David McClure's[1] Second Letter to Col. Red Reeder[2] dated April 20, 1964

From the Stan Smith Collection, Historical Research Center, Texas Heritage Museum, Hill College, Hillsboro Texas

Comments? *Comments are welcome. Just use the link below to our message board.*
https://www.audiemurphy.com/msgb/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=4803

"**DEAR COLONEL REEDER**:

I received your book "The Northern Generals"[3], which I found good reading as well as informative. Thank you very much. I had no idea that you had written so much. Where do you find the time? After thirty years of trying, writing still comes hard to me. It's like a plague, which I can't quit and I can't beat. I'm stuck with it. Incidentally, Audie Murphy's oldest son, Terry, is a real student of the Civil War, although he is only eleven. I think that he would very much appreciate an autographed copy of your new book. Audie is too restless to do much reading outside the racing form. I call that his financial sheet. Fortunately his astounding memory enables him to pick up much at a glance.

Editor's note: Colonel (Col.) Russell Potter "Red" Reeder, author of notable historical works including *Medal of Honor Heroes* was a West Point graduate, class of 1926, who served on active duty until 1946. He later became a West Point instructor (*https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/80690926/russell-potter-reeder*). Based on an inquiry, David McClure – Audie Murphy's friend, writer, and biographer – responded with two letters. A copy of McClure's responses were later given by McClure to Stan Smith, Audie Murphy National Fan Club President, who communicated with McClure and often shared other information. Smith's collection of documents were later turned over to the Heritage Museum of Hill College with his recent passing in 2021.

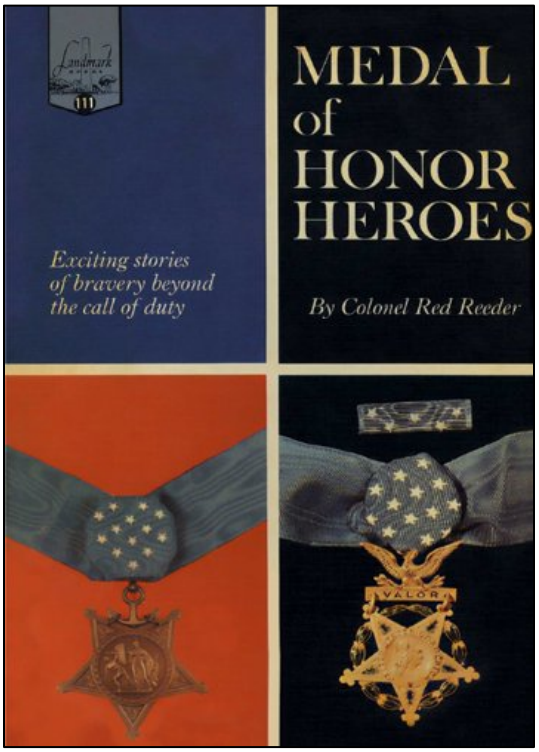
[1] David C. McClure was a World War II veteran who later became a writer and columnist in Hollywood. McClure and Murphy became friends after the war. McClure transcribed and edited Murphy's biographical account *To Hell and Back* as Audie Murphy dictated the story to him. McClure and Murphy's friendship continued through the years until Murphy's death in a plane crash in 1971.

[2] Reeder, R. P., & Walker, G.-. (1965). *Medal of Honor Heroes*. Random House.

[3] Reeder, R. P., Reeder, R., & Glattaver, N. (1964). *The Northern Generals*. Duell, Sloan and Pearce.

"I was glad that I could be of help in straightening out his Medal of Honor record. I wish that I could do the same for every man to whom that Medal was awarded. I did not know, until Frank McCarthy told me, that you were aiming your book at the younger generation. This is most important. Living as you do in a military world, you may be unaware of how ignorant most people are of the significance of military medals, and especially the Medal of Honor. I hope you make the meaning entirely clear. Today there seems to be an insidious, but very knowing, attack on the army. Especially is this true in motion pictures. I know a number of the men involved; and almost to a man they have a history of "liberal" or left-winged politics. I cannot believe that their anti-war sentiments are accidental, but rather deliberate attempts to undermine the public faith in our military.

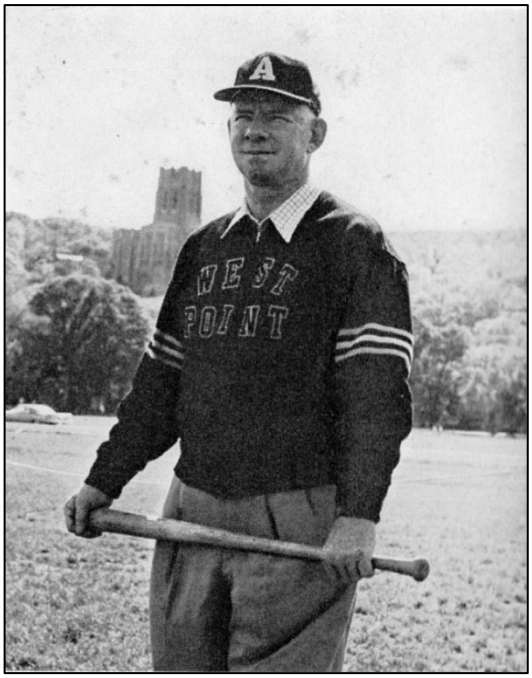
"On the other hand, the military seems to fail just as badly when it has control of the propaganda. It tends to show war in an idealistic light, which destroys a value that truth might preserve and enhance, I do not for a minute believe that the soldiers at Valley Forge spent that dreadful winter in discussing the ideals of democracy or walking around in the snow with bare and bleeding feet. They probably cursed, raved, "liberated" anything that wasn't nailed down, drank, wenched if possible, moaned, groaned, and complained such as soldiers have always done since the beginning of recorded time. The important thing is that they did endure and they did fight with a strength and heroism, almost beyond themselves, when they went into battle. This is also true of soldiers everywhere. It is an awesome experience to see ordinary men start measuring up to the great challenge. It is even more awesome to feel one's self measuring up to heights he did not know he possessed - and heights that he very possibly will never reach again. There is a line from an Emily Dickinson poem which goes: "We do not know how tall we are until we're called to rise."



