

# The Petrel

By Richard Rodgers

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<https://www.audiemurphy.com/msgb/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=4815>

**D**EFINE “*PETREL*”. Most people unfamiliar with the term would turn to an Internet search engine for the answer. The likely definition many would give is “a seabird” – something to that effect.

But the request for a definition isn’t being asked by somebody with an ornithological interest; it comes from the Audie Murphy Research Foundation. So, in the context of Audie Murphy, the better answer is the *Petrel* is the name of the fishing vessel which Audie Murphy owned and operated in the 1950’s.

Unfortunately, the *Petrel* has all but disappeared into maritime obscurity.

You may have once watched Audie Murphy operate a charter fishing boat – the *Lucy-M* – in one of his films known as *The Gun Runners*.<sup>1</sup> In his twenty-fourth movie, a remake of an Ernest Hemingway book<sup>2</sup>, Audie Murphy demonstrated excellent nautical skills as



*The Petrel when owned by Audie. Photo courtesy of Vivian Brandon.*

a sea captain while running guns to Cuba. Audie definitely knew how to handle a boat.

(*Arrggh, shiver-me-timbers*<sup>3</sup>, did I use the word *boat*?)

To an experienced sailor a boat is a small, open water craft vessel usually moved by oars while rowing. The U.S. Navy also teaches that a boat, unlike a ship, is small enough that it can be hoisted out of the water onto the deck of a ship.

<sup>1</sup> The Gun Runners, starring Audie Murphy and Eddie Albert can be viewed on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DswH0Ju3ld0>

<sup>2</sup> Hemingway, E. (1937). *To Have and Have Not* (1st ed.). Charles Scribner's Sons.

<sup>3</sup> A mock oath attributed to pirates who once sailed the high seas seeking loot and fortune; sometimes used by silly researchers to express shock or annoyance when weakly attempting to inject humor.

For more information visit the Audie L. Murphy Memorial Website at [www.audiemurphy.com](http://www.audiemurphy.com)

According to recent papers issued by the the U. S. Coast Guard, the *Petrel* was a 54.6-foot wooden vessel mechanically propelled by a 300 horse-powered diesel engine. Its hull was 14.2-feet at its widest point and was 7 feet high. Its draught – the distance between the keel and its waterline – was 3' 6". Its gross weight (when fully rigged) was well over 30 tons with a net weight of about 26 tons.



*United States Coast Guard / Department of Homeland Security documentation issued January 12, 2010 on the wooden vessel, the Petrel.*

It's safe to assume the *Petrel* wasn't a boat. It was a ship.

### History of the *Petrel* <sup>4, 5</sup>

The *Petrel* has a colorful history which includes military service in the defense of its country.

It was built by Columbia Enterprise Co., in Columbia City, Oregon in 1920. It was launched as a 39-ton fishing vessel and registered as the *Petrel* with the number ON220304.

Its first owner, Mr. Herbert J. Macomber of San Francisco, California, registered the vessel as a yacht in 1922. He maintained it until 1930 when he sold it to a Mr. Cornelius G. Willis out of Los Angeles, California in 1939. It was quickly resold the same year to a Mr. Ira Gosnell. In 1942, the *Petrel* was acquired by the U.S. Navy and pressed into service as a "District Patrol Craft".

The *Petrel* was then converted to meet naval military specifications by San Diego Marine in San Diego, California and was designated as YP-597. "YP" is an abbreviation for "Yard Patrol" and vessels belonging to this category were used for training and research purposes by the U.S. Navy.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> NavSource Online; <http://www.navsource.org/archives/14/31597.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Greg H. Williams, (2013). *World War II U.S. Navy Vessels in Private Hands*. McFarland, Inc. Publishers

<sup>6</sup> NAVSEA. (n.d.). Home. Naval Sea Systems Command; Surface Ships from Cradle to Grave. Retrieved October 9, 2021, from <https://www.navsea.navy.mil/Home/Team-Ships/PEO-Ships/Support-Ships-Boats-and-Craft/Support-Ships/YP-Yard-Patrol/>.

During the war its international call sign was “November-Yankee-Delta-Juliet” (NYDJ). Later, it’s call sign would become KATM and WA9487.

It was assigned to the West Coast Sound Training Squadron at San Diego between the years 1943 and 1945 and then taken out of military service on November 16, 1945. It proudly earned the American Campaign and the World War II Victory Medals.

After being removed from the Naval Register it was assigned to the *War Shipping Administration* for disposal.

In 1946, it was sold to Donald W. Douglas of Los Angeles as “*yacht Petrel*”. Eight years later, in 1954, it was sold to the Bartholomae Corp. which then sold it to Audie Murphy in 1956.

