at the age of nine, which was not considered unusually young. Audie did tell me that his earliest memory is that of hanging from a tree swing on the edge of a field and watching his mother hoe cotton under a sweltering sun. By use of one of those escape-proof baby swings, she could keep an eye on baby Audie while she worked. Naturally Mrs. Murphy's toil had to be endless. Besides the field work, she had to take care of her home and children. Murph said that when he was going to school, his mother washed his denim pants every night. They shrank so much that the other kids called him "short-britches," which got him into many fights.

Mrs. Murphy surely worked all the time that she had time and strength for. My mother, who was a widow, did the same. In retrospect I do not see how she stood up under the grueling years, but she did. We even had a lot of fun; and I was never conscious of being mistreated. I thought everybody worked as hard as we did. My point that is that Audie's boyhood, as grim as it was, could not have been entirely bleak. We often have laughs in recalling things that happened in our childhood. Incidentally taking younger children to the fields and allowing them to play in the shade while the elders worked was customary among the poor when I was a boy. There was simply no time for baby sitters.

I never met Audie's father, but I have heard about him from people not related to the family. I make no brief for any man who deserts his family; but I try to look at him fairly. Being Irish, Mr. Murph evidently had no sense of responsibility. Having come from generations of Irish, I know whereof I speak. "I liked the father," said a friend, "but he had no more sense of

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Tunisian one. When he joined Company B in the battle area, fighting was still going on but ceased before Audie's unit could go back into combat. Murph was discharged as a first lieutenant and now holds the rank of major in the inactive reserves.

I forgot to mention how much Murph believed in weapons. When going into combat, he threw away all excess poundage, keeping his raincoat, a few rations, and all of the ammunition and grenades that he could carry. As a liaison officer, he had the usual fifty calibre machine gun mounted on his jeep. He also carried several rifles, two German machine guns, and case of grenades. Strangers seeing this heavily armed and extremely youthful young soldier thought he was trying to play war.

Since you are aiming your book at a young audience, I know you wish to give as visual a picture as possible. But I believe you made a few minor technical errors which I hope you don't mind my calling your attention to. In your sketch you say that Company B had shrunk from "198 to 55 men" since the landing in Southern France and the Holtzwihr battle. Actually the company was decimated and rebuilt time and again. Murph thinks the unit was down to thirty-four men when he joined it, after hospitalization for malaria, on the Anzio beachhead. He arrived just in time to get in on three murderous days of assault designed to extend the beachhead. The 3rd Division history says that in this terrible battle some companies were reduced to twenty men. Audie, still weak from malaria, fought through the entire battle without getting a scratch. He was knocked briefly unconscious by a heavy shell concussion. That same concussion killed a friend just a few yards from Murph. When Audie regained consciousness, he scrambled over the man. He found him stone dead without a single mark from metal.

I pointed out that the Germans during the Holtzwihr attack were wearing snow capes. Thus their greenish grey uniforms were hidden. Incidentally I could not recall ever seeing a German tank with swastikas painted on them. So I asked Murph about it. He said that the Iron Cross, or a modification of it, was used on the tanks. I believe that the swastika was a political symbol, while the Iron Cross was a military one. Both Audie and I might be wrong about this matter; so you might check it.

If memory serves, I believe that all weapons, including bayonets, had a dull finish for the express purpose of avoiding the reflection of sunlight. Otherwise they would have given positions away. I feel somewhat like a fool in telling a man of your rank and background of these possible small corrections. But you strike me as a man who wants things even small details, right. So you might check out the above suggestions.

Now back to Murph's early background. Audie has seldom discussed his family with me. I thought for a long time that his father was dead; and he never told me the cause of his mother's

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responsibility than the wind. He had the heart of the Irish. He might, for instance, buy a load of groceries for his family and give them all away before he got home, thinking somebody else needed them more. "My own grandfather was exactly like that. He deserted two families evidently without much thought as to how they would get along. But when he got ready to die, he simply crawled into an empty house and died alone. Through him I developed an understanding for wastrels.

God knows Audie had hardship and poverty enough; but for a fair picture there has to be a modification. It is much to his credit that after he became famous, he also became broke and virtually homeless again. But he never allowed himself to be used by pink politicians; and they certainly tried to use him. Believe it or not, a magazine editor offered me a price to write an article explaining why Audie could not marry Wanda Hendrix because they could not afford it financially. I happened to know that between them, they were making around seven hundred dollars a week at the time; and I knew the editor was trying to use me. So I told him off in a very heated manner. He did not ask me to write further articles for him. I cite this as an example of how those boys tried to use Murph with no desire to help him.

If you don't mind my suggestion, I think the situation can be cleared without losing impact something like this. "One of nine living children born to a poverty-stricken sharecropper and his wife, Audie Murph has faced adversity from the time he came into the world. At twelve, he had to assume the responsibilities of a man, because his father disappeared, leaving the family to exist as best it could in a shack in rural Texas. His mother toiled endlessly in cotton fields and at home to care for her brood. But the task was greater than her strength. Audie left school in the eighth grade to help out all that he could. He worked as a far hand, a helper in a filling station, and an errand boy in a radio shop, never earning more than sixteen dollars a week. To supplement his wages, he hunted game for the family. Since he could not afford to buy many shells, he learned never to miss his target. The skill he developed with a gun when hunting for food was later to pay off in the army."

This is a suggestion. Please take it as such. On his discharge papers, Murph has "none" listed as his dependents. This is not accurate either, but I suppose Audie wanted that way. Upon his return from the war, the people of Farmersville gave him a check for \$1750 as an expression of gratitude. Murph used the money to make a down payment on a house for Corrine on the condition that she and her husband take back the three younger children. One of his first acts on arriving home was to have the kids removed from the orphanage. He was always sending money to Corrine to help support the children and her own family in the early years that I knew him.

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There is something else that should be straightened out. As far as I have been able to determine, Audie is one of the two soldiers who was awarded every medal for valor in World War II. The other was Captain Maurice Britt, also of the 3rd Infantry Division. Britt got the British Military Cross, which was not given to Murphy. But Audie moved ahead of Britt with the Legion of Merit; the French Legion of Honor Chevalier; the French Croix de Guerre with Silver Star; the French Croix de Guerre with Two Palms; and the Belgium Croix de Guerre with Palm. I do not believe that Britt got a cluster for his Silver Star; or was awarded more than three Purple Hearts. It is silly to quibble about two such brave and able men. But just for the record, I am convinced that Audie Murphy was the soldier most decorated for valor in World War II or, possibly any other war in which America has engaged. Murphy never knew; and never give a damn. I did the checking.

In closing, Colonel Reeder, I suppose that you have guessed that I have the highest admiration for Audie. I would do nothing to detract from the status he earned with his own courage, skill, and ability. But I want you to see both him and his record in a realistic light. Audie was a child of destiny and not pathos. He was born to go far, because he was born with unusual gifts and with a brain on fire. If he had not made it in the army, he would have made it somewhere else. He had too many dreams to be really poor; too much anger to be pathetic; and too much humor for tragedy. With all of his sentiment, he is too fatalistic to worry a great deal about circumstances he cannot change.

His story is uncompromisingly American: So poor that he could afford only one ragged pair of pants, he accomplished more by the time he was twenty-one than most people do in a life time. In tribute to his courage, he was given a standing ovation by both the congress and the Senate. His portrait hangs by Sam Houston's in the State Capitol Building of Texas.

James and Bill Cagney did bring him to Hollywood and put him under contract. But they did not make a star of him. He was never used in a picture by the Cagneys. In his first film, "Beyond Glory", he played a small part as a West Point cadet. I got him a bit in his second film. He was paid five hundred dollars and given four shirts for it. He gave me two of the shirts, remarking that they "were damned near as bad as the picture." I would go easy on that factor about stranger's sending him defense bonds and his donating to the Red Cross. I doubt whether this was true. With the money he was sending to help out Corrine and his means of getting rid of cash, he had a hard time making ends meet for years.

He once told me a story of picking black-eyed peas on a percentage basis. That is, he was paid off in peas. He started home with a sack full. But he met a man who traded him a thirty pound watermelon for his peas. Now the peas would have made some

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solid eating for the family; he the watermelon was a more generous gesture for the children.

"This is the story of your life," I said. "Every time you get hold of a sack of black-eyed peas, somebody trades you a watermelon for them." And this is about the truth.

Sincerely,

David McClure

David McClure's¹ First Letter to Col. Red Reeder² dated March 27, 1964

From the Stan Smith Collection, Historical Research Center, Texas Heritage Museum, Hill College, Hillsboro Texas

Comments? Comments are welcome. Just use the link below to our message board.
<https://www.audiemurphy.com/msgb/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=4802>

“DEAR COLONEL REEDER:
Frank McCarthy contacted Audie Murphy about the Medal of Honor biographical sketch you wish to include in your book. And Audie turned the matter over to me. He asked me first to thank you for your interest; to assure you that he would be honored to appear in a book with your by-line; and to wish you success on the project. But he asked me to give you the straight facts on the action that brought him the Medal of Honor. The truth has been so distorted by publicity, haphazard news accounts, and the motion picture “To Hell and Back” that it is hardly recognizable anymore.

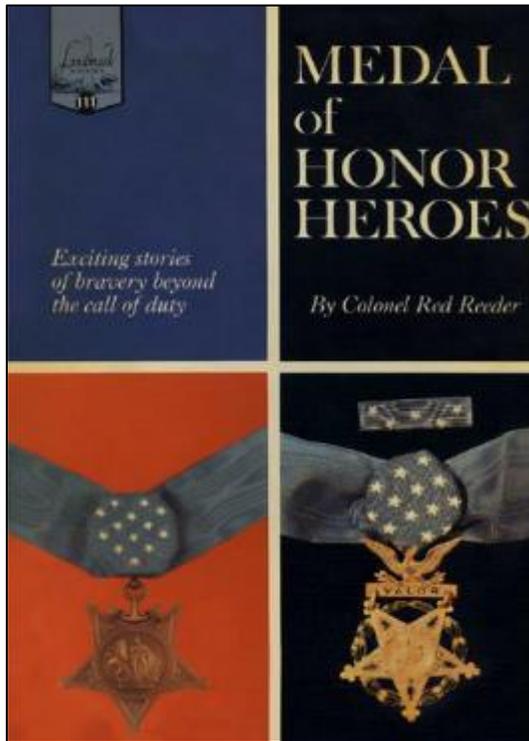
“I have been a close personal friend of Audie's for around seventeen years; and he often says that I know more about him than he does himself. I helped him put his autobiography – that is, the book

Editor's note: Colonel (Col.) Russell Potter “Red” Reeder, author of notable historical works including *Medal of Honor Heroes* was a West Point graduate, class of 1926, who served on active duty until 1946. He later became a West Point instructor (<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/80690926/russell-potter-reeder>). Based on an inquiry, David McClure – Audie Murphy's friend, writer, and biographer – responded with two letters. A copy of McClure's responses were later given by McClure to Stan Smith, Audie Murphy National Fan Club President, who communicated with McClure and often shared other information. Smith's collection of documents were recently turned over to the Heritage Museum of Hill College with his recent passing in 2021.

version – together in 1948. In the summer of that year, Audie was invited

¹ David C. McClure was a World War II veteran who later became a writer and columnist in Hollywood. McClure and Murphy became friends after the war. McClure transcribed and edited Murphy's biographical account *To Hell and Back* as Audie Murphy dictated the story to him. McClure and Murphy's friendship continued through the years until Murphy's death in a plane crash in 1971.

