

Type Casting: *Audie Murphy* as **Audie Murphy** !

by Peer J. Oppenheimer

FAMILY WEEKLY MAGAZINE

JULY 24, 1955

"To HELL AND BACK" marks the first time in motion picture history that a war hero has portrayed himself on the screen, reliving the epic events which brought him world fame.

Just ten years ago, on August 9, 1945, on an airstrip near Salzburg, Austria, Lieut. Gen. Alexander Patch, Commander of the Seventh Army, presented 1st Lieut. Audie Murphy with the highest award the U. S. can bestow, the Congressional Medal of Honor. Winner of 24 decorations, Audie thereupon became the most decorated soldier of World War II - and he wasn't old enough to vote!

Three years later, urged on by hundreds of ex-GIs, Audie began writing a book about his war experiences. He had plenty of time for the project. After having been signed to a movie contract, then dropped, he got along for two years on \$34 a month disability pay.

Yet poverty itself was not a new experience for Audie. One of nine children, he was born 31 years ago on a farm near Kingston, Texas. The father, a cotton sharecropper, deserted the family when Audie was in his early teens. Audie is neither ashamed nor proud of his childhood poverty. "It was simply fact," he says, "so why argue with it?"

Audie quit school at 15 and worked first as a farm hand, then as a clerk in a combination grocery and filling station.

When his mother died and the three younger children were placed in an orphanage, Audie moved to Greenville, Texas, where he worked in a radio repair shop. A year later, war broke out and Audie enlisted in the infantry, the Marines and Paratroopers having rejected him because he was underweight.

Audie is so reluctant to discuss his war exploits that even his wife, Pam, knew little about them until she happened to find a record of his citations.

After the war, Audie had a hard time finding work although he was offered plenty of jobs. He turned them down because he felt people wanted to capitalize on his record.

When he was signed to a movie contract, he thought his worries were over; but after his first picture he was dropped. Then came two years of hardship, until Universal-International signed him to a long-term contract in 1951.

He made a series of horse-operas, laboring under what he described as his only drawback to becoming a good actor: "No talent."

His self-appraisal was too severe. Under John Huston's expert direction, Audie gave an outstanding performance as the sensitive young soldier in Stephen

Crane's "Red Badge of Courage." Then, in the remake of "Destry," some critics declared his portrayal of the gun-shy young sheriff was a better interpretation of the famous Max Brand character than Jimmy Stewart's.

Ever since Audie wrote "To Hell and Back," seeing it on the screen has been his greatest ambition. But he turned down several offers for the screen rights because the producers had low-budget "quickies" in mind. Audie insisted on a major production, and he wanted a hand in it, to assure retaining the book's realism. He got both.

His was not a superficial job, giving a word of advice here and there; it was an intensive eight-month grind. He worked on the script, scouted location sites, took a hand in casting, assisted even in such details as spraying shell craters with the proper amount of char. As a result, "To Hell and Back," which will have pre-release showings in Audie's home state next month, is probably the most authentic war film since the memorable "All Quiet on the Western Front."

Audie still holds a captaincy in the Texas National Guard, though his status, by virtue of his absence from Texas, is inactive. Nevertheless, at his own expense he attends Summer training for two weeks every year.

In 1951 Audie married former airline stewardess Pamela Archer. They live with their two boys, Terry Michael 3 years old, and James Shannon, 1, in a \$30,000 home in the San Fernando Valley.

The son of a Texas sharecropper has come a long way!