-Photo from Amazon.com
Book cover from "Medal of Honor Heroes"
written by Colonel "Red Reeder"

"I had twenty seven months in Europe during World War II with a small highly mobile Signal Corps company. I still do not know what the hell we did or what exactly we were supposed to do except keep moving and follow orders. I never got beyond the rank of corporal, but I did get deeply involved with the war; so deeply that I was never able to free myself from it. It was an experience far beyond anything I had ever imagined or could possibly imagine without the experience. I saw the incredible nobility of men, the incredible sacrifice, the incredible courage that conquered fear, and the incredible will to survive and keep driving. Yet I never knew one man who could tell me exactly why he fought beyond surviving as long as he could and keeping his unit going. I personally felt in time that the war had no beginning and it had no end. We were all going to die; and that did not matter. Some other men would be there to take our place and keep the unit driving. Many veterans have since told me that they had the same feeling, but none of us discussed it during the war. It was a very personal feeling as well as a group feeling. One simply did the best he could and after that the hell with everything. The best was often beyond all imagination.

"When I study a Medal of Honor record - I can hardly believe it; yet I know that somehow it is true. Then I get busy and try to figure out in realistic terms how a man was able to do whatever he did.



-US Army photograph

Then I am overcome with a sense of awe and reverence at the capability of men; at the enormous nobility that might lie within anybody; at the cynic who will give his life in order that something and somebody might go on living. This is why I get sick when the army apologizes for itself; restricts information that would make heroes lesser than gods. They actually are greater than gods because they have battle human frailty while winning the greater battle.

"I also get deathly sick of those actually know nothing about war, yet presume to speak for it. When I was returned home and saw that the war had meant little or nothing to the people who had not shared it, I knew that we had lost; that all of the madness, death, and sacrifice had gone for nothing. So I cracked up and

never really recovered. I have always felt that the tragedy of war is not in the death of millions, but in the death of a single man for whom humanity will not take credit. If we can not truly assume the responsibility of the death of that one man, how can we assume it for millions? It seems to me that the atomic bomb is the workings of a divine justice. Any soldier knows that the bomb can kill him no deader than can a rifle bullet or a small piece of shrapnel. But for untold ages the forces of darkness have been held back by a thin, bloody, muddy line of lost men. They suffered, sacrificed, and died. And for the most part they were soon forgotten. Now nuclear weapons have put everybody on earth in the front lines. So suddenly the people are afraid. They forget, if they ever knew at all, than the men always sent out to die for them were also afraid; that they loved life as dearly as anybody else; but nevertheless they died. So to me it seems the supreme judgment that if we can not live together, we now must die together.

“I have tried to get somebody interested in doing a television series on the Medal of Honor. My idea of a format was this. A regular narrator would tell each story, first showing actual scenes of where the Medal-holder grew up: his home, his church, his school, his streets. Then have professional actors - reenact the deed that brought him the medal, ending with a brief pictorial account of what the man is today. If he's in a grave, show that in stark close-up to let people know what victory in war really costs. As I read the numerous citations, it seemed to me that they contained great action and drama as well as representing the highest living ideals that we have produced in America - or even in mankind. I wanted the stories picked so that they would show that these men came from every walk of life; every race, every creed, every color that make up America. It would be a cross-section of a living democracy at its noblest. But I could never get anybody interested in the series. Almost nobody to whom I talked even understood the significance, or even the meaning, of the Medal of Honor.

“Not long after the war, Hollywood began to make a series of pictures against anti-Semitism, naturally dramatizing intolerance. When I saw these films, I felt like I was being hit over and over with a dead cat. So I tried to give some producer a story that I had picked up in the war. One day there appeared in the “B Bag” section of “The Stars And Stripes” a letter signed by four nurses. It was simply a letter written with great devotion and selflessness to tell the G.I.'s just how the nurses felt about the boys who were brought into them, frequently covered with mud and blood; and of the boys who might never be brought in but who they knew were still out there fighting. It was such a wonderfully simple, direct letter that it

had a great effect upon me. Hundreds of guys wrote "The Stars And Stripes" about it. I was in Belgium when the second part of the story was released. On the very night that letter was mailed, the hospital area came under German fire, and one of those four nurses was killed. She just happened to be Jewish. The story ended with just this line "She was buried among the fighting men she served, the Star of David at her head."

"Now here I saw a great positive story for the Jewish race. I wanted a producer to go back and pick up her life, showing how she grew up, how she loved the earth, how she loved love, how she loved life - and how in the end she gave it all up, because she loved humanity greater. I had a finish for the picture wherein the camera panned over a military cemetery, pulled to a close-up on that one grave with the Star of David, linger for a minute, and move on. There would be no preaching, no overt message. The final truth lay in that grave; in the entire cemetery where all had died for a common cause. I wanted the producers, if the parents of the girl needed money, to pay them for the story. If they did not need the money, then to establish a perpetual medical scholarship in that girl's name. That was all I wanted. I wanted nothing to do with writing or making the picture. But I could not get a single producer, many of whom were Jewish, interested in the story. They wanted to continue to make the pictures damning intolerance and showing the question up in its worst light; and to my mind a very exaggerated light.

"I did not show Audie my letter to you until some days after it was mailed. He had been out of town. But upon reading a copy of the letter, he said it was the first time he could study the details of that action objectively as the letter seemed to have been written about somebody else, and not him. So he set me straight on a couple of points. From all accounts, it appeared that Company B was in an isolated position on that Holtzwihr front. The only thing I ever found in the records was that the Third Battalion was fighting to the south of Company B. So I asswned [sic[4]] that two units were connected, at least, loosely. But Murphy upon reading the account immediately recalled that his left flank was covered by a battered Company A, of the First Battalion. A unit of the 3rd Recon, Troop was supposed to have moved up and covered his right flank, but it never arrived, leaving that flank exposed. I have been trying to get this information out of him for seventeen years; but not until he saw the story in writing did he correct that point. He also said that he and Captain Coles actually ran into that group of armed, and still fighting Germans, upon turning a bend in

[4] *assumed*

a rod. There was no village; and he still thought there were about four hundred of the Germans. There was no possible way to escape them except by bluff. So they took a long shot gamble and bluffed their way right through what could have been a trap with no escape.

“Since you have the battle record, we might as well try and straighten out Murphy's background, which has also been so distorted that nobody seems to know the truth. Audie was the sixth of nine living children. Two more died while babies. By birth Audie is almost pure Irish in blood except of a streak of Indian which he inherited from his mother, Josie. Murph was twelve, not sixteen, when his father left the family. Since the older children had either married or otherwise left home, Audie was the oldest one left at home. As such, he became the male head of the family at the age of twelve. He quit school before finishing the eighth grade to devote his entire time to work; and he never received any more formal education.