² Reeder, R. P., & Walker, G.-. (1965). *Medal of Honor Heroes*. Random House.



-Photo from Amazon.com

Book cover from "Medal of Honor Heroes" written by Colonel "Red Reeder"

to France to receive the Legion of Honor; and I went along with him. We visited two of his old battlefields: The one that brought him the Distinguished Service Cross; and the other that brought him the Medal of Honor. With Audie, I studied the features of the terrain while he explained to me what happened. I also made some rough pencil sketches of the battlefields while the memory was still fresh.

"The account of how Audie won the Medal of Honor in the book "To Hell and Back" is fairly accurate. At the time of the writing Audie was too exhausted and indifferent to details to give a good

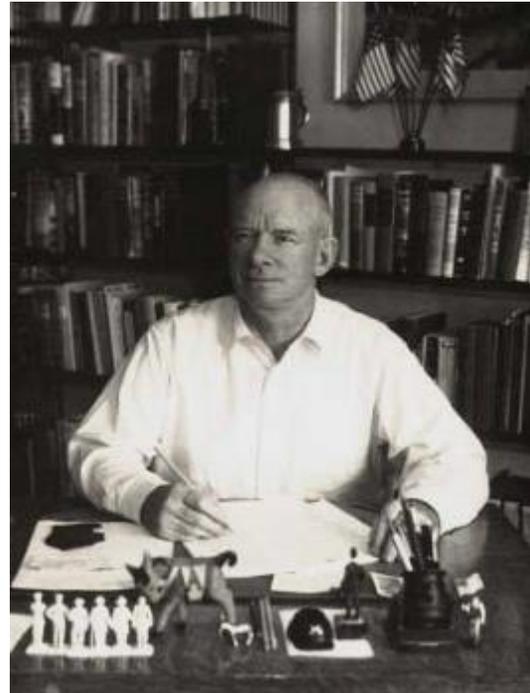
picture, however. The film version of the action made me sick because it caught neither the drama nor the truth. Audie does not like to discuss the war and especially his part in it. This is not due to modesty or remembered horror. The subject bores him unutterably. So for the past seventeen years I have tried to uncover the real record. The job has not been easy. I have studied maps, newspaper accounts, citations, letters. I have talked to men who were in his company. And Audie himself will talk to me for about fifteen minutes at a time about the war before he gets bored. So I have pieced together the record as accurately as I know how.

"The reason I have dedicated myself to this job is that I believe that Murphy will some day be a legend in the true sense. In an age of nuclear warfare, no other man will likely have the opportunity to do what he did as an infantryman. So I am going to tell you the truth in an effort to give you as complete a picture as possible. Naturally the material will be too long. But you can cut it as you see fit. I am sure that you would rather have the real story. You are in a position to help straighten the record out. I would personally appreciate your help. And I'm sure Audie would too.

"I have often wondered what the real story was behind Sergeant Alvin York in World War I. As you know, it is practically impossible to translate military

maneuvers into a language that the civilian can understand. York is credited with killing twenty Germans, forcing the surrender of 132 more, and capturing thirty-five machine guns with a rifle. Undoubtedly he was a very brave and able man, but I cannot see how he could possibly have performed this feat unless the Germans, who were already thoroughly beaten, were just ready to surrender. Any soldier knows that one machine gun against a rifle is a pretty rugged affair. Just before I entered the Army myself, I was on the set where they were filming the story of Sergeant York, and I asked the director, Howard Hawks, who he was going to show this action. He replied, "Do you mean whether I believe it or not?" I told him yes. He said he did not believe the action took place according to the records, but he was going to try to stage it to make it appear possible. I later saw the picture, and he did a fairly good job of it except for one thing. Any soldier knows those Germans wouldn't have put themselves in such a position, even for Howard Hawks.

"To understand Murphy the soldier, one must first understand Murphy the man. His natural looks are most deceiving. Beneath that shy exterior is a keg of dynamite with the fuse lit. Inwardly he is as hard as steel. He has the Irish temperament in spades, with his moods constantly changing. He has more natural humor than Bob Hope. The Murphy humor is scathing and



-Source: [The Story of the Mexican War](#)

Colonel Red Reeder, veteran, author, historian, and West Point Instructor

penetrating, striking at the very roots of the folly of man. It operates best when he is under great pressure. He has the mind of a genius, and I do not use the word mind lightly. But he has never cultivated it properly. Again typically Irish, his mind is at constant war with his emotions with the latter usually dominating.

"I have never seen a man with such fast reflexes. With him, to think is to act. But if he thinks too much, he loses the advantage of reflex. For instance, we have often hunted quail. If Audie fires on instinct, he is deadly accurate. But if he starts tracking the bird with his gun, he is apt to miss. His vision is fabulous. It must be far better than twenty-twenty. He

often points out tiny objects to me at night; and even with his help I cannot see them except upon close inspection. His sense of smell is very acute. He is annoyed by odors that I cannot even detect. During the war, he was sent out to capture prisoners for intelligence on night patrols. He was able to locate the Germans by the smell of the tobacco they smoked and thus gain the advantage of surprise.

“Although he took no care of his teeth for years, he still does not have a single cavity. We have the same dentist; and he told me that Audie had one of the best sets of teeth he had ever seen. Murphy's memory is photographic. After a glance at a movie script, he will go before the camera and do the scene. He loathes acting, incidentally, but find that it is the easiest way for him to make a living. His greatest pleasure is found in gambling. Given the right odds he would bet that the sun wasn't shining at high noon on a cloudless day and then try to prove it. He lives life as if he were constantly playing a long shot. He fought the war the same way, using every physical and mental asset to back up his gamble.

“Briefly Audie is a physical and mental phenomenon. He seems to be a mutation by birth as he resembles none of his relatives that I have met except in looks. This is the type of boy that went to war. I assure you that his fantastic war record is no more fantastic than his

character. His string of medals was no accident. I have never understood what motivated Audie in combat. He has a strange sense of loyalty. He might take my last pair of shoes if he needed them; but there is nobody on whom I would call faster in a real emergency. He would somehow get through hell and high water to come to my aid. He has often said that he could not operate unless he had his back against the wall. So in civilian life, as in war, that is where he usually keeps his back – straight against the wall. “I never seek trouble,” he says. “Trouble has a way of looking me up.”

“Audie has a flaring temper, but is incapable of prolonged anger. He has too much humor. His sense of loyalty – call it esprit de corps – led him to stick with his beloved Company B, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment throughout the war. He joined the company as a replacement private in North Africa. Winning every promotion in the field, he was the commanding officer of Company B in less than two years. Between Sicily and Rome, he was knocked out by malaria three times. He does not know exactly how many times he was wounded. But he has a Purple Heart with two clusters. The sheer luck of the Irish saved his life on occasions. For instance, a mortar shell struck between his feet, knocking him unconscious by concussion, tearing off part of one shoe, and breaking the stock of the carbine which he held in his hands. He had caught the base of the cone-

shaped explosion, missing the shower of steel, which killed several men standing a few yards away. Audie went to the rear, had his foot dressed, got a new pair of shoes, and returned to action within a few days.

“He stuck in the front lines at Anzio until he collapsed from malaria, blacking out completely. At the time he was a platoon sergeant. Two of his men, finding him unconscious and therefore unable to resist, carried him to an aid station on an old door. He awoke in a hospital too

weak to move. But within ten days he was back in the lines and fighting.

“He was not a model soldier by the book. On Anzio, Company B was pulled out of the lines for a brief rest. Audie had been recommended for a promotion from staff to tech sergeant. But he disobeyed an order to put his men through close order drill. He refused to drill the men until they had found proper quarters for the rest period. His promotion was turned down; and Murphy was used as a public example of how a soldier should not act.



-Source: Lillian Bailey Collection

Audie Murphy and Spec McClure revisit the battlefield at Ramatuelle, France - 1948

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

“In France he was sent on a night reconnaissance patrol with strict orders not to fire unless in an absolute emergency. But he detected a German patrol slipping down the road toward him and he could not resist the opportunity to stir up a quiet fight. He stationed his men to one side of the road, fixed his bayonet, and charged the lead German. The bayonet hit, but failed to kill. The German screamed, and all hell broke loose as the frightened and confused patrols fought their way out of what was thought to be a trap. Upon reporting his mission, he said, “Sir, a German started screaming out there, and we had to shoot him.” A weary colonel guessed the truth. “Yes, goddamit, I know, Murphy,” he said. “You won't be happy until you get yourself killed.” Audie was disappointed in his attitude. As per order he had not fired until the Germans started shooting. He had merely used a bayonet.

“Audie is not a devil-may-care kind of fellow. In the war he was often very frightened; but he never allowed fear to stand in his way. He has told me that when moving into a fight, he had the feeling that somebody had stuck a cold hand in the middle of his intestines and was twisting them into knots. But the feeling went away usually once he got into action. He also told me that it seemed that he had been grappling with fear all his life. He and fear had each

other by the throat, and he never knew which was going to conquer.

