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Audie Never Yelled For Help Before, But He Could Sure Use It

By VERNON SCOTT

NEWS ITEM: Audie Murphy is broke and in debt.

But Audie has paid off the most relentless debt of all - the cost of heroism.

In every studio handout on Audie Murphy over the years was attached his claim to fame, "the country's most decorated soldier of World War II."

The decorations he won were his credentials for becoming a movie star.

Discharged from the Army as a lieutenant, Murphy, of Farmersville, Texas, held the Congressional Medal of Honor among 20 other decorations, including two Silver Stars, a Bronze Star, three Purple Hearts, Distinguished Service Cross, and the Legion of Merit.

When the government had fully exploited the baby-faced hero, Hollywood quickly stepped in to make a buck and add a celluloid star to his beribboned chest.

Like most legitimate heroes, Murphy strove to lose his identification as a killer of other men in combat.

Second eldest of seven children - who sometimes went hunting in the Texas hills for family dinner - Audie was an introverted young man when he made his film debut in "Beyond Glory."

In a community of tissue paper heroes going back to Douglas Fairbanks, Audie Murphy was a freak.

On every sound stage, at every glittering party the great names of the screen approached Audie to discuss how he killed those lousy Krauts - the very subject Murphy loathed.

They cast him in one wretched picture after another, exploiting his war record for all it was worth.

As an actor, Murphy would not make the world forget, say, Greg Peck. But he did his best. Then, as the images of World War II faded and the

anti-heroes took over - the Paul Newmans, Marlon Brandos, Rod Steigers - the real hero became an anachronism.

Audie's private life was almost disastrous. He married and divorced actress Wanda Hendrix. He and his second wife, Pamela, separated four years ago.

But Audie never lost sight of who or what he was.

Back in 1962 he said, "About once or twice a year I go back to the farming country in Texas where I was born and almost starved. Then I come back to Hollywood and work a little harder."

He also knew he was being used: "After I left the service I couldn't get a job that would leave me self respect. I met two kinds of people - those who wanted to use me for my war record, and those who wouldn't hire me because of it. It's bad enough that I'm in Hollywood making pictures."

In good times and bad, Audie Murphy has kept his own counsel. His dignity is intact. His luck is abominable.

Now 44 years old, Murphy told superior court commissioner Hyman Danoff that he lost \$260,00 in an Algerian oil venture at the time of the six-day war between the Arab nations and Israel.

He is entangled with the revenue people for back taxes. Television residual payments from his old movies - and he made about 30 of them - are immediately attached.

The farm boy who killed or captured 240 Germans in hand-to-hand combat in World War II is in a very different kind of foxhole now.

He was generous to everybody who touched him for a loan, but never asked for anything from anyone. He was a loner and still is. There are no copouts, no crying, no excuses offered by Murphy.

Curiously, sadly, the greatest money-earner of all his motion pictures was "To Hell and Back - a biography of his war exploits.

Recently Audie said, "The war thing is worn out and past. I just wanted the picture to be in good taste and true."

Audie Murphy didn't yell for help on the battlefield; he's not asking for it now.

Document provided by Stan Smith, Editor (Ret.), The Audie Murphy National Fan Club