“His family had been share-croppers; that is, they worked other people's land for a share of the crops. This was a very common procedure in my boyhood. I also grew up as a share-cropper. On Murphy's discharge papers, his civilian profession is listed as “farmer”, meaning he was unskilled in any other form of labor. But since farm work is seasonal, Audie took other jobs to fill out the year. He worked as a helper in a combination filling-station and grocery store - one of those little institutions that serve the rural South. His final job before entering the army was that of an unskilled helper in a radio shop in Greenville, Texas. Previous to induction, he had never made more than sixteen dollars a week. From his wages he paid his own way and helped his mother all that he could.

“Murphy began hunting for game, chiefly rabbits and squirrels, when he was a small boy. Although he enjoyed hunting, it was also a deadly serious business with him. The game was always needed to feed his family. Since he could afford little ammunition for lack of money, he did the next best thing. He learned not to miss his target. Thus he developed a deadly aim which came easily with his natural ability with weapons. He used both a twenty-two rifle and a shotgun. His ability with guns, thus developed, came in handy during the war.

“Audie was born on a farm near Kingston, Texas. He actually had no town, but worked in several briefly. Thus several claimed him after he became famous. He returned to Farmersville after being brought back from Europe only because his sister, Corrine, and her family lived there. All these - Greenville, Celeste, Kingston, Farmersville - are small towns in a farming area northeast of Dallas. I have never been able to find Celeste and Kingston on the map.

"When Murphy was sixteen, his mother died of cancer. At the time of her serious illness, she and the three younger children were living in Farmersville with Corrine. Audie was living and working in Celeste when he received word of her grave condition. It was then that he went to Farmersville. After his mother's death, the three younger Murphy children were put in an orphanage. Corrine, already over burdened with her own family, was unable to take care of them. And Audie was in no position to be both father and mother to them. He went to Greenville, where he got the job in the radio shop, and earned enough money to pay for his mother's funeral. He was in Greenville when the war broke out with Japan.

"On December 7, 1941, Audie met a man on a road who told him that the Japs had bombed Pearl Harbor. Murphy did not know what or where Pearl Harbor was. As his seventeenth birthday approached, he tried to enlist in both the Marines and Paratroops, but was turned down because of being underweight. I told Murph that I wanted to straighten out this age business for good. He said that he enlisted in the army on his seventeenth birthday, not his eighteenth. At his insistence, Corrine testified that he was eighteen. According to Murphy, his birth registration was destroyed in a court-house fire.

"In 1948, believe it or not, he had difficulty getting a passport, because he could not prove that he was born in America. I was with him through this whole routine. So again Corrine had to testify that he was American-born so he could get a passport for his trip to France to receive the Legion of Honor.

"Audie enlisted in the army in Greenville, Texas - not Dallas - on June 20, 1942. But he did not report for active duty at Camp Wolters until ten days later. He had to wait until the army got enough recruits together to justify sending a bus-load for a distance. I do not know his weight and height upon enlistment; but his discharge papers, dated September 21, 1945, give his weight at 138 pounds and his height as five feet 7 1/2 inches. A former member of Company B told me that when he first saw Audie in North Africa, he was sure that the draft boards had scraped the bottom of the barrel. "To me Murphy looked like an underweight Boy Scout", he said.

"During an early session of close order drill at Camp Wolters, Audie, weak from inoculations, fainted cold on the drill ground. He acquired the nickname of "baby"; and his company commander tried to send him to a cooks and bakers school. Murphy swore he would go to the guardhouse first. The co gave in and Murphy was trained as an infantry rifleman.

"At Fort Meade, Maryland, which served as a P.O.E. for Audie's group, Murphy

worked in the PX. His kindly superiors, still trying to save him from combat, offered him a permanent spot on the cadre at Fort Meade. Audie declined. He was made an acting sergeant on the boat to North Africa; and spent most of the time suffering from deathly seasickness. He also went to the latrine one night, lost his bunk, and did not find it until the next day. Left on board as a ship guard at Casablanca, Audie took a brief AWOL to see the town. He began breaking army rules early.

“Once in combat, he was still denied an opportunity to fight. His CO kept him in the rear as a runner, still trying to spare him. But Murphy slipped off on so many combat patrols that the CO gave in. He promoted Audie to corporal and sent him to the front, where he remained for most of the war. He went through seven battle campaigns and fought in all of them except the Tunisian one. When he joined Company B in the battle area, fighting was still going on but ceased before Audie's unit could go back into combat. Murphy was discharged as a first lieutenant and now holds the rank of major in the inactive reserves.

“I forgot to mention how much Murphy believed in weapons. When going into combat, he threw away all excess poundage, keeping his raincoat, a few rations, and all of the ammunition and grenades that he could carry. As a liaison officer, he had the usual fifty calibre machine gun mounted on his jeep. He also carried several rifles, two German machine guns, and case of grenades. Strangers seeing this heavily armed and extremely youthful young soldier thought he was trying to play war.

“Since you are aiming your book at a young audience, I know you wish to give as visual a picture as possible. But I believe you made a few minor technical errors which I hope you don't mind my calling your attention to. In your sketch you say that Company B had shrunk from “198 to 55 men” since the landing in Southern France and the Holtzwihr battle. Actually the company was decimated and rebuilt time and again. Murphy thinks the unit was down to thirty-four men when he joined it, after hospitalization for malaria, on the Anzio beachhead. He arrived just in time to get in on three murderous days of assault designed to extend the beachhead. The 3rd Division history says that in this terrible battle some companies were reduced to twenty men. Audie, still weak from malaria, fought through the entire battle without getting a scratch. He was knocked briefly unconscious by a heavy shell concussion. That same concussion killed a friend just a few yards from Murphy. When Audie regained consciousness, he scrambled over the man. He found him stone dead without a single mark from metal.

"I pointed out that the Germans during the Holtzwihr attack were wearing snow capes. Thus their greenish grey uniforms were hidden. Incidentally I could not recall ever seeing a German tank with swastikas painted on them. So I asked Murphy abut [sic[5]] it. He said that the Iron Cross, or a modification of it, was used on the tanks. I believe that the swastika was a political symbol, while the Iron Cross was a military one. Both Audie and I might be wrong about this matter; so you might check it.

"If memory serves, I believe that all weapons, including bayonets, had a dull finish for the express purpose of avoiding the reflection of sunlight. Otherwise they would have given positions away. I feel somewhat like a fool in telling a man of your rank and background of these possible small corrections. But you strike me as a man who wants things, even small details, right. So you might check out the above suggestions.

"Now back to Murphy's early background. Audie has seldom discussed his family with me. I thought for a long time that his father was dead; and ne never told me the cause of his mother's death. I learned that from a family friend. He said that she died from cancer of the womb. This probably explains Audie's bitterness toward his father. He told me that his mother's bearing too many children too fast undoubtedly hastened her death. Of course, the big thing between Murph and his father was the "desertion."