“This then is a brief sketch of the man beneath the uniform: Tough as nails, yet as sensitive as dawn; an exhibitor of extreme courage who grapples with fear; a man perfectly coordinated for combat; a man endowed with acute physical and mental resources; and a man who could laugh at his own epitaph. He was no Boy Scout. He did not know that he was regarded as a hero until brought home. Upon learning the public attitude, he ducked the homecoming celebration in San Antonio, went to a hotel, and fell asleep, missing the banquet at which he was announced as the most decorated foot soldier of World War II. Newspaper reporters awakened him to give him the information. He used the occasion to borrow a ride to Dallas from one of the reporters. But he paid for the ride. The reporter wrote an article quoting Murphy on “Why We Fight”. It was a complete dream-up and so flowery that Audie, had he read it, would have been aghast. I still have a copy of it. From then on Murphy was never able to escape publicity. He said that he would not talk; so the reporters wrote their own stories. I knew him for years before I ever saw his medals. Three days ago he called to ask if I had his citations. I told him that I did not. He said then somebody must have thrown them away. He didn't know what became of them. For his wounds he receives \$107.⁰⁰ a month compensation.

He hasn't the slightest idea whether or not he was the most decorated soldier of World War II. Nor does he care. "I know no live heroes," he says. "All the real heroes are dead." That about sums up his attitude.

"Thus you may see, Colonel Reeder, why somebody like me must keep the records if they are to be kept. Any writer who has asked me about Audie I have told the truth. They have refused to believe me as my description does not fit the public image. The real image is far more intriguing to my mind.

"The story of how Audie got the Medal of Honor should properly begin with October, 1944. At the beginning of the month the advance of the 15th Infantry Regiment has been stopped by a fiercely defended German strongpoint known as the Cleurie rock quarry in the Vosge Mountains. On October 2nd, 1st Battalion Commander Lt. Col. Michael Paulick took out a daylight patrol to reconnoiter enemy defenses. The patrol was ambushed and pinned down by a German machine gun approximately 35 yards from the Americans.

"Murphy was not officially on the patrol but had tagged along slightly in its rear. Upon hearing the fire, he worked his way to fifteen yards from the gun and stood

up to throw a grenade. The Germans saw him, turned the machine gun upon him, and fired. But the barrel struck a bush, deflecting the aim, and the Germans missed Audie. Before the enemy could recover, Murphy had thrown two grenades into the nest, killing four of the crew and wounding three more; thereby destroying the position and relieving the patrol. For this action he was later awarded the Silver Star.

"Three days later, on October 5th, Company B, was again stopped about two and a half miles beyond the quarry. The Germans were in a strange defensive position, having machine gun installations on a downward slope of a hill. Their infantry soldiers were in foxholes covered by criss-crosses trees. Murphy, then a staff sergeant, moved down the hill with twenty-seven men to get a closer look at the enemy positions. The weather was rainy and visibility poor. The Germans discovered Murphy's maneuver and fired at the group with a machine gun. Six of the men were killed or wounded before they could drop to the ground.

"Audie grabbed a 536 radio³ and moved forward alone to a spot where he could observe. He called down 4.2 chemical mortar fire on the Germans for approximately an hour. While directing

antenna and operated with a large rubber button on one side. It featured a microphone and ear piece on an adjacent side and had a range of about 300 feet in unobstructed conditions.

³ The SCR-536 was a five-pound hand held radio powered by a large dry-cell battery and vacuum tubes. It was turned on by extending a metal

the mortars by radio, he kept the Germans away from his position with a carbine, engaging in several close-range duels. Official records list fifteen Germans killed and thirty-five wounded in the fight, mostly by the accurately directed mortars. For his action Murphy was again awarded the Silver Star, thus receiving the same medal twice in three days.

“On October 14th, Audie, with two other enlisted men, was called to Regimental Headquarters. The three received field commissions as second lieutenants.

“On October 26th, Murphy, while directing his platoon through a forest area, received a severe hip wound from a German sniper, who fired from a camouflaged foxhole at a thirty-five yards distance. Audie, knocked down by the bullet and unable to rise, killed the sniper with a single shot from his carbine.

“Because of weather conditions, Murphy did not reach a general hospital for three days. Meanwhile, his wound had become gangrenous. He virtually had to learn to walk again. In early January of 1945, he was still in a state of convalescence. But tired of the monotony of hospital life, he did not wait for orders. Collecting his gear, he returned to the front and rejoined his old Company B.

“At the time the Third Division was engaged in the reduction of the Colmar Pocket, an engagement later regarded as the division's second toughest assignment of the entire war. The Pocket, a huge and heavily fortified bulge stretching from the Rhine into France, had to be eliminated. Strategically it amounted to a strong bridgehead from which a counter attack could be launched. It also posed a constant and harassing threat to the right flank of the Seventh Army. The Germans were daily building up the strength of the Pocket.

“The terrain, studded by forests and fields, consisted of gently rolling hills and much flat ground. The earth was frozen solid by weather temperatures that seldom rose above fourteen degrees. The conditions thus were almost perfect for heavy armor. When Audie rejoined the division, the snow was almost knee deep. His Company B was at full combat strength, including a surplus of officers. Murphy was not then given a platoon.

“On January 22, 1945, the division was ordered to begin a full-scale coordinated attack against the strongly defended positions of the Germans across the Fecht River. With an enormous supply of armor, the enemy had turned virtually every village in the area into a powerful fortress. The 7th and 30th Infantry Regiments crossed the Fecht River and fought their way to the Ill River capturing

a bridge, known as the Maison Rouge, across the Ill.

“The little bridge was to play an important role in battle development; for upon it depended getting armor across the stream to support the infantry attacks. Anticipating the capture of the bridge, the division had rushed supplies and armor to the area so that an immediate crossing could be effected [sic]⁴. But the first tank that tested the bridge caved in the structure, rendering it useless for vehicles.

“The 30th Infantry soldiers had already crossed the Ill. Its attack had been coordinated with a drive by the 7th Infantry on its right flank and a similar push by the French on the left flank. The immediate objective was a large forest, known as the Bois de Riedwihr, which stretched between two powerfully fortified villages: Riedwihr and Holtzwihr.

“By the afternoon of the 23rd, the 30th, without armor support, had captured the forest and reached the outskirts of the two villages. The advance had been so rapid that the forward artillery observers had not established radio communications. Nevertheless the 30th continued its attack. Without a vestige of cover and with no possibility of digging into the frozen earth, the 3rd Battalion was hit by ten German tanks and tank

destroyers with an estimated 100 infantrymen on the outskirts of Holtzwihr. The unit was cut to pieces. The survivors managed to fall back to the Ill.

“The same fate befell the 1st Battalion on the outskirts of Riedwihr. The 2nd Battalion managed to cross the Ill, but was likewise thrown back by the enemy's murderous armor assault.

“With the 30th battered, under strength, and badly disorganized, the 15th Regiment was committed to the attack on January 24th. The 3rd Battalion went in first, but was stopped by a counterattack.

“The 1st Battalion, to which Audie Murphy belonged, entered the battle, moving through the 3rd, and driving to the Bois de Riedwihr. Still without armor support, the unit was soon knocked out of the forest but refused to retreat to the Ill. The soldiers managed to get cover in shell holes.

“Audie, still wearing a bandage over his wounded hip, remembers that he dropped off to sleep and his hair froze to the ground on that first night of attack. The following day he was knocked down by a mortar shell blast. His lower legs were peppered with steel fragments, which he still carries in his flesh. All accounts say that he received those

⁴ affected

wounds on the third day of battle. But the truth is: The second day, or the 25th of January.

“Murphy did not stop for first aid. The wounds were painful, but only slightly disabling. For the remainder of the battle, however, he could not walk without limping. During the ferocious counterattack, Audie saw the two men who had been commissioned with him jump into a shell hole. There they received a direct hit by a mortar shell, and both were killed.

“During the night of January 24-25th, engineers had bridged the Ill River, enabling armor to cross. Three tanks joined the 1st Battalion. Two were destroyed by the Germans; and the third, with its main gun out of commission, had to withdraw from the fight. But more armor moved up. The 1st Battalion again moved into the forest; and Battalion headquarters were established in a farmhouse in the woods.

“By midnight on January 25th, Company B had penetrated the Bois de Riedwihr to a depth of about six hundred yards when it halted because of an ammunition shortage. Having started the fight with around 155 men and six officers, the company had been cut to two officers and about twenty-eight men in the two days of ferocious combat. The others had been either killed or wounded. Around one o'clock in the morning, fresh

supplies and five replacements reached the company. The figures are approximate as Audie is depending upon his memory; but the records bear him out as being approximately right.

“A senior officer, a first lieutenant, was in charge of the company as it was ordered to advance to the edge of the forest with two tank destroyers and hold the line there until relieved. As the Germans still were in the woods, but in poor strength, the company advanced with bursts of precautionary fire but had no fight. Reaching their destination, the men tried to dig in, but could barely chip the frozen ground. Thus they were without cover except for sparse trees. During the night the senior officer was wounded by mortar or shell fire. He was evacuated, and Murphy was ordered by telephone to take over command. Having started with Company B as a private less than two years before, he thus became its commanding officer.

“During the night when the men could not dig in, Murphy kept them stamping around in the snow to prevent their feet from freezing. He had strung them along a three hundred yard front at the edge of the forest. His right flank was left completely exposed. The left was loosely connected with men of probably the 3rd Battalion, which was also badly under strengthened. When dawn broke Audie studied the situation, fearing an attack. The weather was extremely cold and

quite cloudy. At his company position the Bois de Riedwihr ended abruptly at the center. However on each side the forest continued in thick long fingers toward the village of Holtzwihr, giving the shape of a huge rough U. Company B held the right portion of the U butt. Between the fingers of trees were open fields extending to Holtzwihr, about a mile away. The village was in plain sight of the men on the edge of the forest.

“From Holtzwihr, a one-way dirt road, about twelve feet wide and frozen solid, led along the right tree-finger and directly in to the forest. It was along this road that the two tank destroyers had moved up the previous night. One had stopped at a position about forty yards in front of Company B. The second had halted at the edge of the forest and formed part of the company line. A forward artillery observer, Lieutenant Walter Weispfenning, had taken a post with a radio between the two TD's⁵. Audie had established his company command post back of the second tank in a drainage ditch, which was from three to four feet deep and flanked the length of the dirt road. For his CP⁶ he had a field map, a pair of binoculars, and a field telephone connected with Battalion headquarters a mile deep in the forest. Audie had a carbine, his favorite weapon for fighting in wooded areas.

“Upon studying the situation, Murphy saw that the first TD could be maneuvered in an emergency. But the second, due to the flanking ditch and narrow position in the trees, could not. He also believed it could be plainly seen from Holtzwihr with binoculars. So Audie awoke the TD commander and advised him to get under cover; to get some kind of concealment. But the commander, afraid of getting stuck if he moved off the road, chose to remain where he was.