Audie owned the *Petrel* until 1959. In the January 1958 edition of *Movie Star Parade* an article described Audie’s restless nature and his need to preoccupy himself with various hobbies and outdoor interests. The author mentioned the *Petrel* and how Audie Murphy used it to go fishing and scuba diving. On one occasion, the author wrote that Audie became so absorbed in



*A 2010 photograph of the Petrel while moored. Photo submitted by John Kumparak.*



*A 2010 photograph of the Petrel in dry-dock while being repaired. Photo submitted by John Kumparak.*

a dive, he literally ran out of oxygen while submerged under fifty feet of water. He nearly drowned trying to get back to the surface and onto the *Petrel*.<sup>7</sup>

Audie sold the *Petrel* in 1959 to Ms. Harriette Horton of Tucson, Arizona who was later married to Mr. Arthur Pollard. The ceremony was aboard the *Petrel*. Mr. Pollard was a former University of Arizona football legend and drafted by the Washington Redskins. College gridiron injuries prevented him from

joining the NFL team, but he became well known in the thoroughbred and Quarter Horse industry making his mark and earning several American Quarter Horse Association Lifetime Achievement Awards with notable champions that included Lightning Bar, Spotted Bull, Arizonan, and Hula Girl. He and his wife Harriette owned the Lightning A Ranch in Tucson.<sup>8</sup>

Like the Pollards, Audie owned a horse ranch (the TM Ranch) in Tucson where

<sup>7</sup> Morris, J. (1958, January). You Can't Harness The Wind. *Movie Stars Parade*, 38–39, 62–63.  
<https://www.audiemurphy.com/msgb/viewtopic.php?f=18&t=2397>

<sup>8</sup> “Obituary,” *Arizona Daily Star* (<https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/tucson/name/arthur-pollard-obituary?pid=117317425>), Arthur Pollard, died September 8, 2008.

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*Mast, yardarm, crow's nest, and rigging of the Petrel. Photo submitted by John Kumparak.*

he too raised Quarter Horses. The Pollards and Audie may have known each other well.

Harriette later sold the *Petrel* to Joseph Davis (1961) of Los Angeles. It was then purchased six years later by the Petrel Corp. (1967) also of Los Angeles, California.

Afterwards, the *Petrel* was sold to George P. Martin, as a fishing boat in 1975 and then to Bradford Hayes in 1977 – both of Long Beach, California.

Not much is known about the *Petrel* after 1977 until thirty-three years later. The U.S. Coast Guard issued a Certificate of Documentation on January 10, 2010 (shown on page 2), to the *Petrel* and listed the owners as Bradford K. Hayes and Myron P. Ryan, Jr. of Santa Anna,

California. Each were described as 50 percent owners (see graphic on page 2).

As luck would have it, the *Petrel* unexpectedly resurfaced on the Audie Murphy Memorial Website message boards in 2010 when Mr. John T. Kumparak – a.k.a. “kumparakllc” – made a post titled “*Audie’s boat - The Petrel Found*”.<sup>9</sup> He described himself as “a current partner” and “co-owner” for the *Petrel* and that he along with his wife were attempting to restore the old ship with the help of others. More posts followed which included in-depth descriptions of repair efforts.

Over a period of several months, Mr. Kumparak wrote updates. In a second related message board thread, he also uploaded new pictures<sup>10</sup>. His enthusiasm in restoring the *Petrel* was apparent.

Unfortunately, the magnitude of the repairs needed was not anticipated when the project began. In his final post, Mr. Kumparak sadly announced that during a minor fender-bender with another boat, serious dry rot to the vessel was discovered and the decay was threatening to spread to the keel and

<sup>9</sup> “*Audie’s Boat – the Petrel Found*” <https://www.audiemurphy.com/msgb/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=875>

<sup>10</sup> “*The Petrel Project – Pictures*”. <https://www.audiemurphy.com/msgb/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=881>



*Extensive damage to the Petrel due to dry rot exposed after a minor collision with another boat. Photo submitted by John Kumparak.*

other critical framing members. This was a major setback to the members of *Project Petrel* and their hopes for restoring the ship back to its former glory days on the high seas. A photo of the crumbling structural components was included with the message (see above).

Not much is known after this. There have been no other posts made by Mr. Kumparak. The owners and project group once maintained a project website which has since become defunct.

Likely, based on *Petrel's* reported condition, it's certification as a seaworthy vessel became unrenowable and its papers expired in 2012. If true, the *Petrel* would no longer be permitted to sail by the U.S. Coast Guard for reasons of safety. With docking fees and other related costs, the owners of the *Petrel* have probably been forced to scrap the vessel.

The ending seems a sad one. Even still, the *Petrel's* history is the kind of stuff that good sea stories are made of. With its pre-Great Depression christening in 1920 followed by service in the military with the U.S. Navy during World War II, then with its post-war connections to an American war hero and Hollywood filmstar, and with later onboard nuptials by future owners who were tied to the thoroughbred and Quarter Horse industry, the tale of the *Petrel* is certainly a good sea story. As such, it is sure to be told by Audie fans, sailors, landlubbers, and maybe even a few equestrians for some time to come. Let's hope so.

*-Richard Rodgers*



*The "skull and crossbones" flies from the rigging of the Petrel circa 2010. This photo was found on the Petrel Project's website (no longer active) and submitted by M. D. Marks.*