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Medal Winner To Play Role In Own Story

Hollywood Letter

By Richard Dyer MacCann – Hollywood

Audie Murphy was one of nine children of a cotton sharecropper near Kingston, Texas. His earliest memory is of sitting strapped in a baby swing while his mother battled weeds in a cotton patch. When he grew strong enough he was given the task of collecting wood along stream banks and carrying it home on his back.

Later he became a hunter, tracking down game for his family's meals. He had to shoot straight, because sometimes he had only one or two shells to spare.

At 16, left without mother or father, with part of the family in an orphanage, he got a job at \$16 a week in a radio repair shop.

The war broke out a year later. The Marine Corps and the paratroops both turned him down as underweight, but when he finally found his place in the infantry, he told his sister, "I'll try to do my share of the fighting."

After Sicily, Anzio, and southern France, Audie Murphy came home with 24 decorations, including the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Here is what the Medal of Honor citation said, in part: "Second Lieutenant Audie L. Murphy, 15th Infantry, on Jan. 26, 1945, near Holtzwihr, France, commanded Company B, which was attacked by six tanks and waves of infantry. Lieutenant Murphy ordered his men to withdraw to prepared positions in a woods, while he remained forward at his command post and continued to

give fire directions to the artillery by telephone. Behind him, to his right, one of our tank destroyers received a direct hit and began to burn...

"With the enemy tanks abreast of his position, Lieutenant Murphy climbed on the burning tank destroyer, which was in danger of blowing up at any moment, and employed its 50-caliber machine gun against the enemy. He was alone and exposed to German fire from three sides...For an hour the Germans tried every available weapon to eliminate Lieutenant Murphy, but he continued to hold his position...He then made his way to his company, refused medical attention, and organized the company in a counterattack which forced the Germans to withdraw...Lieutenant Murphy's indomitable courage and his refusal to give an inch of ground saved his company from possible encirclement and destruction."

Universal - International has undertaken to dramatize the terrible simplicity of that account of heroism. "To Hell and Back," taken from Audie Murphy's own book, will have as its climax this feat of battle which would be unbelievable if it were not known to be true.

Mr. Murphy has not been in a hurry to do his own story. After he got out of the Army and was sought as a film star, he determined not to be persuaded to do the film which meant most to him until he knew as much as he could about the medium, about Hollywood, and about the people who would be responsible for production.

Evidently he has decided the right time has come. With Aaron Rosenberg as producer, Jesse Hibbs as director, and a screenplay by Gil Doud, "To Hell and Back" will soon be seen on the screens of a world which is already beginning to forget the wounds of World War II.

Audie Murphy has not forgotten. Although he wants to "keep it down" a little more on the screen than it was in real life because "the War Department record looks to most people like some Wild West story," he is also concerned to show something to the mothers of America. He wants them to see the difference between the veterans and the untrained soldier - to encourage them to understand that it's safer to be trained. And he also wants to show a little of the comradeship of danger - how different it is from "the competitive life outside."

It is almost as if he were saying that there is more trust and less fear under the pressures of war. "It's a situation," he explains, "where you may trust a former pickpocket with your life, where everybody becomes a little bigger than they really are and you find that you are actually getting more than you are putting in."

It is a quiet, thoughtful, and yet stubbornly strong man who says these things - a rare kind of person in Hollywood, and rare not only because he has never been willing to watch himself in any of his pictures. Somewhere down underneath is a built-in sense of values which has survived both the losses of wartime friends and the shifting of Hollywood friends.

"Most fellows see the war only from a small unit," he reminds us. "They see a plot of ground or a little house right in front of them - we had to take one house several times and get kicked out of it several times, because we didn't have enough men to stay and hold it."

"You don't keep the same group very long, you know, though in this picture we try to follow through on the original gang as long as we can. New men come and go on the front lines. You don't have time to make new friends."

"This picture is going to be the story of all these guys - all of them, and the people

they stand for, are the stars. It just happens that it starts with me."