“Company B was merely in a defensive position at its best. Plans called for a Battalion – Audie does not remember which nor can I find any records of which – to fan through the battered company and attack Holtzwihr. It was probably the 3rd Battalion of the 30th Infantry which finally completed the assignment after a day's delay for reorganization and reinforcement. The time of the German attack varies in accounts from 10:00 in the morning until 2:00 in the afternoon. The latter is usually given. Audie does not know as he says he had lost all time sense. The day remained dull and cloudy but visibility was quite good.

“At 2:00 in the afternoon – let us say – the Germans began a fierce assault from Holtzwihr. It consisted of six heavy tanks, supported by an estimated 250 German infantrymen who were wearing white snow capes and advanced in ragged skirmish formation. One reference calls

⁵ Tank Destroyers

⁶ Command Post

the tanks Jagdpanthers. Suddenly all hell broke loose. Audie believes that the attack was preceded by an enemy artillery barrage, but there was so much noise and confusion he is not certain. The tanks, fanning out over the frozen ground and using the tree fingers for partial cover, were throwing in a barrage of their own. The first American tank destroyer began firing and Audie remembers seeing a 90 mm shell – he insists they were 90 mm and not 75 – hit one of the tanks flush and did not even cause it to falter. He said he never used the machine gun against the tanks as he did not wish to waste his ammunition. Its cartridges, for some reason, were not armor-piercing. I have read accounts which said that Murphy fired upon the tanks to “button up”. But Murphy declares this is not true machine gun was helpless against the iron monsters.

“A corporal and a staff sergeant, for some reason I have never learned, were evidently doing all the firing from the first TD. Nobody else is mentioned in the account. According to the news story the two men alternated between firing the big gun directly at the tanks and spraying the infantrymen with 30 and 50 calibre machine guns at the beginning of the attack. But in trying to maneuver their TD into a new position they lost control of it. The TD slipped into the drainage ditch and stuck. It could not be budged and the

guns remained at a useless angle for firing. So the crew took off. Because of the position of these guns Audie skipped it and resorted to the second TD later on in the fight. When I visited this battlefield in 1948, the first TD was not there, so evidently it was retrieved and put back into battle. However, the second TD was within a few yards of its old position, having been dragged off the road into the brush at the edge of the forest.

“At the outset of the attack the second TD had received a direct hit from a German eighty-eight. The shell had penetrated the armor killing the commander and gunner. It also started a fire inside. What remained of the crew climbed out of the TD and disappeared into the forest. Audie says that a thick black smoke was boiling out of the TD hatch and he always assumed that the grease, oil and rags inside were burning.

“Lt. Weispenning, the FO,⁷ had been trying to get our artillery down on the enemy by radio. But the radio could not establish good communication because of some defect that had developed. Audie, who had been firing at the German infantrymen with his carbine, saw that the situation was desperate if not hopeless. He ordered his men to fall back to a prearranged position, another ditch, about a half mile deep in the woods. He also asked Lt.⁸ Weispenning to move slightly to his rear and save the

⁷ Forward Observer

⁸ Lieutenant

radio while he tried contacting the artillery with the field telephone through Battalion headquarters. Audie told me the reason he sent his men back was that he couldn't see why all had to get killed when one man could do the job that had to be done. And it was up to him to do it. Murphy seldom fought alone if help were practical, but he never risked men if he did not need them.

“For the remainder of the fight he relayed his instructions to the artillery by the field telephone through Battalion headquarters. He was never in direct



*-Source: Audie Murphy Research
Foundation collection*

Lieutenant Walter Weispfenning, 39th
Field Artillery Regiment, 3rd Infantry
Division.

contact with artillery. And he used an ordinary field map to correct the fire. But his corrections were remarkably accurate. I have never understood why – nor does he – the Germans concentrated their attack upon his position unless they were trying to get control of the road so they could move their armor into the forest.

“In point of fact he was alone in his position, but Lt. Weispfenning remained closely in the rear to take over the artillery corrections if Murphy needed him or got killed. So he was able to observe Audie at all times. So were several other soldiers. In his desperate spot, Murphy alternated between grabbing the field telephone and correcting the artillery fire and dropping the phone to grab his carbine and keep the German infantrymen away from him. During this crisis one of those ridiculous things of war happened. A lieutenant in Battalion headquarters called Audie and asked how close the Germans were. Audie gave his now famous reply: “Just hold the phone and I'll let you talk to one of the bastards.”

“Audie told me that he had no idea of how he would ever get out of the spot, but for some reason he didn't care a damn. With his carbine ammunition depleted he started to fall back. Then he got the most audacious idea of his audacious army career. On the burning TD was a perfectly good fifty calibre

turret machine gun and Murphy saw no reason for not taking it over. Dragging his telephone behind him, he climbed on top of the TD and took over. The body of the dead tank commander was sprawled over the hatch with his throat cut. Murphy pulled him out and threw him in the snow so that he would not interfere with the machine gun movements. The burning TD was literally a powder keg with the fuse lit. As soon as the fire reached the diesel oil and ammunition it was apt to blow sky high. Even the German tanks were giving it a wide berth. And Audie had placed himself smack on top of it. Thus the two powder kegs, meaning Murphy and the burning TD, got together. Lt. Weispfenning, in his account, says that Audie's act was "the bravest thing I ever saw a man do in combat".

"Once in position Murphy began to cut the German foot soldiers down with the machine gun and correcting the artillery fire by phone. The infantrymen could not figure where the machine gun fire was coming from as they thought nobody was crazy – or brave – enough to be on the dangerous TD. But the tanks spotted Audie. They slammed two more eighty-eight MM⁹ shells into the TD, enabling Murphy to get off another famous crack. He was calling back artillery instructions to a Battalion headquarters sergeant when one of the shells hit the TD.

Weispfenning says that each time the TD was struck by cannon fire Audie was engulfed in smoke and flames. The sergeant, hearing one of the explosions, yelled over the wire: "Are you still alive, Lieutenant?" Murphy yelled back: "Momentarily, Sergeant. And what are your post-war plans?"

"I asked Audie if he recalled the hits by the eighty-eight. He said he remembered getting the hell shook out of him a couple of times but that was nothing new.

"The tanks, failing to knock Audie off the TD with the eighty-eights, tried to get him with machine guns. But they never touched him. In reminiscing with me, Audie said: "I can understand why those foot soldiers didn't get me. But I can never forgive those blasted tanks for missing me." He meant, of course, that he was glad to be alive, but was disappointed in the enemy marksmanship, which is typical of the way he thinks. He has a great respect for the fighting Germans.

"The smoke boiling from the turret was both good and bad. It offered him some concealment, but it also interfered with his vision. Twelve German soldiers creeping down the drainage ditch reached a point about ten yards from Audie. But still they could not locate him. They had stopped and were frantically discussing something directly before the

⁹ millimeter

TD. Murphy saw them and killed them with the machine gun.

“Lt. Weispfenning later reported that from his position Audie was clearly exposed, making a silhouette against the snow and leafless trees. But Murphy had committed one final audacity. He called his artillery virtually down upon his own position. “I figured that I could luck out the barrage if those goddamned Germans could,” he told me. “With those shells bursting all around me, they couldn't even hear the machine gun, much less locate it.” It was an insane – or brilliant – piece of strategy, possibly saving his life. The correction was his last. His telephone went dead. The wire had been cut either by artillery or the Germans who had managed to bypass Murphy and infiltrate the woods. A few got as far back as Battalion headquarters. And during a lull at the front, the headquarters personnel were fighting a mile deep in the woods.

“The clouds broke for a single brief period during the entire day; and some planes from the 1st TAF happened over. Seeing the combat below, they swept [sic] down and strafed the Germans on Audie's far left flank. The enemy infantrymen were falling back, and the tanks were wavering, unwilling to proceed without the foot soldiers, when Audie crawled off the TD. It was then that he noticed his field map, which he had been holding in his outstretched

hands, had been tattered by flying rocks and steel fragments. His raincoat, which he was wearing, was likewise full of holes. But not one new fragment had penetrated Murphy's skin during the terrible fight. He was still limping from his mortar wound; so observers thought he had been hit again. That is why the official reports says he was. Audie told me that he was so tired and frightened when he climbed off the TD that he did not look back to see if he would be shot. He no longer cared. In a short while he heard the TD blow up.

“Audie found his men, regrouped them, and counter-attacked the Germans who had infiltrated into the forest. He regained his old position at the edge of the woods and he held it until the following day when Company B was relieved of the strain. The 3rd Battalion of the 30th Infantry Regiment on January 27th assaulted Holtzwihr, taking the town with relative ease. The Germans had pulled out most of its strength. Murphy remained in the fighting until the complete reduction of the Colmar Pocket on February 6th. On February 18th, the 3rd Division, with mission completed, was pulled out of action to rest and reorganize for an assault against the Siegfried Line. It went back into combat on March 15th. By this time, it was known that Audie had been recommended for the Medal of Honor so his superior officers pulled him out of the lines and made a liaison officer of him to

reduce the danger. They feared that Murphy would be killed before he had a chance to receive the Medal otherwise. However, Audie remained with the 3rd Division until the final German surrender. And despite regulations he could not be kept out of action. He had great fondness and respect for the regular commanding officer of Company B, Captain Paul Harris. While serving in liaison, Audie got the word that Captain Harris and two other company officers had been killed. Company B had bogged down somewhere in the general Zweibrucken-Kaiserslautern area. Without saying a word to anybody of his mission, Murphy had a sergeant drive him to the general area in a jeep. Then he got out and walked along until he found Company B which had been pinned down in a fire trench. The surviving men were under the command of a young lieutenant and they were all suffering from a severe psychological defeat. Murphy coaxed them out of the trench and took them through the Siegfried Line. Not a shot was fired at the group. Leaving the old company under the command of a young officer, Murphy returned to his duty in liaison. He found he had not been missed in his absence. I learned this story after reading a postwar letter written to Murphy by one of the men he had pulled out of that jam. And I

asked Audie to explain the circumstances.

“In the Holtzwihr action, Audie is credited with killing and wounding from fifty to a hundred Germans with machine gun, carbine and artillery fire. Of course, the figure is approximate. The details of this Holtzwihr action can be found in the 3rd Division History¹⁰, pages 283-324. You will find the maneuvers as well as the strategic importance of this fight there. The book also has excellent maps.