"How Audie actually feels towards his family, I don't know. He had a younger brother, Dick, who lived near Los Angeles. But I never met him. He died several years ago. Audie not only took care of the funeral, but served as a pallbearer for his brother. The latter is unusual. I was sick at the time, but Murphy came by my house after the burial. "I never asked God for much," he said, "but I did pray for Him to give Dick a chance. They opened his head and that was all - cancer of the brain. He never had a chance." You will understand why I don't question him much about the family.

"Now on the record we have very grim picture. But in all fairness to truth, it should be examined further. It is wrong to say that his mother supported eleven - or nine - children. I grew up on a share crop farm myself, and it was customary for the children to pitch in and help all they could as soon as they were old enough. I started working in the fields at the age of nine, which was not considered unusually young. Audie did tell me that his earliest memory is that of hanging from a tree swing on the edge of a field and watching his mother hoe cotton under a sweltering sun. By use of one of those escape-proof baby swings,

[5] *about*

she could keep an eye on baby Audie while she worked. Naturally Mrs. Murphy's toil had to be endless. Besides the field work, she had to take care of her home and children. Murphy said that when he was going to school, his mother washed his denim pants every night. They shrank so much that the other kids called him "short- britches," which got him into many fights.

"Mrs. Murphy surely worked all the time that she had time and strength for. My mother, who was a widow, did the same. In retrospect I do not see how she stood up under the grueling years, but she did. We even had a lot of fun; and I was never conscious of being mistreated. I thought everybody worked as hard as we did. My point that is that Audie's boyhood, as grim as it was, could not have been entirely bleak. We often have laughs in recalling things that happened in our childhood. Incidentally taking younger children to the fields and allowing them to play in the shade while the elders worked was customary among the poor when I was a boy. There was simply no time for baby sitters.

"I never met Audie's father, but I have heard about him from people not related to the family. I make no brief for any man who deserts his family; but I try to look at him fairly. Being Irish, Mr. Murphy evidently had no sense of responsibility. Having come from generations of Irish, I know whereof I speak. "I liked the father," said a friend, "but he had no more sense of responsibility than the wind. He had the heart of the Irish. He might, for instance, buy a load of groceries for his family and give them all away before he got home, thinking somebody else needed them more." My own grandfather was exactly like that. He deserted two families evidently without much thought as to how they would get along. But when he got ready to die, he simply crawled into an empty house and died alone. Through him I developed an understanding for wastrels.

"God knows Audie had hardship and poverty enough; but for a fair picture there has to be a modification. It is much to his credit that after he became famous, he also became broke and virtually homeless again. But he never allowed himself to be used by pink politicians; and they certainly tried to use him. Believe it or not, a magazine editor offered me a price to write an article explaining why Audie could not marry Wanda Hendrix because they could not afford if financially. I happened to know that between them, they were making around seven hundred dollars a week at the time; and I knew the editor was trying to use me. So I told him off in a very heated manner. He did not ask me to write further articles for him. I cite this as an example of how those boys tried to use Murphy with no desire to help him.

"If you don't mind my suggestion, I think the situation can be cleared without losing impact something like this. "One of nine living children born to a poverty-stricken sharecropper and his wife, Audie Murphy has faced adversity from the time he came into the world. At twelve, he had to assume the responsibilities of a man, became his father disappeared, leaving the family to exist as best it could in a shack in rural Texas. His mother toiled endlessly in cotton fields and at home to care for her brood. But the task was greater than her strength. Audie left school in the eighth grade to help out all that he could. He worked as a far hand, a helper in a filling station, and an errand boy in a radio shop, never earning more than sixteen dollars a week. To supplement his wages, he hunted game for the family. Since he could not afford to buy many shells, he learned never to miss his target. The skill he developed with a gun when hunting for food was later to pay off in the army."

"This is a suggestion. Please take it as such. On his discharge papers, Murphy has "none" listed as his dependents. This is not accurate either, but I suppose Audie wanted [it] that way. Upon his return from the war, the people of Farmersville gave him a check for $1750 as an expression of gratitude. Murphy used the money to make a down payment on a house for Corrine on the condition that she and her husband take back the three younger children. One of his first acts on arriving home was to have the kids removed from the orphanage. He was always sending money to Corrine to help support the children and her own family in the early years that I knew him.

"There is something else that should be straightened out. As far as I have been able to determine, Audie is one of the two soldiers who was awarded every medal for valor in World War II. The other was Captain Maurice Britt, also of the 3rd Infantry Division. Britt got the British Military Cross, which was not given to Murphy. But Audie moved ahead of Britt with the Legion of Merit; the French Legion of Honor Chevalier; the French Croix de Guerre with Silver Star; the French Croix de Guerre with Two Palms; and the Belgium Croix de Guerre with Palm. I do not believe that Britt got a cluster for his Silver Star; or was awarded more than three Purple Hearts. It is silly to quibble about two such brave and able men. But just for the record, I am convinced that Audie Murphy was the soldier most decorated for valor in World War II or, possibly any other war in which America has engaged. Murphy never knew; and never give a damn. I did the checking.

"In closing, Colonel Reeder, I suppose that you have guessed that I have the highest admiration for Audie. I would do nothing to detract from the status he earned with his own courage, skill, and

ability. But I want you to see both him and his record in a realistic light. Audie was a child of destiny and not pathos. He was born to go far, because he was born with unusual gifts and with a brain on fire. If he had not made it in the army, he would have made it somewhere else. He had too many dreams to be really poor; too much anger to be pathetic; and too much humor for tragedy. With all of his sentiment, he is too fatalistic to worry a great deal about circumstances he cannot change.

“His story is uncompromisingly American: So poor that he could afford only one ragged pair of pants, he accomplished more by the time he was twenty-one than most people do in a life time. In tribute to his courage, he was given a standing ovation by both the Congress and the Senate. His portrait hangs by Sam Houston's in the State Capitol Building of Texas.

