

RIDER TO CAROLYN P. RYAN STATEMENT ¹

Carolyn Price Ryan, in this frank and excellent account of the Audie Murphy she knew, has three errors. Undoubtedly they were caused by a memory that had to reach back 29 years to events that were under pressure at that time. I have told Mrs. Ryan that I would furnish this rider to correct them.

1. On October 26, 1944, Audie Murphy was wounded in the right hip by a German sniper bullet - not shrapnel as stated. Because of the extremely bad weather that made driving hazardous, Murphy did not get beyond the evacuation hospital for three days. During this time, the deep wound that had slashed almost entirely through the hip became complicated by gangrene. Audie was forced to spend almost three months in hospitals.

He was transferred, apparently in early January, 1945, from the 3rd General Hospital in Southern France to a "rest camp", also in Southern France, to complete his recovery. Here Audie ran into trouble. He was ordered to put a group of other convalescents through a session of close-order drill. Murphy, not being a parade soldier, loathed close-order drill. He had fainted during his first experience with close-order drill at Camp Wolters, Texas. On the Anzio Beachhead, his battered company had been pulled out of the front-lines for a brief rest. Before the men in his platoon could find quarters, Audie was told to put them through close-order drill. Murphy refused to obey the order. For this action he might have been court-martialed. But the brass had already recognized his ability as a front-line soldier, who specialized in dangerous patrols. However Audie was dressed down in public and a recommendation for promotion from Staff Sergeant to Tech Sergeant was canceled.

Now that he was ordered to put a group of convalescents through close-order drill, he exploded. Going AWOL, he rejoined Company "B" in the front-lines area on January 14, 1945. Since Company "B" already had six officers, Audie was considered "surplus."

On January 24th, Company "B" was thrown into a ferocious battle that was a part of the campaign to eliminate the Colmar Pocket. On the

¹ This document is written by David "Spec" McClure to amplify details given by Ms. Ryan and to correct a few errors.

following day, he was wounded in the left leg by a mortar shell fragment, but refused to be evacuated. Around 3:00 A.M., January 26, 1945, Audie, as the last surviving officer, was ordered to take over the command of Company "B." On the afternoon of that same day, he performed the deeds that brought him the Medal of Honor.

2. Audie himself never spent any time in an orphanage. After his father deserted the family, Audie and his mother tried to keep a home for the three youngest children. But Mrs. Murphy came down with a "lung disease"; also perhaps cancer of the uterus, as stated by John Cawthon. The ailing mother with her three youngest children (Joe, Billie, and Nadine) moved into the home of an elder daughter, Corinne Burns, Farmersville, Texas. Audie supported himself (and doubtless helped his mother) by doing farm work at \$12 a week. For a while he lived with the John Cawthons, of Celeste, Texas. His army induction papers listed his current address (1942) as Route 3, Greenville, Texas.

Audie's mother died in either 1939 or 1941. (The real date has to be verified.) Corinne Burns had children of her own; and after the death of Mrs. Murphy, Corinne and Audie decided that the Murphy children (Joe, Billie, and Nadine) should be placed in the Boles Orphanage Home near Greenville, Texas. The load was too much for Corinne: and Audie could not support the children on \$12 a week. Audie apparently continued to do farm work. But he also worked as a handyman-clerk in a combination grocery store and filling station. He finally landed in Greenville, Texas, where he worked as a handyman in a radio shop. (Murphy's army discharge papers classifies him as FARM HAND, GENERAL, but makes no mention of the radio shop.) On his 18th birthday, June 20, 1942, Audie tried to enlist in the Marines and the Paratroopers. Both turned him down because he lacked the required weight. But on June 30, 1942, the army inducted Audie in Dallas. He was promptly sent to Fort Wolters, Texas, for basic training.

Upon his return from the war, Audie was given approximately \$2000 by the citizens of Farmersville as a token of gratitude. He was given an additional \$1000 by the people of Greenville. With all of this money, Audie made a substantial down-payment on a two-story house for Corinne and her immediate family. Under the arrangement, Corinne took Joe, Billie, and Nadine from the orphanage to live with her in the new house. But perhaps the burden still proved to be too much. Nadine and Joe returned to the Boles Orphanage. Only Billie remained with Corinne. Nadine married early.

(Billie thinks she was only 16.) Joe was taken from the orphanage and placed in a Boys Ranch near Dallas². He later served in the army. After his discharge, Joe became a policeman and was killed in a car wreck. Both Billie and Nadine still live in Texas. When Audie started making money from the movies, he helped support the younger children.

3. This is not an error, but a comment on Audie's insomnia. Murphy had a horror of being caught off-guard, but he told me that he would become so exhausted that he frequently fell asleep while standing on his feet in the front lines. So he developed an alarm system. He clutched his service pistol with both hands. If he fell asleep, his hands would relax their hold on the gun. The pistol would drop and strike his feet, thus awakening him. But in general his sleep, often of a nightmare quality, was quite poor. About seven years before his death, Murphy developed severe insomnia. His doctor prescribed Placidyl - a hypnotic drug - for the insomnia. Audie took too much Placidyl - much more than prescribed - and twice became badly addicted. But he withdrew himself from the drug without medical help. However he did call his doctor, Kurt Jonas, M.D., and raised hell. Murphy had thought the drug to be non-addicting. On occasions of bad insomnia he took Placidyl for the remainder of his life; but he did so with much discretion and never became addicted again.