“In Audie's fantastic stand against the Germans at the edge of the Bois de Riedwihr, many factors are to be considered. The frozen ground was favorable to the enemy as it did not permit Company B to dig in, while providing a good surface for German armor. The small drainage ditch flanking the road proved the undoing of the TD's. Had not the second been burning and threatening to blow up, the German infantrymen would have almost surely discovered Murphy. Thus Audie was saved by his own audacity and daring maneuvers. All of his skill as a combat soldier was needed; and it came forth. Also the man beneath the uniform had his back against the wall. He had himself a long shot against incredible odds. Knowing Murphy, I don't believe he could have resisted playing his hand.

¹⁰ Taggart, D. G. (1987). *History of the Third Infantry Division in World War II*. Battery Press.

Furthermore, the Germans should have know [sic] better than to kick around his beloved Company B, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment. That made him real mad.

“The story of the Holtzwihr action is so fantastic that I have checked it in every way I could. Murphy, from utter weariness, has let his war record be distorted at will. But he has never told anything about it for the records that was not true. I, myself, examined the old TD in 1948. I counted three punctures made by the eight-eight shells in the armor. The inside of the TD was heavily charred, and the turret had been blown completely off along with most of its top. My findings jived with the written accounts. I also talked to Lt. Walter Weispfenning, whose testimony helped get Murphy the Medal of Honor. I had read the testimony and asked Weispfenning if the details were strictly accurate. “As accurate as it could be under the circumstances,” he laughed. “When a man is figuring on getting his ass shot off any minute – and I did – he does not think how the situation is going to look in writing. But Audie earned the Medal of Honor time and again, and I was only happy that my testimony finally helped him get it.”

“I also asked Weispfenning if Murphy were know [sic] well in the 3rd Division before all the publicity about him broke. “Known!” he exclaimed. “When Murphy was in the lines with his men, we in the rear went to sleep. But if Audie sent word that he was falling back, we made ready to get the hell out of there. When Murphy fell back, we all knew that it was time to move.” Incidentally, Weispfenning and Audie had only a brief personal acquaintance. I do not believe they ever met until that frozen morning on the front at Holtzwihr. The last time they met was in 1949 when Weispfenning was brought to Hollywood to appear on the Ralph Edwards radio show “This Is Your Life”.¹¹ The subject was Audie Murphy. At this time, I talked to him. I also spent a great deal of time with Sergeant Emmett Kelly, who was the basis of the character called Kerrigan in the book “To Hell and Back”. I also talked to Jim Fife, the Indian whom we called Swope in the book. At that time, the book had already been published but after meeting the real life characters, I would not have changed them. Murphy's brief description of the men had fitted them perfectly.

¹¹ Listen to the full broadcast by visiting <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MrPaGoBOGY0>



-Photo Source: Wikipedia

Colonel Otto Skorzeny, high ranking and dangerous member of Nazi SS in World War II disarmed by Lieutenant Audie Murphv.

“As a final story about Murphy the soldier and also an indication of – I have gathered material on him, I will cite an incident which began in Paris in 1948. Audie and I lunched with an American Army officer who received the Legion of Honor at the same time Murphy did. This man was with the O.S.S.¹² during World War II and told us about being assigned to kill a high ranking Nazi but could not find him. It was his greatest frustration in the war. “I found him,” said Murphy, and proceeded to tell how. Since I [McClure]

was suffering from a severe hangover, I didn't pay much attention to the details. Some ten years later, I happened to remember the incident while Audie and I were driving along in a car. So I asked Murphy what Nazi he and the American officer had talked about that day. He said: “Colonel Otto Skorzeny.” This made my ears pick up as Skorzeny had once been called “the most dangerous man in Europe”. So I asked Audie how he happened to find him.

“He had already been captured evidently,” said Murphy. “But he was still walking along an Austrian street wearing his sidearms. As the place was full of surrendered Germans still at liberty, I didn't pay much attention to the Colonel, but a lieutenant who was with me went over and asked for the Colonel to please give him his sidearms. It was then that I looked and saw it was Skorzeny. Also I damned near had a heart attack. I practically jumped the distance between us and said to the lieutenant, ‘Don't say please to this sonofabitch. Tell him to give you his goddamned gun.’ The Colonel glanced at me for once second, but that second was damned long. Then he handed over his gun. I recognized Skorzeny from a picture which I thought had been shown to all members of the 3rd Division. Captured or not, as long as Skorzeny had

¹² Office of Strategic Services. An agency of the U.S. government during World War II responsible for obtaining information and for

sabotaging the enemy by secretly inserting trained military agents behind enemy lines.

a gun, he was worse than a mad cobra. At least that's the way I figured him"

"Supposing he refused to give up his gun?" I asked.

"Then I would have killed him," said Audie. "I'd already killed far less deserving of death. Besides I figured had the positions been reversed, Skorzeny would have killed me."

"Was this incident ever reported?" I asked.

"Not as far as I know," said Audie. "It wasn't worth reporting. Skorzeny had already been taken. All we did was pull his teeth. I didn't want to tempt him to shoot anyone else by leaving him a gun."

"This story is typical of Murphy the soldier.

"Not long ago Audie told me of going into a bar at Del Mar while a friend of his had a drink. He didn't want to enter the place, as he said they always meant trouble for him. Somebody was forever wanting to fight. Murphy had scarcely got seated until a man grabbed him by the throat and said, "Up on your feet you so-and-so." Audie turned to his friend and said "See what I told you." Then he recognized the man who had him by the throat as an old war comrade by the name of Red Coles. So Audie finished out the story for me. He and Coles, then a Captain, were moving ahead of their

Battalion in Germany. A sergeant was driving them in a jeep when he made a sudden turn into a village and found around 400 fully armed German soldiers taking a break. Since they didn't know where their Battalion was, Murphy and Coles decided to bluff it out. The sergeant panicked and wanted to cut the jeep around. The officers threatened to shoot him if he didn't drive straight ahead. Murphy with one hand on a machine gun and Coles also fingering a weapon waved in a friendly fashion to the Germans, who thought from the attitude that their outfit was just behind them. Thus they got safely through what might have been a lethal ambush. Coles had become an alcoholic since those days, and that depressed Audie very much.

"Murphy came to Hollywood in September, 1945, at the invitation of James Cagney, who had been greatly intrigued by the photo layout in Life magazine. Some years later Cagney told me that he almost fainted when Audie stepped off the plane. He said Murphy was still badly underweight, limping, greenish in color, and had a southern accent so thick he could hardly understand him. Cagney had reserved a hotel room for Audie, but after one glimpse at him he was afraid to leave him alone in his condition, so he took him to his home where he could watch over him. This was about four months after Audie received the Medal of Honor from

Alexander Patch in Salzburg, Austria, on
June 2nd.

“The full details of how Audie won the Medal of Honor, as given here, have never been published. In fact, I have never put them together before. However, I intend to write a factual account of the highlights of Audie’s army career. He has agreed to cooperate if I will agree never to ask him about the war again.

“If I can be of further help, please let me know.

Sincerely,
David McClure

CC: Mr. Frank McCarthy”

Images of Stan Smith's Retyped Copy of Original

1
March 27, 1964

Colonel Red Rensler
U. S. Military Academy
1015 Merritt Road
West Point, New York

Dear Colonel Rensler:

Frank McCarthy contacted Audie Murphy about the Medal of Honor biographical sketch you wish to include in your book. And Audie buzzed the writer over to see. He asked me first to thank you for your interest; to assure you that he would be honored to appear in a book with your by-line; and to wish you success on the project. But he asked me to give you the straight facts on the action that brought him the Medal of Honor. The truth has been so distorted by publicity, magazines' news accounts, and the motion picture "To Hell and Back" that it is hardly recognizable anymore.

I have been a close personal friend of Audie's for around seventeen years; and he often says that I know more about him than he does himself. I helped him put his autobiography—that is, the book version—together in 1946. In the summer of that year, Audie was invited to receive the Legion of Honor; and I went along with him. He visited two of his old battlefields: the one that brought him the Distinguished Service Cross; and the other that brought him the Medal of Honor. With Audie, I studied the features of the terrain while he explained to me what happened. I also made some rough pencil sketches of the battles while the scenery was still fresh.

The account of how Audie won the Medal of Honor in the book "To Hell and Back" is fairly accurate. At the time of the writing Audie was too shocked and indifferent in details to give a good picture. However, the film version of the action made me sick because it caught neither the drama nor the truth. Audie does not like to discuss the war and especially his part in it. This is not due to modesty or unrequited horror. The subject buries him unalterably. So for the past seventeen years I have tried to uncover the real record. The fun has not been easy. I have scoured maps, newspaper accounts, citations, letters. I have talked to men who were in his company. And Audie himself will talk to me for about fifteen minutes at a time about the war before he gets bored. So I have pieced together the record as accurately as I know how.

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fabulous. It must be far better than twenty-twenty. He often points out tiny objects to me at night and even with his help I cannot see them except upon close inspection. His sense of smell is very acute. He is annoyed by odors that I cannot even detect. During the war, he was sent out to capture prisoners. His intelligence on night patrols. He was able to locate the Germans by the smell of the tobacco they smoked and then gain the advantage of surprise.

Although he took no care of his teeth for years, he still does not have a single cavity. We have the same dentist; and he told me that Audie had one of the best sets of teeth he had ever seen. Murphy's memory is photographic. After a glance at a movie script, he will go before the camera and do the scene. He loathes acting, incidentally, but finds that it is the easiest way for him to make a living. His greatest pleasure is found in gambling. Given the right odds he would bet that the sun wasn't shining at high noon on a cloudless day and then try to prove it. He lives life as if he were constantly playing a long shot. He fought the war the same way, using every physical and mental asset to back up his gamble.

Briefly Audie is a physical and mental phenomenon. He seems to be a mutation by birth as he resembles none of his relatives that I have met except in looks. This is the type of boy that went to war. I assure you that his fantastic war record is no more fantastic than his character. His acting of audacity was an accident. I have never understood what motivated Audie in combat. He has a strange sense of loyalty. He might take my last pair of shoes if he needed them; but there is nobody on whom I would rely faster in a real emergency. He would somehow get through hell and high water to come to my aid. He had often said that he could not operate unless he had his back against the wall. So in civilian life, as in war, that is where he usually keeps his back—outright against the wall. "If never seek trouble," he says. "Trouble has a way of looking me up."