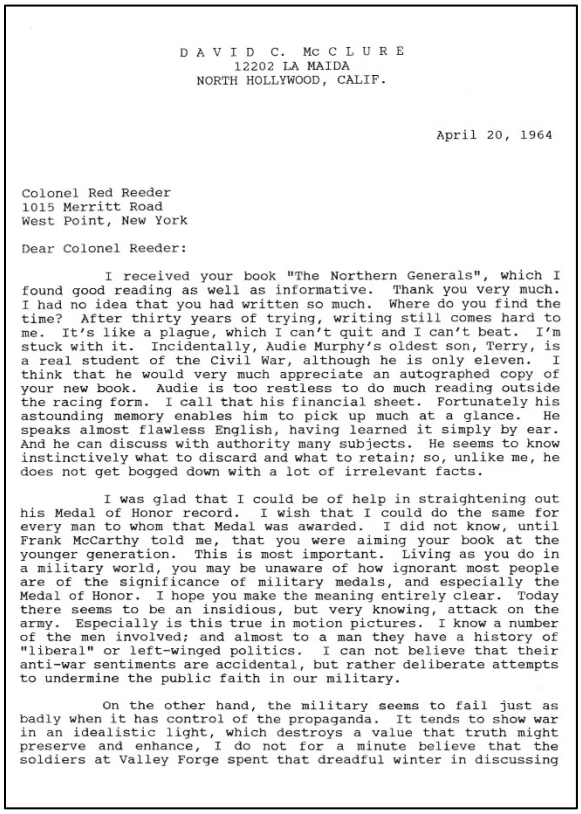
“James and Bill Cagney did bring him to Hollywood and put him under contract. But they did not make a star of him. He was never used in a picture by the Cagneys. In his first film, “Beyond Glory”, he played a small part as a West Point cadet. I got him a bit in his second film. He was paid five hundred dollars and given four shirts for it. He gave me two of the shirts, remarking that they “were damned near as bad as the picture.” I would go easy on that factor about stranger's sending him defense bonds and his donating to the Red Cross. I doubt whether this was true. With the money he was sending to help out Corrine and his means of getting rid of cash, he had a hard time making ends meet for years.

“He once told me a story of picking black-eyed peas on a percentage basis. That is, he was paid off in peas. He started home with a sack full. But he met a man who traded him a thirty pound watermelon for his peas. Now the peas would have made some solid eating for the family; he the watermelon was a more generous gesture for the children.

“This is the story of your life,” I said. “Every time you get hold of a sack of black-eyed peas, somebody trades you a watermelon for them.” And this is about the truth.

Sincerely,
David McClure

Images of Original Letter:



D A V I D C. Mc C L U R E
12202 LA MAIDA
NORTH HOLLYWOOD, CALIF.

April 20, 1964

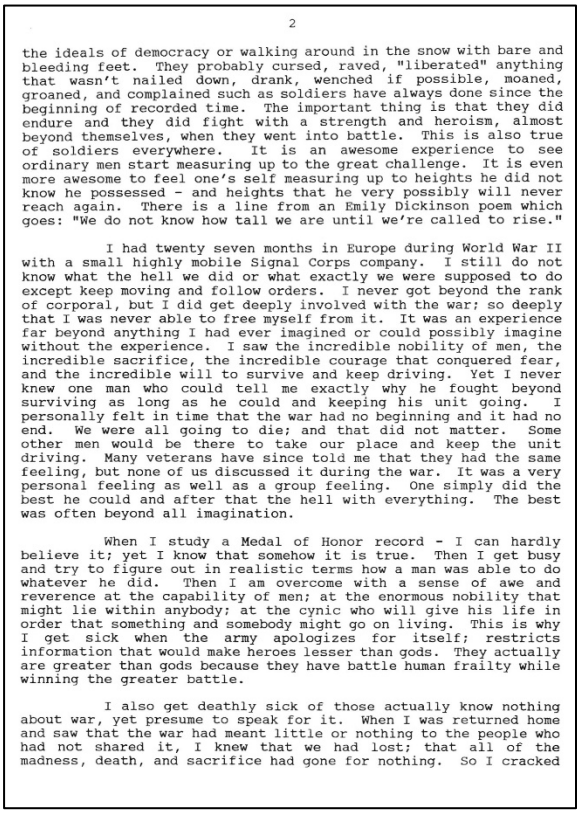
Colonel Red Reeder
1015 Merritt Road
West Point, New York

Dear Colonel Reeder:

I received your book "The Northern Generals", which I found good reading as well as informative. Thank you very much. I had no idea that you had written so much. Where do you find the time? After thirty years of trying, writing still comes hard to me. It's like a plague, which I can't quit and I can't beat. I'm stuck with it. Incidentally, Audie Murphy's oldest son, Terry, is a real student of the Civil War, although he is only eleven. I think that he would very much appreciate an autographed copy of your new book. Audie is too restless to do much reading outside the racing form. I call that his financial sheet. Fortunately his astounding memory enables him to pick up much at a glance. He speaks almost flawless English, having learned it simply by ear. And he can discuss with authority many subjects. He seems to know instinctively what to discard and what to retain; so, unlike me, he does not get bogged down with a lot of irrelevant facts.

I was glad that I could be of help in straightening out his Medal of Honor record. I wish that I could do the same for every man to whom that Medal was awarded. I did not know, until Frank McCarthy told me, that you were aiming your book at the younger generation. This is most important. Living as you do in a military world, you may be unaware of how ignorant most people are of the significance of military medals, and especially the Medal of Honor. I hope you make the meaning entirely clear. Today there seems to be an insidious, but very knowing, attack on the army. Especially is this true in motion pictures. I know a number of the men involved; and almost to a man they have a history of "liberal" or left-winged politics. I can not believe that their anti-war sentiments are accidental, but rather deliberate attempts to undermine the public faith in our military.

On the other hand, the military seems to fail just as badly when it has control of the propaganda. It tends to show war in an idealistic light, which destroys a value that truth might preserve and enhance, I do not for a minute believe that the soldiers at Valley Forge spent that dreadful winter in discussing



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the ideals of democracy or walking around in the snow with bare and bleeding feet. They probably cursed, raved, "liberated" anything that wasn't nailed down, drank, wenched if possible, moaned, groaned, and complained such as soldiers have always done since the beginning of recorded time. The important thing is that they did endure and they did fight with a strength and heroism, almost beyond themselves, when they went into battle. This is also true of soldiers everywhere. It is an awesome experience to see ordinary men start measuring up to the great challenge. It is even more awesome to feel one's self measuring up to heights he did not know he possessed - and heights that he very possibly will never reach again. There is a line from an Emily Dickinson poem which goes: "We do not know how tall we are until we're called to rise."

I had twenty seven months in Europe during World War II with a small highly mobile Signal Corps company. I still do not know what the hell we did or what exactly we were supposed to do except keep moving and follow orders. I never got beyond the rank of corporal, but I did get deeply involved with the war; so deeply that I was never able to free myself from it. It was an experience far beyond anything I had ever imagined or could possibly imagine without the experience. I saw the incredible nobility of men, the incredible sacrifice, the incredible courage that conquered fear, and the incredible will to survive and keep driving. Yet I never knew one man who could tell me exactly why he fought beyond surviving as long as he could and keeping his unit going. I personally felt in time that the war had no beginning and it had no end. We were all going to die; and that did not matter. Some other men would be there to take our place and keep the unit driving. Many veterans have since told me that they had the same feeling, but none of us discussed it during the war. It was a very personal feeling as well as a group feeling. One simply did the best he could and after that the hell with everything. The best was often beyond all imagination.