Because of the heavy dosages, the effect of the Placidyl remained throughout the days. Many people thought he was drinking heavily. Some insisted that he was drinking heavily during the last year of his life. I do not believe this. Audie would take a couple glasses of red wine with the Italian dinners he enjoyed so much. Once we were going to a party given by John Huston for the cast of "The Red Badge of Courage." Audie did not want to attend the affair, but he felt that he must, being the star of the movie. He was nervous and asked me what he could drink to calm him down, I suggested screwdrivers. Audie drank two of them; and this was the most I ever saw him drink at one time. John Tuell - a bartender friend of Audie's told me that Murph, in his last year of life, would sometimes have two or three drinks with a tequila base; but that he drank only in moderation. Tuell said that Murphy was taking a tranquilizer; and that this may have mixed with alcohol to produce the effect of slight drunkenness.

² Audie Murphy Research Foundation note: The actual location of the Boys Ranch was just south of Copperas Cove, Texas. See "Audie Murphy's Movies, Introduction" at <http://www.audiemurphy.com/>
http://www.audiemurphy.com/movies/movie_int.htm

Audie was a sleep-walker on occasions. His sister, Corinne Burns, told me that one night shortly after his return from the war, Audie got up, apparently in his sleep, and turned on all of the lights in her house. Another sister, Billie, told me that once she went to Audie's room to bid him good night. As she was leaving, she switched off the lights. Murphy told her to turn the lights back on so he could sleep.

I once shared a boat cabin with Audie. We were anchored at Catalina Island. A small dory was attached by line to our boat (The Petrel owned by Murphy). Audie had just fallen asleep when the dory began to bump against The Petrel. In the darkness of our cabin, Audie instantly reached for a light switch about an inch long. How he instantly found that switch I don't know. When he jumped out of his bunk, his eyes were open, but I saw that he was still sleeping. I tried to grab him, but missed. He swiftly climbed a wall ladder to the open deck. Apparently he awakened during the climb. I called to him and asked if he were all right. "Yes," he said. "But while I'm up here, I'm going to relieve my kidneys into the sea. I don't want this ladder climb to be a total loss."

Audie had a recurring nightmare. He dreamed that he was in combat and that his weapon was falling apart. As fast as he replaced a piece, it would fall off again. As stated elsewhere, he had either a recurring dream or a hallucination (Audie got his knowledge of hallucination when withdrawing from Placidyl) of a small duck that repeatedly visited his room after he went to bed.

4. After the elimination of the Colmar Pocket, the 3rd Infantry Division went into reserve on February 18, 1945. Audie was promoted to First Lieutenant and transferred to the 15th Infantry Regiment as a liaison officer. It is true that superior officers thought that Murphy's luck had been strained to the breaking point. He had been recommended for both the Medal of Honor and the Legion of Merit. (His enlisted men had put him in for the Medal of Honor). Officers from General O'Daniels on down wanted Audie to live long enough to get the decorations. They thought the liaison job would keep Murphy out of the front lines. But it didn't. He heard that his beloved Company B had bogged down in the Siegfried Line fighting. Captain Paul Harris, to whom Murphy was devoted, had been killed.

Upon hearing the news, Murphy conned a communications sergeant into driving him to the front line area. Then he got out and walked until he

found Company B. With no official permission whatever, Audie took command of the company and moved it through the Siegfried Line. (A graphic account of this action has been taped by Carroll Bjordahl, who was a sergeant with Company B at the time).

On another occasion, Audie and a Captain "Red" Cole got in front of the entire army in a sector in Germany. They ran into about 400 fully armed German soldiers who were taking a break by the roadside. The sergeant driving the jeep wanted to make a turnabout and make a run for it. But Murphy and Cole decided this would be the wrong thing; and would certainly get them either captured or shot. So they pulled an enormous bluff. With one hand on a 50-caliber machinegun trigger and the other waving in a friendly fashion, Murphy had the sergeant drive right by the Germans. Cole, with one finger on a rifle trigger and another hand waving, strongly backed the bluff. The amazed Germans made no effort to stop them. Murphy, Cole, and the sergeant hid out until the army could catch up with them.

I don't think Mrs. Ryan would want to give the impression that the army hid Murphy out on the French Riviera, while the others finished the fighting. Audie started that rest leave around May 6, 1945. Undoubtedly bored and lonely as Mrs. Ryan describes, Audie spent only a few days on the Riviera. It was characteristic of the Audie Murphy I knew to call, out of sheer boredom and loneliness, at all hours and ask for company. Mrs. Ryan's other impressions of Audie are the same as I often found him. Many times did I see Murphy's smiling face turn suddenly white with cold anger.

Out of utter modesty Carolyn Price Ryan did not say that she was Audie's first big romance. Before the war he lacked the clothes and money to do much dating. But he fell in love and proposed marriage with Carolyn Price. Both she and Murphy discussed the marriage with Perry Pitt. Perry, thinking that a good marriage would have a calming influence on Murphy's restless soul, encouraged it. But for some reason she turned the marriage proposal down. She married C. Andrew Ryan on February 23, 1946. They are currently (1973) living in Germany. Carolyn Price was four years older than Audie. This may have caused her to decide against marriage to Audie.

(Signed) David McClure
October 12, 1973