Audie has a fiery temper, but is incapable of prolonged anger. He has too much humor. His sense of loyalty—call it respect—the corps—led him to stick with his beloved Company B, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment throughout the war. He joined the company as a replacement private in North Africa. Winning every promotion in the field, he was the commanding officer of Company B in less than two years. Between Sicily and Rome, he was knocked out by malaria three times. He does not know exactly how many times he was wounded. But he has a Turpie Scarf with two slits. The sheer luck of the Irish saved his life on occasions. For instance, a mortar shell struck between his feet, knocking him unconscious by concussion, bearing off part of one shoe, and breaking the crack of the carbine which he held in his hands. He had caught the base of the cone-shaped explosion, missing the shower of steel, which killed several men standing a few yards

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The reason I have dedicated myself to this job is that I believe that Murphy will come by be a legend in the true sense. In an age of nuclear warfare, no other man will likely have the opportunity to do what he did as an infantryman. So I am going to tell you the truth in an effort to give you as complete a picture as possible. Naturally the material will be too long. But you can cut it as you see fit. I am sure that you would rather have the real story. You are in a position to help straighten the record out. I would personally appreciate your help. And I'm sure Audie would too.

I have often wondered what the real story was behind Sergeant Alvin York in World War I. As you know, it is practically impossible to translate military maneuvers into a language that the civilian can understand. York is credited with killing twenty Germans, forcing the surrender of 137 more, and capturing thirty-five machine guns with a rifle. Undoubtedly he was a very brave and able man, but I cannot see how he could possibly have performed this feat unless the Germans, who were already thoroughly beaten, were just ready to surrender. Any soldier knows that one machine gun against a rifle is a pretty roughed affair. Just before I entered the Army myself, I was in the mess where they were filming the story of Sergeant York, and I asked the director, HOWARD HEMCK, who he was going to show this action. He replied, "Do you mean whether I believe it or not?" I told him yes. He said he did not believe the action took place according to the records, but he was going to try to stage it to make it appear possible. I later saw the picture, and he did a fairly good job of it except for one thing. Any soldier knows those Germans wouldn't have put themselves in such a position, even for HOWARD HEMCK.

Murphy's toughest fights were those for which he was not cited. Usually they were individual duels in which he almost lost his life on a number of occasions.

To understand Murphy the soldier, one must first understand Murphy the man. His natural looks are most deceiving. Beneath that shy exterior is a keg of dynamite with the fuse lit. Inwardly he is as hard as steel. He has the Irish temperament in 1916, with his mood constantly changing. He has more natural humor than Bob Hope. The Murphy humor is scathing and penetrating, striking at the very roots of the folly of man. It operates best when he is under great pressure. He has the mind of a genius, and I do not use the word kind lightly. But he has never cultivated it properly. Again typically Irish, his mind is at constant war with his emotions with the latter usually dominating.

I have never seen a man with such fast reflexes. With him, no think is to act. But if he thinks too much, he loses the advantage of reflex. For instance, we have often hunted quail. If Audie fires on instinct, he is deadly accurate. But if he starts tracking the bird with his gun, he is apt to miss. This vision is

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away. Audie went to the rear, had his feet dressed, got a new pair of shoes, and returned to action within a few days.

He stuck in the front lines at Aisio until he collapsed from malaria, bleeding out completely. At the time he was a platoon sergeant. Two of his men, finding he was unable to resist, carried him to an aid station on an old door. He awoke in a hospital too weak to move. But within ten days he was back in the lines and fighting.

He was not a medal soldier by the book. On Anzio, Company B was pulled out of the lines for a brief rest. Audie had been recommended for a promotion from staff to staff sergeant. But he disobeyed an order to put his men through close order drill. He refused to drill the men until they had found proper quarters for the rest period. His promotion was turned down; and Murphy was used as a public example of how a soldier should not act.

In France he was sent on a night reconnaissance patrol with strict orders not to fire unless in an absolute emergency. But he detected a German patrol slipping down the road toward him and he could not resist the opportunity to stick up a quiet fight. He stationed his men on one side of the road, fixed his bayonet, and charged the lead German. The bayonet hit, but failed to kill. The German screamed, and all hell broke loose as the frightened and confused patrol fought their way out of what was thought to be a trap. Upon reporting his mission, he said, "Hell, a German started screaming our fears, and we had to shoot him." A weary colonel quashed the truth. "Yes, sergeant, I know, Murphy," he said. "You won't be happy until you get yourself killed." Audie was disappointed in his attitude. As per order he had not fired until the Germans started shooting. He had merely used a bayonet.

Audie is not a devil-may-care kind of fellow. In the war he was often very frightened; but he never allowed fear to stand in his way. He has told me that when moving into a fight, he had the feeling that somebody had stuck a cold hand in the middle of his intestine and was twisting that into knots. But the twisting went away usually once he got into action. He also told me that he expected that he had been grappling with fear all his life. He and fear had each other by the throat, and he never knew which was going to conquer.

This then is a brief sketch of the man beneath the uniform: tough as nails, yet as sensitive as down; an exhibitor of extreme courage who grapples with fear; a man perfectly coordinated for combat; a man endowed with acute physical and mental resources; and a man who could laugh at his own epitaph. He was no Boy Scout. He did not know that he was regarded as a hero until months later. Upon learning the public attitude, he dashed the honorifics of a colonel, went to a hotel and fell asleep, making the banquet at which he was announced as the most decorated

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foot soldier of World War II. Newspaper reporters awakened him to give him the information. He used the occasion to borrow a ride to Dallas from one of the reporters. But he paid for the ride. The reporter wrote an article quoting Murphy on "Why We Fight". It was a complete dream-up and so flowery that Audie, had he read it, would have been ashamed. I still have a copy of it. From then on Murphy was never able to escape publicity. He said that he would not talk to the reporters wrote their own stories. I knew his far worse than a word was his medals. Three days ago he called me and said I had his citations. I told him that I did not. He said then somebody must have thrown them away. He didn't know what because of them. For his wounds he receives \$107.00 a month compensation. He hasn't the slightest idea whether or not he was the most decorated soldier of World War II. Nor does he care. "I know no live heroes," he says. "All the real heroes are dead." That about sums up his attitude.

Thus you may see, Colonel Reader, why somebody like me must keep the records if they are to be kept. Any writer who has asked me about Audie I have told the truth. They have refused to believe me as my description does not fit the public image. The real image is far more intriguing to my mind.

The story of how Audie got the Medal of Honor should properly begin with October, 1944. At the beginning of the month the advance of the 15th Infantry Regiment has been stopped by a fiercely defended German strongpoint known as the Clever rock quarry in the Vosges Mountains. On October 20th, 1st Battalion Commander Lt. Col. Michael Paulik took out a daylight patrol to reconnoiter enemy defenses. The patrol was ambushed and pinned down by a German machine gun approximately 15 yards from the Americans.

Murphy was not officially on the patrol but had tagged along slightly in its rear. Upon hearing the fire, he worked his way to fifteen yards from the gun and stood up so threw a grenade. The Germans saw him, turned the machine gun upon him, and fired. But the barrel struck a bush, deflecting the aim, and the Germans missed Audie. Before the enemy could recover, Murphy had thrown two grenades into the nest, killing four of the crew and wounding three more; thereby destroying the position and relieving the patrol. For this action he was later awarded the Silver Star.

Three days later, on October 23rd, Company B, was again stopped about two and a half miles beyond the quarry. The Germans were in a strange defensive position, having machine gun installations on a downward slope of a hill. Their infantry soldiers were in foxholes covered by prize-crosses trees. Murphy, then a staff sergeant, moved down the hill with twenty-seven men to get a closer look at the enemy positions. The weather was rainy and visibility poor. The Germans discovered Murphy's maneuver and fired at the

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armor, the enemy had turned virtually every village in the area into a powerful fortress. The 7th and 30th Infantry Regiments crossed the Peche River and fought their way to the III River, capturing a bridge, known as the Maison Rouge, across the III.

The little bridge was to play an important role in battle development; for upon it depended getting armor across the stream to support the infantry attacks. Anticipating the capture of the bridge, the division had rushed supplies and armor to the area so that an immediate crossing could be effected. But the first tank that tested the bridge caved in the structure, rendering it useless for vehicles.

The 30th Infantry soldiers had already crossed the III. Its attack had been coordinated with a drive by the 7th Infantry on its right flank and a similar push by the French on the left flank. The immediate objective was a large forest, known as the Bois de Riedwahr, which stretched between two powerfully fortified villages: Riedwahr and Holtzwahr.

By the afternoon of the 13th, the 10th, without armor support, had captured the forest and reached the outskirts of the two villages. The advance had been so rapid that the forward artillery observers had not established radio communications. Nevertheless the 30th continued its attack. Without a vestige of cover and with no possibility of digging into the frozen earth, the 2d Battalion was hit by ten German tanks and tank destroyers with an estimated 100 infantrymen on the outskirts of Holtzwahr. The unit was cut to pieces. The survivors managed to fall back to the III.

The same fate befell the 1st Battalion on the outskirts of Riedwahr. The 2nd Battalion managed to cross the III, but was likewise thrown back by the enemy's murderous armor assault.

With the 10th battered, under strength, and badly disorganized, the 15th Regiment was committed to the attack on January 24th. The 3d Battalion went in first, but was stopped by a counterattack.

The 1st Battalion, to which Audie Murphy belonged, entered the battle, moving through the 3rd, and driving to the Bois de Riedwahr. Still without armor support, the unit was soon knocked out of the forest but refused to retreat to the III. The soldiers managed to get cover in shell holes.

Audie, still wearing a bandage over his wounded hip, remembers that he dropped off to sleep and his hair froze to the ground on that first night of attack. The following day he was knocked down by a mortar shell blast. His lower legs were peppered with steel fragments, which he still carries in his flesh. All accounts say that he received those wounds on the third day of battle. But the truth is: The second day, or the 25th of January.

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group with a machine gun. Six of the men were killed or wounded before they could drop to the ground.

Audie grabbed a 516 radio and moved forward alone to a spot where he could observe. He called down 4.2 chemical mortar fire on the Germans for approximately an hour. While directing the mortars by radio, he kept the Germans away from his position with a carbine, angling in several close-range snails. Official records list fifteen Germans killed and thirty-five wounded in the fight, mostly by the accurately directed mortars. For his action Murphy was again awarded the Silver Star, thus receiving the same medal twice in three days.

On October 14th, Audie, with two other enlisted men, was called to Regimental Headquarters. The three received field commissions as second lieutenants.

On October 26th, Murphy, while directing his platoon through a forest area, received a severe hip wound from a German sniper, who fired from a camouflaged foxhole at a thirty-five yard distance. Audie, knocked down by the bullet and unable to rise, killed the sniper with a single shot from his carbine.