When I study a Medal of Honor record - I can hardly believe it; yet I know that somehow it is true. Then I get busy and try to figure out in realistic terms how a man was able to do whatever he did. Then I am overcome with a sense of awe and reverence at the capability of men; at the enormous nobility that might lie within anybody; at the cynic who will give his life in order that something and somebody might go on living. This is why I get sick when the army apologizes for itself; restricts information that would make heroes lesser than gods. They actually are greater than gods because they have battle human frailty while winning the greater battle.

I also get deathly sick of those actually know nothing about war, yet presume to speak for it. When I was returned home and saw that the war had meant little or nothing to the people who had not shared it, I knew that we had lost; that all of the madness, death, and sacrifice had gone for nothing. So I cracked

up and never really recovered. I have always felt that the tragedy of war is not in the death of millions, but in the death of a single man for whom humanity will not take credit. If we can not truly assume the responsibility of the death of that one man, how can we assume it for millions? It seems to me that the atomic bomb is the workings of a divine justice. Any soldier knows that the bomb can kill him no deader than can a rifle bullet or a small piece of shrapnel. But for untold ages the forces of darkness have been held back by a thin, bloody, muddy line of lost men. They suffered, sacrificed, and died. And for the most part they were soon forgotten. Now nuclear weapons have put everybody on earth in the front lines. So suddenly the people are afraid. They forget, if they ever knew at all, than the men always sent out to die for them were also afraid; that they loved life as dearly as anybody else; but nevertheless they died. So to me it seems the supreme judgment that if we can not live together, we now must die together.

I have tried to get somebody interested in doing a television series on the Medal of Honor. My idea of a format was this. A regular narrator would tell each story, first showing actual scenes of where the Medal-holder grew up: his home, his church, his school, his streets. Then have professional actors - reenact the deed that brought him the medal, ending with a brief pictorial account of what the man is today. If he's in a grave, show that in stark close-up to let people know what victory in war really costs. As I read the numerous citations, it seemed to me that they contained great action and drama as well as representing the highest living ideals that we have produced in America - or even in mankind. I wanted the stories picked so that they would show that these men came from every walk of life; every race, every creed, every color that make up America. It would be a cross-section of a living democracy at its noblest. But I could never get anybody interested in the series. Almost nobody to whom I talked even understood the significance, or even the meaning, of the Medal of Honor.

Not long after the war, Hollywood began to make a series of pictures against anti-semitism, naturally dramatizing intolerance. When I saw these films, I felt like I was being hit over and over with a dead cat. So I tried to give some producer a story that I had picked up in the war. One day there appeared in the "B Bag" section of "The Stars And Stripes" a letter signed by four nurses. It was simply a letter written with great devotion and selflessness to tell the G.I.'s just how the nurses felt about the boys who were brought into them, frequently covered with mud and blood; and of the boys who might never be brought in but who they knew were still out there fighting. It was such a wonderfully simple, direct letter that it had a great effect upon me. Hundreds of guys wrote "The Stars And Stripes" about it. I was in Belgium when the second part of the story was released. On the very night that letter was mailed, the hospital area came under German fire,

and one of those four nurses was killed. She just happened to be Jewish. The story ended with just this line "She was buried among the fighting men she served, the Star of David at her head."

Now here I saw a great positive story for the Jewish race. I wanted a producer to go back and pick up her life, showing how she grew up, how she loved the earth, how she loved love, how she loved life - and how in the end she gave it all up, because she loved humanity greater. I had a finish for the picture wherein the camera panned over a military cemetery, pulled to a close-up on that one grave with the Star of David, linger for a minute, and move on. There would be no preaching, no overt message. The final truth lay in that grave; in the entire cemetery where all had died for a common cause. I wanted the producers, if the parents of the girl needed money, to pay them for the story. If they did not need the money, then to establish a perpetual medical scholarship in that girl's name. That was all I wanted. I wanted nothing to do with writing or making the picture. But I could not get a single producer, many of whom were Jewish, interested in the story. They wanted to continue to make the pictures damning intolerance and showing the question up in its worst light; and to my mind a very exaggerated light.

I did not show Audie my letter to you until some days after it was mailed. He had been out of town. But upon reading a copy of the letter, he said it was the first time he could study the details of that action objectively as the letter seemed to have been written about somebody else, and not him. So he set me straight on a couple of points. From all accounts, it appeared that Company B was in an isolated position on that Holtzwihr front. The only thing I ever found in the records was that the Third Battalion was fighting to the south of Company B. So I assumed that two units were connected, at least, loosely. But Murphy upon reading the account immediately recalled that his left flank was covered by a battered Company A, of the First Battalion. A unit of the 3rd Recon, Troop was supposed to have moved up and covered his right flank, but it never arrived, leaving that flank exposed. I have been trying to get this information out of him for seventeen years; but not until he saw the story in writing did he correct that point. He also said that he and Captain Coles actually ran into that group of armed, and still fighting Germans, upon turning a bend in a rod. There was no village; and he still thought there were about four hundred of the Germans. There was no possible way to escape them except by bluff. So they took a long shot gamble and bluffed their way right through what could have been a trap with no escape.

Since you have the battle record, we might as well try and straighten out Murphy's background, which has also been so distorted that nobody seems to know the truth. Audie was the sixth of nine living children. Two more died while babies. By birth Audie is almost pure Irish in blood except of a streak of Indian

which he inherited from his mother, Josie. Murph was twelve, not sixteen, when his father left the family. Since the older children had either married or otherwise left home, Audie was the oldest one left at home. As such, he became the male head of the family at the age of twelve. He quit school before finishing the eighth grade to devote his entire time to work; and he never received any more formal education.

His family had been share-croppers; that is, they worked other people's land for a share of the crops. This was a very common procedure in my boyhood. I also grew up as a share-cropper. On Murphy's discharge papers, his civilian profession is listed as "farmer", meaning he was unskilled in any other form of labor. But since farm work is seasonal, Audie took other jobs to fill out the year. He worked as a helper in a combination filling-station and grocery store - one of those little institutions that serve the rural South. His final job before entering the army was that of an unskilled helper in a radio shop in Greenville, Texas. Previous to induction, he had never made more than sixteen dollars a week. From his wages he paid his own way and helped his mother all that he could.

