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THE PASSING SHOW

Audie Murphy May Now Believe What Friends Told Him

By JOHN ROSENFELD

They tell this story of Audie Murphy, one of Dallas' gifts to motion pictures. He was at work on a movie, the name of which escapes us and doesn't matter. The scene was not coming off, he thought, and he demanded one retake after another.

"What's the matter?" the director asked, this being a picture on which little time could be lost for a thing like an imperfect scene. "You forget, said Audie with a snarl, "that I'm working under a terrible handicap." . . . "Aw, what handicap?" snapped the director. . . . "No talent," snapped Audie right back.

Audie had gone to Hollywood with plenty of misgivings. If he thought himself without talent as an actor, it was nothing to his views of himself as a person with equipment to face life in the big, frightening nonprofessional world.

He has returned to North Texas with twenty-four wartime decorations, the most ever garnered by an American soldier. He was surprised—and bewildered—by the lionizing that followed. One has yet to hear him speak of himself as a hero.

He was banqueted, luncheoned, given keys to cities, probed for his life's story.

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THEN HE WAS yesterday's story and what next for a farm boy born in 1924 with most of his life to be lived? The theater men of Dallas,

who had nothing to gain, took charge and suggested Hollywood. They did better. They arranged Hollywood.

You can credit Raymond Willie, James Owen Cherry and, later, Paul Short, with the interest that sprang from nothing but affection and show business' way of picking up what other people have forgotten.

Nor did they have in mind the exploitation of a war hero. The decorations have played little or no part in the Audie Murphy buildups. They saw a quality in him that he is only beginning to recognize. They believed he had a chance.

He disbelieved it at the start but he has had from the start an unusually appealing "kid brother" personality. "Teen-age girls fall for him and their mothers start feeling maternal again, in the picture house at least.

The Murphy personality is integrated and he has learned to talk and move. There is a beguiling genuineness about him and none of it is flim-flam. The same hardheaded, slightly self-flagellating frankness that made him tell press and public his story as a share-cropper's deserted offspring, still governs his life.

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HE HAD NOTHING but bad breaks in Hollywood until a few months ago. His first picture for the Cagneys, "Beyond Glory"

spelled nothing and his option was dropped. Then Paul Short, of Dallas, taking a flyer as a producer, put him in "Bad Boy," film backed by the Variety Club of Texas.

During this period Audie Murphy wasn't living too well. When Dallas friends could find out his circumstances, they made him take help. Usually he told nobody. He also said that if he didn't think "Bad Boy" made him look like an actor he would quit.

He wasn't exactly John Barrymore in "Bad Boy" but he wasn't John Barrymore Jr. either. His other westerns, "The Kid From Texas," "Sierra" and "Kansas Raiders" were progressively better. Then came the muted, beautifully attuned performance as the central character in "The Red Badge of Courage." It had rhythm as well as action, long speeches instead of monosyllables.

"The Red Badge of Courage" comes near to being one of the great pictures and Audie Murphy was its leading player. Moreover, he satisfied the author-director, John Houston, who doesn't make horse operas.

At least he was in the big leagues of his chosen profession. Nobody has to hell him to hand on and that he has a quality the screen needs. His advisers always meant it but Audie, a sharp-eyed skeptic, thought they told it to all the boys. Now, presumably, he knows it, too.

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THE WELL-MEANING lad ran into further difficulties when he married Wanda Hendrix on Jan. 8, 1949. The union lasted a little more than a year, harried on by again-off-again bulletins from the lady columnists.

When making "The Cimarron Kid," which will come to the Majestic Wednesday for eight days, he married Pamela Archer. The date was last April 23 and now it appears that the private life of Audie Murphy is also in order.

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HIS VIS-A-VIS in "The Cimarron Kid" is Beverly Tyler, the little girl who tried to sing Magnolia in the 1949 "Show Boat" at the Auditorium. In passing we should mention, that her material grandfather was Maurice Grau, the general manager of the Metropolitan Opera who brought Caruso, Scotti and Geraldine Farrar into the company.

Miss Tyler also aspires to the Metropolitan. "The Cimarron Kid" is a long way from it. Other things will be farther.