

HUDSON VALLEY WOMAN'S CURIOSITY UNCOVERS A BUREAUCRATIC DISGRACE

By Edward N. Klein

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HIGHLAND FALLS -- When Virginia Reynolds bought a copy of Audie Murphy's biography a few years ago, she became curious as to why the US Post Office had never issued a stamp to honor Murphy who has been recognized for 50 years as America's most decorated war hero. There were new stamps being issued for Mickey Mouse, Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley. In fact the Post Office is heralding the sale of stamps as another revenue producer with the current Bugs Bunny stamp.

Reynolds is the widow of John Reynolds, whom she met when he was stationed at West Point in 1946, following service in World War II in a medical detachment. He later served in Korea and was on his way to Vietnam when that war ended. The couple lived in Highland Falls where they raised two children. John died in 1987.

Reynolds first began writing letters and seeking information in November, 1996 and she made some startling discoveries. The US Post Office does not make the selection of who goes on the stamps. That mission has been delegated to the Citizen's Stamp Advisory Committee which reviews nominations for stamps and after selection presents their proposals to the US Post Office Department.

This process, according to James C. Tolbert, manager of Stamp Development, takes years. "The Advisory Committee

works two to three years in advance to meet stamp design and production requirements," he said in his latest letter to Mrs. Reynolds, dated November 13, about a year after she began her quest. "They (the committee) are currently working on the stamp programs for the year 2000 and beyond."

In April, in answer to Reynolds' first letter to Congress Benjamin Gilman who had written asking about the Murphy stamp for Mrs. Reynolds, Laren S. Weinmer, Legislative Affairs Representative of the US Post Office described how the advisory committee operates, and informed Gilman that the stamp program for 1998 has been filled and "stamps for 1999 and subsequent years are now being considered."

Weinmer added that "an Audie Murphy stamp is now under consideration by the committee, and if it is approved the selection will be publicly announced."

Terry Murphy, Audie's [oldest son], of the Audie Murphy Research Foundation in Santa Clarita, CA., wrote Mrs. Reynolds in November 1996, that the family was appreciative of her quest for a Murphy stamp, but felt it would detract from the honor of the event for them to make the request.

They in turn referred her to Diane Thomason of Quinlan, TX, in Audie Murphy's hometown area, who was spearheading recognition for Murphy

with a stamp.

Thomason told the *Hudson Valley Business Journal* that she has been running through the same bureaucratic maze for years in her campaign for a stamp. She has initiated petition drives, and has been inundating the committee with petitions, but so far there is little indication that anything is being done. She has contacts at both West Point and Annapolis who she says are also collecting names for a petition. Her husband, James, is Commander of American Legion Post 17 and has written to President Clinton and sent resolutions to the national office of the American Legion.

Scott Tackett of Highland Falls, a disabled veteran, has been spearheading a drive at West Point. One of his sons, a graduate, is on active service, and another is on the Corps of Cadets. He has spent a lot of time on the Internet which has many sites all of which can be accessed by a browser by just typing Audie Murphy.

There has been no shortage of elected and public officials who have also been attempting to see that Murphy is given the proper recognition. "If ever there was an individual who deserved a commemorative stamp it was Audie Murphy. His courage and actions personify the sacrifices that countless Americans have made for their country," wrote Congresswoman Sue Kelly. "It is an outrage that the US Postal Service said he did not merit one."

Letters were also written by Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison of Texas, and Congressman Ralph Hall, of the 4th District of Texas.

Paul W. Buchs, President of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society of the United States, back in October 1996, wrote Reynolds: "I applaud and enthusiastically support your efforts. Unfortunately the Washington powers seem to have a different agenda."

In May of this year, John J. Behan, Director of the Division of Veterans Affairs of New York State wrote that he endorsed the idea of a Murphy stamp and would also write the postal committee of his support and that of Governor George Pataki. "It will be my pleasure to lend my support to your endeavor to obtain a commemorative postal stamp for Audie Murphy, and will urge that the committee reconsider their decision and authorize **issuance as soon as possible.**"

The New York Daily News in an editorial last month added its voice to the drive, supporting a resolution adopted at the American Legion convention in Orlando, to "strongly urge the US Postal Service to issue a commemorative stamp honoring the late Audie Murphy.

The News said that this is not the first time the Legion has made the request which has also come from other veteran's organizations.

The News said: "We can hear some of you younger people out there saying "Who's Audie Murphy?" Which is exactly why a commemorative stamp is needed ... to re-teach a lesson about the personification of courage."

And so it goes. Despite the mounting pressures the secret "powers that be" in Washington remain immune. No one

from the advisory committee answers the requests, and their identity, pay, and how they're appointed also remains a mystery.

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