Murphy began hunting for game, chiefly rabbits and squirrels, when he was a small boy. Although he enjoyed hunting, it was also a deadly serious business with him. The game was always needed to feed his family. Since he could afford little ammunition for lack of money, he did the next best thing. He learned not to miss his target. Thus he developed a deadly aim which came easily with his natural ability with weapons. He used both a twenty-two rifle and a shotgun. His ability with guns, thus developed, came in handy during the war.

Audie was born on a farm near Kingston, Texas. He actually had no town, but worked in several briefly. Thus several claimed him after he became famous. He returned to Farmersville after being brought back from Europe only because his sister, Corrine, and her family lived there. All these - Greenville, Celeste, Kingston, Farmersville - are small towns in a farming area northeast of Dallas. I have never been able to find Celeste and Kingston on the map.

When Murphy was sixteen, his mother died of cancer. At the time of her serious illness, she and the three younger children were living in Farmersville with Corrine. Audie was living and working in Celeste when he received word of her grave condition. It was then that he went to Farmersville. After his mother's death, the three younger Murphy children were put in an orphanage. Corrine, already over burdened with her own family, was unable to take care of them. And Audie was in no position to be both father and mother to them. He went to Greenville, where he got the job in the radio shop, and earned enough money to pay for his mother's funeral. He was in Greenville when the war broke out with Japan.

On December 7, 1941, Audie met a man on a road who told him that the Japs had bombed Pearl Harbor. Murphy did not know what or where Pearl Harbor was. As his seventeenth birthday approached, he tried to enlist in both the Marines and Paratroops, but was turned down because of being underweight. I told Murph that I wanted to straighten out this age business for good. He said that he enlisted in the army on his seventeenth birthday, not his eighteenth. At his insistence, Corrine testified that he was eighteen. According to Murphy, his birth registration was destroyed in a court-house fire.

In 1948, believe it or not, he had difficulty getting a passport, because he could not prove that he was born in America. I was with him through this whole routine. So again Corrine had to testify that he was American-born so he could get a passport for his trip to France to receive the Legion of Honor.

Audie enlisted in the army in Greenville, Texas - not Dallas - on June 20, 1942. But he did not report for active duty at Camp Wolters until ten days later. He had to wait until the army got enough recruits together to justify sending a bus-load for a distance. I do not know his weight and height upon enlistment; but his discharge papers, dated September 21, 1945, give his weight at 138 pounds and his height as five feet 7 1/2 inches. A former member of Company B told me that when he first saw Audie in North Africa, he was sure that the draft boards had scraped the bottom of the barrel. "To me Murphy looked like an underweight Boy Scout", he said.

During an early session of close order drill at Camp Wolters, Audie, weak from inoculations, fainted cold on the drill ground. He acquired the nickname of "baby"; and his company commander tried to send him to a cooks and bakers school. Murphy swore he would go to the guardhouse first. The CO gave in and Murphy was trained as an infantry rifleman.

At Fort Meade, Maryland, which served as a P.O.E. for Audie's group, Murphy worked in the PX. His kindly superiors, still trying to save him from combat, offered him a permanent spot on the cadre at Fort Meade. Audie declined. He was made an acting sergeant on the boat to North Africa; and spent most of the time suffering from deathly seasickness. He also went to the latrine one night, lost his bunk, and did not find it until the next day. Left on board as a ship guard at Casablanca, Audie took a brief AWOL to see the town. He began breaking army rules early.

Once in combat, he was still denied an opportunity to fight. His CO kept him in the rear as a runner, still trying to spare him. But Murphy slipped off on so many combat patrols that the CO gave in. He promoted Audie to corporal and sent him to the front, where he remained for most of the war. He went through seven battle campaigns and fought in all of them except the

death. I learned that from a family friend. He said that she died from cancer of the womb. This probably explains Audie's bitterness toward his father. He told me that his mother's bearing too many children too fast undoubtedly hastened her death. Of course, the big thing between Murph and his father was the "desertion."

How Audie actually feels towards his family, I don't know. He had a younger brother, Dick, who lived near Los Angeles. But I never met him. He died several years ago. Audie not only took care of the funeral, but served as a pallbearer for his brother. The latter is unusual. I was sick at the time, but Murphy came by my house after the burial. "I never asked God for much," he said, "but I did pray for Him to give Dick a chance. They opened his head and that was all - cancer of the brain. He never had a chance." You will understand why I don't question him much about the family.

Now on the record we have very grim picture. But in all fairness to truth, it should be examined further. It is wrong to say that his mother supported eleven - or nine - children. I grew up on a share crop farm myself, and it was customary for the children to pitch in and help all they could as soon as they were old enough. I started working in the fields at the age of nine, which was not considered unusually young. Audie did tell me that his earliest memory is that of hanging from a tree swing on the edge of a field and watching his mother hoe cotton under a sweltering sun. By use of one of those escape-proof baby swings, she could keep an eye on baby Audie while she worked. Naturally Mrs. Murphy's toil had to be endless. Besides the field work, she had to take care of her home and children. Murphy said that when he was going to school, his mother washed his denim pants every night. They shrank so much that the other kids called him "short-britches," which got him into many fights.

Mrs. Murphy surely worked all the time that she had time and strength for. My mother, who was a widow, did the same. In retrospect I do not see how she stood up under the grueling years, but she did. We even had a lot of fun; and I was never conscious of being mistreated. I thought everybody worked as hard as we did. My point that is that Audie's boyhood, as grim as it was, could not have been entirely bleak. We often have laughs in recalling things that happened in our childhood. Incidentally taking younger children to the fields and allowing them to play in the shade while the elders worked was customary among the poor when I was a boy. There was simply no time for baby sitters.

I never met Audie's father, but I have heard about him from people not related to the family. I make no brief for any man who deserts his family; but I try to look at him fairly. Being Irish, Mr. Murphy evidently had no sense of responsibility. Having come from generations of Irish, I know whereof I speak. "I liked the father," said a friend, "but he had no more sense of

Tunisian one. When he joined Company B in the battle area, fighting was still going on but ceased before Audie's unit could go back into combat. Murphy was discharged as a first lieutenant and now holds the rank of major in the inactive reserves.

I forgot to mention how much Murphy believed in weapons. When going into combat, he threw away all excess poundage, keeping his raincoat, a few rations, and all of the ammunition and grenades that he could carry. As a liaison officer, he had the usual fifty calibre machine gun mounted on his jeep. He also carried several rifles, two German machine guns, and case of grenades. Strangers seeing this heavily armed and extremely youthful young soldier thought he was trying to play war.