Because of weather conditions, Murphy did not reach a general hospital for three days. Meanwhile, his wound had become gangrenous. He virtually had to learn to walk again. In early January of 1945, he was still in a state of convalescence. But tired of the monotony of hospital life, he did not wait for orders. Collecting his gear, he returned to the front and rejoined his old Company B.

At the time the Third Division was engaged in the reduction of the Colmar Pocket, an engagement later regarded as the division's second toughest assignment of the entire war. The Pocket, a huge and heavily fortified bulge stretching from the Rhine into France, had to be eliminated. Strategically it amounted to a strong bridgehead from which a counter attack could be launched. It also posed a constant and harassing threat to the right flank of the Seventh Army. The Germans were daily building up the strength of the Pocket.

The terrain, studded by forests and fields, consisted of gently rolling hills and such flat ground. The earth was frozen solid by weather temperatures that seldom rose above fourteen degrees. The conditions thus were almost perfect for heavy armor. When Audie rejoined the division, the snow was almost knee deep. His Company B was at full combat strength, including a surplus of officers. Murphy was not then given a platoon.

On January 22, 1945, the division was ordered to begin a full-scale coordinated attack against the strongly defended positions of the Germans across the Peche River. With an enormous supply of

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Murphy did not stop for first aid. The wounds were painful, but only slightly disabling. For the remainder of the battle, however, he could not walk without limping. During the ferocious counterattack, Audie saw the two men who had been commiserated with his jump into a shell hole. There they received a direct hit by a mortar shell, and both were killed.

During the night of January 24-25th, engineers had bridged the III River, enabling armor to cross. Three tanks joined the 1st Battalion. Two were destroyed by the Germans; and the third, with its main gun out of commission, had to withdraw from the fight. But more armor moved up. The 1st Battalion again moved into the forest; and Battalion headquarters were established in a farmhouse in the woods.

By midnight on January 25th, Company B had penetrated the Bois de Riedwahr to a depth of about six hundred yards when it halted because of an ammunition shortage. Having started the fight with around 155 men and six officers, the company had been cut to two officers and about twenty-eight men in the two days of ferocious combat. The others had been either killed or wounded. Around one o'clock in the morning, fresh supplies and five replacements reached the company. The figures are approximate as Audie is depending upon his memory; but the records bear him out as being approximately right.

A senior officer, a first lieutenant, was in charge of the company as it was ordered to advance to the edge of the forest with two tank destroyers and hold the line there until relieved. As the Germans still were in the woods, but in poor strength, the company advanced with bursts of precautionary fire but had no light. Reaching their destination, the men tried to dig in, but could barely chip the frozen ground. Thus they were without cover except for sparse trees. During the night the senior officer was wounded by mortar or shell fire. He was evacuated, and Murphy was ordered by telephone to take over command. Having started with Company B as a private less than two years before, he thus became its commanding officer.

During the night when the men could not dig in, Murphy kept them stamping around in the snow to prevent their feet from freezing. He had stumps then along a three hundred yard front at the edge of the forest. His right flank was left completely exposed. The left was loosely connected with men of probably the 3d Battalion, which was also badly under strengthened. When dawn broke Audie studied the situation, fearing an attack. The weather was extremely cold and quite cloudy. At his company position the Bois de Riedwahr ended abruptly at the center. However on each side the forest continued in thick long fingers toward the village of Holtzwahr, giving the shape of a huge rough U. Company B held the right portion of the U butt. Between the fingers of trees were

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open fields extending to Holtzweil, about a mile away. The village was in plain sight of the men on the edge of the forest.

From Holtzweil, a one-way dirt road, about twelve feet wide and frozen solid, led along the right tree-line and directly in to the forest. It was along this road that the two tank destroyers had moved up the previous night. One had stopped at a position about forty yards in front of Company B. The second had halted at the edge of the forest and formed part of the company line. A forward artillery observer, Lieutenant Walter Weispfenning, had taken a post with a radio between the two TD's. Audie had established his company command post back of the second tank in a drainage ditch, which was from three to four feet deep and flanked the length of the dirt road. For his CP he had a field map, a pair of binoculars, and a field telephone connected with Battalion headquarters a mile deep in the forest. Audie had a carbine, his favorite weapon for fighting in wooded areas.

Upon studying the situation, Murphy saw that the first TD could be maneuvered in an emergency. But the second, due to the flanking ditch and narrow position in the trees, could not. He also believed it could be plainly seen from Holtzweil with binoculars. So Audie spoke the TD commander and advised him to get under cover; to get some kind of concealment. But the commander, afraid of getting stuck if he moved off the road, chose to remain where he was.

Company B was merely in a defensive position at the best. Plans called for the battalion -- Audie does not remember which nor can I find any records of which -- to fan through the battered company and attack Holtzweil. It was probably the 3rd Battalion of the 30th Infantry which finally completed the assignment after a day's delay for reorganization and reinforcement. The time of the German attack varies in accounts from 16:00 in the morning until 2:00 in the afternoon. The latter is usually given. Audie does not know as he says he had lost all time sense. The day rained dull and cloudy but visibility was quite good.

At 2:00 in the afternoon -- let us say -- the Germans began a fierce assault from Holtzweil. It consisted of six heavy tanks, supported by an estimated 150 German infantrymen who were wearing white snow caps and advanced in ragged skirmish formation. One reference calls the tanks Jagpanthers. Suddenly all hell broke loose. Audie believes that the attack was preceded by an enemy artillery barrage, but there was so much noise and confusion he is not certain. The tanks, fanning out over the frozen ground and using the tree trunks for partial cover, were throwing in a barrage of their own. The first American tank destroyer began firing and Audie remembers seeing a 90 mm shell -- he insists they were 90 mm and not 75 -- hit one of the tanks dead and did not even cause it to falter. He said he never used the machine gun against the tanks as he did not wish to waste his ammunition. The

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cartridges, for some reason, were not armor-piercing. I have read accounts which state that Murphy fired upon the tanks causing them to "button up". But Murphy disagrees this is not true either. The machine gun was helpless against the iron monsters.

A corporal and a staff sergeant, for some reason I have never learned, were evidently doing all the firing from the first TD. Nobody else is mentioned in the account. According to the new story the two men alternated between firing the big gun directly at the tanks and spraying the infantrymen with 30 and 50 calibre machine guns at the beginning of the attack. But in trying to maneuver their TD into a new position they lost control of it. The TD slipped into the drainage ditch and stuck. It could not be budged and the guns remained at a useless angle for firing. So the crew took off. Because of the position of these guns Audie skipped it and resorted to the second TD later on in the fight. When I visited this battlefield in 1948, the first TD was not there, so evidently it was retrieved and put back into battle. However, the second TD was within a few yards of its old position, having been dragged off the road into the brush at the edge of the forest.

At the outset of the attack the second TD had received a direct hit from a German eighty-eight. The shell had penetrated the armor killing the commander and gunner. It also started a fire inside. What remained of the crew climbed out of the TD and disappeared into the forest. Audie says that a thick black smoke was boiling out of the TD hatch and he always assumed that the grease, oil and wax inside were burning.

Lt. Weispfenning, the FO, had been trying to get our artillery down on the enemy by radio. But the radio could not establish good communication because of some defect that had developed. Audie, who had been firing at the German infantrymen with his carbine, saw that the situation was desperate if not hopeless. He ordered his men to fall back to a prearranged position, another ditch, about a half mile deep in the woods. He also asked Lt. Weispfenning to save slightly to his rear and save the radio while he tried contacting the artillery with the field telephone through Battalion headquarters. Audie told me the reason he sent his men back was that he couldn't see why all had to get killed when one man could do the job that had to be done. And it was up to him to do it. Murphy seldom fought alone if help were practical, but he never risked men if he did not need them.

For the remainder of the fight he relayed his instructions to the artillery by the field telephone through Battalion headquarters. He was never in direct contact with artillery. And he used an ordinary field map to correct the fire. But his corrections were remarkably accurate. I have never understood why -- nor does he -- the Germans concentrated their attack upon his position unless they were trying to get control of the road so they could save their armor into the forest.

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In point of fact he was alone in his position, but Lt. Weispfenning remained closely in the rear to take over the artillery corrections if Murphy needed him or got killed. So he was able to observe Audie at all times. So were several other soldiers. In his desperate bid, Murphy alternated between grabbing the field telephone and correcting the artillery fire and dropping the phone to grab his carbine and keep the German infantrymen away from him. During this crisis one of those ridiculous things of war happened. A lieutenant in Battalion headquarters called Audie and asked how close the Germans were. Audie gave his now famous reply: "Just hold the phone and I'll let you talk to one of the bastards."

Audie told me that he had no idea of how he would ever get out of the spot. But for some reason he didn't care a damn. With his carbine ammunition depleted he started to fall back. When he got the most audacious idea of his audacious army career. On the burning TD was a perfectly good fifty calibre turret machine gun and Murphy saw no reason for not taking it over. Dragging his telephone behind him, he climbed on top of the TD and took over. The body of the dead tank commander was sprawled over the hatch with his throat cut. Murphy pulled him out and threw him in the snow so that he would not interfere with the machine gun movements. The burning TD was literally a powder keg with the fuse lit. As soon as the fire reached the diesel oil and ammunition it was apt to blow sky high. Even the German tanks were giving it a wide berth. And Audie had placed himself smack on top of it. Thus the two powder kegs, burning Murphy and the burning TD, got together. Lt. Weispfenning, in his account, says that Audie's act was "the bravest thing I ever saw a man do in combat."

Once in position Murphy began to cut the German foot soldiers down with the machine gun and correcting the artillery fire by phone. The infantrymen could not figure where the machine gun fire was coming from as they thought nobody was crazy -- or brave -- enough to be on the dangerous TD. But the tanks spotted Audie. They slammed two more eighty-eight MM shells into the TD, cooking Murphy to get off another famous crack. He was calling back artillery instructions to a Battalion headquarters sergeant when one of the shells hit the TD. Weispfenning says that each time the TD was struck by German fire Audie was engulfed in smoke and flames. The sergeant, hearing one of the explosions, yelled over the wire: "Are you still alive, Lieutenant?" Murphy yelled back: "Momentarily, Sergeant. And what are your post-war plans?"

I asked Audie if he recalled the hits by the eighty-eight. He said he remembered getting the hell shook out of his a couple of times but that was nothing new.

The tanks, failing to knock Audie off the TD with the eighty-eight, tried to get him with machine guns. But they never touched him. In reminiscing with me, Audie said: "I can understand why

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those foot soldiers didn't get me. But I can never forgive those blasted tanks for missing me." He meant, of course, that he was glad to be alive, but was disappointed in the enemy marksmanship, which is typical of the way he thinks. He has a great respect for the fighting Germans.

The smoke boiling from the turret was both good and bad. It offered him some concealment, but it also interfered with his vision. Twelve German soldiers creeping down the drainage ditch reached a point about ten yards from Audie. But still they could not locate him. They had stopped and were frantically discussing something directly before the TD. Murphy saw them and killed them with the machine gun.

Lt. Weispfenning later reported that from his position Audie was clearly exposed, making a silhouette against the snow and leafless trees. But Murphy had committed one final audacity. He called his artillery virtually down upon his own position. "I figured that I could look out the barrage if those goddamned Germans could," he told me. "With those shells bursting all around me, they couldn't even hear the machine gun, such less locate it." It was an insane -- or brilliant -- piece of strategy, possibly saving his life. The correction was his last. His telephone went dead. The wire had been cut either by artillery or the Germans who had managed to bypass Murphy and infiltrate the woods. A few got as far back as Battalion headquarters. And during a lull at the front, the headquarters personnel were fighting a mile deep in the woods.

The clouds broke for a single brief period during the entire day; and some planes from the 1st TAF happened over. Seeing the combat below, they swooped down and strafed the Germans on Audie's far left flank. The enemy infantrymen were falling back, and the tanks were swerving, unwilling to proceed without the foot soldiers, when Audie crawled off the TD. It was then that he noticed his field map, which he had been hiding in his outstretched hands, had been battered by flying rocks and steel fragments. His raincoat, which he was wearing, was likewise full of holes. But not one new fragment had penetrated Murphy's skin during the terrible fight. He was still limping from his earlier wound; so obviously thought he had been hit again. That is why the official reports say he was. Audie told me that he was so tired and frightened when he climbed off the TD that he did not look back to see if he would be shot. He no longer cared. In a short while he heard the TD blow up.

Audie found his men, regrouped them, and counter-attacked the Germans who had infiltrated into the forest. He regained his old position at the edge of the woods and he held it until the following day when Company B was relieved of the strain. The 2nd Battalion of the 30th Infantry Regiment on January 27th assaulted Holtzweil, taking the town with relative ease. The Germans had

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pulled out most of its strength. Murphy remained in the fighting until the complete reduction of the Colmar Pocket on February 16th. On February 18th, the 3rd Division, with mission completed, was pulled out of action to rest and recuperation for an assault against the Siegfried Line. It went back into combat on March 15th. By this time, it was known that Audie had been recommended for the Medal of Honor so his superior officers pulled him out of the lines and made a liaison officer of him to reduce the danger. They feared that Murphy would be killed before he had a chance to receive the Medal otherwise. However, Audie remained with the 3rd Division until the final German surrender. And despite regulations he could not be kept out of action. He had great fondness and respect for the regular commanding officer of Company B, Captain Paul Harris. While serving in liaison, Audie got the word that Captain Harris and two other company officers had been killed. Company B had bogged down somewhere in the general Zweibrücken-Kaiserslautern area. Without saying a word to anybody of his mission, Murphy had a sergeant drive him to the general area in a jeep. Then he got out and walked along until he found Company B which had been pinned down in a fire trench. The surviving men were under the command of a young lieutenant and they were all suffering from a severe psychological defeat. Murphy coaxed them out of the trench and took them through the Siegfried Line. Not a shot was fired at the group. Leaving the old company under the command of a young officer, Murphy returned to his duty in liaison. He found he had not been missed in his absence. I learned this story after reading a postwar letter written by Murphy to one of the men he had pulled out of that job. And I asked Audie to explain the circumstances.

In the Moltzweir action, Audie is credited with killing and wounding from fifty to a hundred Germans with machine gun, carbine and artillery fire. Of course, the figure is approximate. The details of this Moltzweir action can be found in the 3rd Division History, pages 223-224. You will find the maneuvers as well as the strategic importance of this fight there. The book also has excellent maps.

In Audie's fantastic stand against the Germans at the edge of the Bois de Hiedeloh, many factors are to be considered. The frozen ground was favorable to the enemy as it did not permit Company B to dig in, while providing a good surface for German armor. The small drainage ditch flanking the road proved the undoing of the 99's. Had not the second been burning and threatening to blow up, the German infantrymen would have almost surely discovered Murphy. Thus Audie was saved by his own audacity and daring maneuvers. All of his skill as a combat soldier was needed; and it came forth. Also the man beneath the uniform had his back against the wall. He had himself a long shot against incredible odds. Knowing Murphy, I don't believe he could have resisted playing his hand. Furthermore, the Germans should have

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as Skorzeny had once been called "the most dangerous man in Europe". So I asked Audie how he happened to find him.

"He had already been captured evidently," said Murphy. "But he was still walking along an Austrian street wearing his sidearms. As the place was full of surrendered Germanic kill at liberty, I didn't pay much attention to the Colonel, but a lieutenant who was with me went over and asked for the Colonel to please give him his sidearms. It was then that I looked and saw it was Skorzeny. Also I damned near had a heart attack. I practically jumped the distance between us and said to the lieutenant, 'Don't say please to this sonofabitch. Tell him to give you his goddamned gun.' The Colonel glanced at me for one second, but that second was damn long. Then he handed over his gun. I recognized Skorzeny from a picture which I thought had been shown to all members of the 3rd Division. Captured or not, as long as Skorzeny had a gun, he was worse than a mad noble. At least that's the way I figured him."

"Supposing he refused to give up his gun?" I asked.

"Then I would have killed him," said Audie. "I'd already killed many far less deserving of death. Besides I figured had the positions been reversed, Skorzeny would have killed me."

"Was this incident ever reported?" I asked.

"Not as far as I know," said Audie. "It wasn't worth reporting. Skorzeny had already been taken. All we did was pull his teeth. I didn't want to tempt him to shoot anybody else by leaving him with a gun."

This story is typical of Murphy the soldier.

Not long ago Audie told me of going into a bar at Del Mar while a friend of his had a drink. He didn't want to enter the place, as he said they always meant trouble for him. Somebody was always wanting to fight. Murphy had scarcely got seated until a man grabbed him by the throat and said, "Up on your feet, you son-of-a-bitch." Audie turned to his friend and said, "See what I told you." Then he recognized the man who had him by the throat as an old war comrade by the name of Red Coles. So Audie finished out the story for me. He and Coles, then a Captain, were moving ahead of their Battalion in Germany. A sergeant was driving them in a jeep when he made a sudden turn into a village and found around 450 fully armed German soldiers taking a break. Since they didn't know where their Battalion was, Murphy and Coles decided to bluff it out. The sergeant panicked and wanted to cut the jeep around. The officers threatened to shoot him if he didn't drive straight ahead. Murphy with one hand on a machine gun and the other fingering a weapon waved in a friendly fashion to the Germans, who thought from the attitude that their outfit was just behind them. Thus they got safely through what might have been a lethal ambush. Coles had

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known better than to kick around his beloved Company B, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment. That made his real mad.

The story of the Moltzweir action is so fantastic that I have checked it in every way I could. Murphy, from after weariness, has let his war record be distorted at will. But he has never told anything about it for the records that was not true. I, myself, examined the old TD in 1948. I counted three punctures made by the eight-eight shells in the armor. The inside of the TD was heavily charred, and the turret had been blown completely off along with most of its top. My findings jived with the written accounts. I also talked to Lt. Walter Weispfenning, whose testimony helped get Murphy the Medal of Honor. I had read the testimony and asked Weispfenning if the details were strictly accurate. "As accurate as it could be under the circumstances," he laughed. "When a man is figuring on getting his ass shot off any minute -- and I did -- he does not think how the situation is going to look in writing. But Audie earned the Medal of Honor time and again, and I was only happy that my testimony finally helped him get it."

I also asked Weispfenning if Murphy were know well in the 3rd Division before all the publicity about him broke. "Known!" he exclaimed. "When Murphy was in the lines with his men, we in the rear went to sleep. But if Audie sent word that he was falling back, we were ready to get the ball out of there. When Murphy fell back, we all knew that it was time to move." Incidentally, Weispfenning and Audie had only a brief personal acquaintance. I do not believe they were met until that frozen morning on the front at Moltzweir. The last time they met was in 1949 when Weispfenning was brought to Hollywood to appear on the Ralph Edwards radio show "This Is Your Life". The subject was Audie Murphy. At this time, I talked to him. I also spent a great deal of time with Sergeant Ernest Kelly, who was the basis of the character called Kelly in the book "The Hell and Back". I also talked to Jim Kife, the Indian whom we called Swepe in the book. At that time the book had already been published but after seeing the real life characters, I would not have changed them. Murphy's brief description of the man had fitted them perfectly.

As a final story about Murphy the soldier and also an indication of -- I have gathered material on him, I will cite an incident which began in Paris in 1948. Audie and I lunched with an American Army officer who received the Legion of Honor at the same time Murphy did. This man was with the U.S.A. during World War II and told us about being assigned to kill a high ranking Nazi but could not find him. It was his greatest frustration in the war. "I found him," said Murphy, and proceeded to tell how. Since I was suffering from a severe hangover, I didn't pay much attention to the details. Some ten years later, I happened to remember the incident while Audie and I were driving along in a car. So I asked Murphy what Nazi he and the American officer had talked about that day. He said: "Colonel Otto Skorzeny." This made my ears prick up

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became an alcoholic since those days, and that depressed Audie very much.

Murphy came to Hollywood in September, 1946, at the invitation of James Cagney, who had been greatly intrigued by the photo layout in Life magazine. Some years later Cagney told me that he almost fainted when Audie stepped off the plane. He said that Murphy was still badly underweight, limping, greenish in color, and had a southern accent so thick he could hardly understand him. Cagney had reserved a hotel room for Audie, but after one glimpse at him he was afraid to leave him alone in his condition, so he took him to his own home where he could watch over him. This was about four months after Audie received the Medal of Honor from General Alexander Patch in Salzburg, Austria, on June 2nd.

The full details of how Audie won the Medal of Honor, as given here, have never been published. In fact, I have never put these together before. However, I intend to write a factual account of the highlights of Audie's army career. He has agreed to cooperate if I will agree never to ask him about the war again.

If I can be of further help, please let me know.

Sincerely,

David C. McClure

cc: Mr. Frank McCarthy