Since you are aiming your book at a young audience, I know you wish to give as visual a picture as possible. But I believe you made a few minor technical errors which I hope you don't mind my calling your attention to. In your sketch you say that Company B had shrunk from "198 to 55 men" since the landing in Southern France and the Holtzwihr battle. Actually the company was decimated and rebuilt time and again. Murphy thinks the unit was down to thirty-four men when he joined it, after hospitalization for malaria, on the Anzio beachhead. He arrived just in time to get in on three murderous days of assault designed to extend the beachhead. The 3rd Division history says that in this terrible battle some companies were reduced to twenty men. Audie, still weak from malaria, fought through the entire battle without getting a scratch. He was knocked briefly unconscious by a heavy shell concussion. That same concussion killed a friend just a few yards from Murphy. When Audie regained consciousness, he scrambled over the man. He found him stone dead without a single mark from metal.

I pointed out that the Germans during the Holtzwihr attack were wearing snow capes. Thus their greenish grey uniforms were hidden. Incidentally I could not recall ever seeing a German tank with swastikas painted on them. So I asked Murphy abut it. He said that the Iron Cross, or a modification of it, was used on the tanks. I believe that the swastika was a political symbol, while the Iron Cross was a military one. Both Audie and I might be wrong about this matter; so you might check it.

If memory serves, I believe that all weapons, including bayonets, had a dull finish for the express purpose of avoiding the reflection of sunlight. Otherwise they would have given positions away. I feel somewhat like a fool in telling a man of your rank and background of these possible small corrections. But you strike me as a man who wants things, even small details, right. So you might check out the above suggestions.

Now back to Murphy's early background. Audie has seldom discussed his family with me. I thought for a long time that his father was dead; and ne never told me the cause of his mother's

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death. I learned that from a family friend. He said that she died from cancer of the womb. This probably explains Audie's bitterness toward his father. He told me that his mother's bearing too many children too fast undoubtedly hastened her death. Of course, the big thing between Murph and his father was the "desertion."

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responsibility than the wind. He had the heart of the Irish. He might, for instance, buy a load of groceries for his family and give them all away before he got home, thinking somebody else needed them more. "My own grandfather was exactly like that. He deserted two families evidently without much thought as to how they would get along. But when he got ready to die, he simply crawled into an empty house and died alone. Through him I developed an understanding for wastrels.

God knows Audie had hardship and poverty enough; but for a fair picture there has to be a modification. It is much to his credit that after he became famous, he also became broke and virtually homeless again. But he never allowed himself to be used by pink politicians; and they certainly tried to use him. Believe it or not, a magazine editor offered me a price to write an article explaining why Audie could not marry Wanda Hendrix because they could not afford if financially. I happened to know that between them, they were making around seven hundred dollars a week at the time; and I knew the editor was trying to use me. So I told him off in a very heated manner. He did not ask me to write further articles for him. I cite this as an example of how those boys tried to use Murphy with no desire to help him.

If you don't mind my suggestion, I think the situation can be cleared without losing impact something like this. "One of nine living children born to a poverty-stricken sharecropper and his wife, Audie Murphy has faced adversity from the time he came into the world. At twelve, he had to assume the responsibilities of a man, became his father disappeared, leaving the family to exist as best it could in a shack in rural Texas. His mother toiled endlessly in cotton fields and at home to care for her brood. But the task was greater than her strength. Audie left school in the eighth grade to help out all that he could. He worked as a far hand, a helper in a filling station, and an errand boy in a radio shop, never earning more than sixteen dollars a week. To supplement his wages, he hunted game for the family. Since he could not afford to buy many shells, he learned never to miss his target. The skill he developed with a gun when hunting for food was later to pay off in the army."

This is a suggestion. Please take it as such. On his discharge papers, Murphy has "none" listed as his dependents. This is not accurate either, but I suppose Audie wanted that way. Upon his return from the war, the people of Farmersville gave him a check for $1750 as an expression of gratitude. Murphy used the money to make a down payment on a house for Corrine on the condition that she and her husband take back the three younger children. One of his first acts on arriving home was to have the kids removed from the orphanage. He was always sending money to Corrine to help support the children and her own family in the early years that I knew him.

There is something else that should be straightened out. As far as I have been able to determine, Audie is one of the two soldiers who was awarded every medal for valor in World War II. The other was Captain Maurice Britt, also of the 3rd Infantry Division. Britt got the British Military Cross, which was not given to Murphy. But Audie moved ahead of Britt with the Legion of Merit; the French Legion of Honor Chevalier; the French Croix de Guerre with Silver Star; the French Croix de Guerre with Two Palms; and the Belgium Croix de Guerre with Palm. I do not believe that Britt got a cluster for his Silver Star; or was awarded more than three Purple Hearts. It is silly to quibble about two such brave and able men. But just for the record, I am convinced that Audie Murphy was the soldier most decorated for valor in World War II or, possibly any other war in which America has engaged. Murphy never knew; and never give a damn. I did the checking.

In closing, Colonel Reeder, I suppose that you have guessed that I have the highest admiration for Audie. I would do nothing to detract from the status he earned with his own courage, skill, and ability. But I want you to see both him and his record in a realistic light. Audie was a child of destiny and not pathos. He was born to go far, because he was born with unusual gifts and with a brain on fire. If he had not made it in the army, he would have made it somewhere else. He had too many dreams to be really poor; too much anger to be pathetic; and too much humor for tragedy. With all of his sentiment, he is too fatalistic to worry a great deal about circumstances he cannot change.

His story is uncompromisingly American: So poor that he could afford only one ragged pair of pants, he accomplished more by the time he was twenty-one than most people do in a life time. In tribute to his courage, he was given a standing ovation by both the Congress and the Senate. His portrait hangs by Sam Houston's in the State Capitol Building of Texas.

James and Bill Cagney did bring him to Hollywood and put him under contract. But they did not make a star of him. He was never used in a picture by the Cagneys. In his first film, "Beyond Glory", he played a small part as a West Point cadet. I got him a bit in his second film. He was paid five hundred dollars and given four shirts for it. He gave me two of the shirts, remarking that they "were damned near as bad as the picture." I would go easy on that factor about stranger's sending him defense bonds and his donating to the Red Cross. I doubt whether this was true. With the money he was sending to help out Corrine and his means of getting rid of cash, he had a hard time making ends meet for years.

He once told me a story of picking black-eyed peas on a percentage basis. That is, he was paid off in peas. He started home with a sack full. But he met a man who traded him a thirty pound watermelon for his peas. Now the peas would have made some

solid eating for the family; he the watermelon was a more generous gesture for the children.

"This is the story of your life," I said. "Every time you get hold of a sack of black-eyed peas, somebody trades you a watermelon for them." And this is about the truth.

Sincerely,

David McClure