

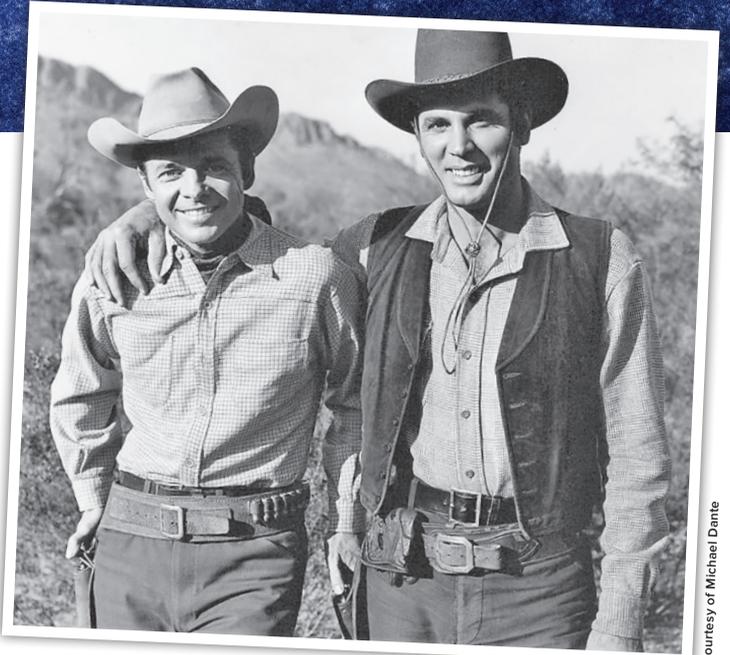
Michael Dante's Tribute To Audie Murphy

By Bob Roloff,
"The Arizona Duuude"



This is a story about a sharecropper's son from the cotton fields of Texas who had dreams of a great military career. He met up with another boy who had dreams of being a major league ballplayer. They both worked together as grown men in two big western movies. Reflecting on this, one would call it an act of providence, God bringing them together.

It was an honor for me to sit and listen as Michael Dante told me about his time spent with Audie Murphy. This is from an interview I had with Michael in Tombstone on September 3 and 4, 2021 while he was there as the guest of honor and ribbon cutter for the grand opening of "Billy" Gray's Audie Murphy and Medal of Honor Museum. You can read more about the museum at AudieMurphyMuseum.com.



Audie Murphy, left, and Michael Dante

Courtesy of Michael Dante

It was about ten years ago when we were first invited to be the honored guest speaker at The Audie Murphy American Cotton Museum in Greenville, Texas. We pulled into a circular drive around a bigger-than-life monument of Audie Murphy manning a machine gun. It was six or seven feet off the ground and an impressive sight at the museum entrance.

The museum is one story, with one half displaying his war memorabilia and the other half his movie memorabilia. The first thing you see is a mannequin with his war memorabilia with his medals of honor, so many medals that they were displayed on both sides of the jacket down to the waist. There were so many medals that he had to turn some of them down because he couldn't fit in all the requests for his appearances. It was quite extraordinary.

I did two films with Audie, *Apache Rifles* in 1964 and *Arizona Raiders* in 1965. William Whitney was the director of *Apache Rifles*; then he cast me in *Arizona Raiders* in 1965 in an entirely different role, playing a bad guy. Having done two films with Audie back-to-back, they were all aware of my career and asked my wife Mary-Jane and me to be their honored guest this year. It was the 25th anniversary of the museum. They had so many loyal Americans, who were there being much more than just fans. The atmosphere was so strong it was like family, a very spiritual uplifting experience. So, it was a ten-year spread since we had seen the inside of the museum in 2011. There were many additions and new experiences.

Then they ran the *Arizona Raiders* movie, followed by a Q & A with a large audience. It is said that *Arizona Raiders* was played more than *The Godfather*. We had some wonderful questions. Most of the questions were about my relationship with Audie on location. You know there aren't many of us left that worked with Audie in the 1960s.

Duuude, there was one moment in my life that was so strong and memorable, something I think about so many times. We were sitting under a canopy in the desert. It was about 117 or

120, so hot we didn't dare go in the dressing room. With the air conditioning and then the heat, you would have pneumonia in an hour. We sat there very quietly on the first day. In retrospect, I had this long pause of a moment in thinking when I first saw Audie Murphy on the screen in a newsreel. He was just a nineteen-year-old soldier who had just won the Medal of Honor. I'll never forget it. It was up on the newsreel in the theater in between the movie and the serial.

I looked up along with three or four of my buddies and there was our American hero. We all wanted to be like him. God, what he accomplished. When we played cops and robbers, we had a hero. He fast became one of our heroes. So now I'm sitting there, here I am co-starring with him in the first one, *Apache Rifles*. I looked over and very quietly thought, "Oh my God, all of those years as a boy that I'd looked up to him. Then he became an actor and was immediately one of my favorites. He was a hero on and off the screen. This is God-sent, divine guidance in my career."

I was a professional baseball player with the Washington Senators and trained with them in 1955. So, I did achieve my dream but that was cut short due to a bad shoulder. Tommy Dorsey arranged a screen test for me at MGM because he thought I had a great

future as an actor. He was just passing through when he saw me rehearse a play in Miami at the Ring Theater. I had met him through my roommate Mickey McDermott, who played with the Red Sox and the Yankees. So I went with the flow and tested at MGM which Tommy arranged and MGM signed me to a contract. With thirty films and one hundred and fifty rated T V shows, at age 90, and all these years later, I'm still thinking about Audie and how our careers caught up with us.

So now I'm sitting opposite of him, sitting in a chair thinking, "My God by divine guidance here I am co-starring with Audie Murphy who was our hero when we were growing up." And I had to pinch myself; this is just a spiritual moment that I will never forget. I looked over at Audie who was kind of relaxed. At that moment he looked at me, and then we both looked away. Whatever his thoughts were, it had been quite a journey.

When the PR photographer came by and wanted to take a picture of us (we were so hot) we got up. The photographer said, "Come on guys smile." Audie responded, "You want us to smile while we're roasting to death?" We both submitted to a little laughter. Audie just slid his hand down on my pistol and applied pressure. That's how we got the smile in the picture.

So, I'm here today in Tombstone for the grand opening of The Audie Murphy and Medal of Honor Museum by William "Billy" Gray. He has just a phenomenal collection of Audie Murphy memorabilia in his museum. It's an honor to be here and to cut the ribbon.

What a gift it is to be given life and to be born healthy, both mentally and physically, and to be blessed with great parents and born in America. The clarity in which I appreciate the above has allowed me to embrace life, as well as to accept the responsibility to grow as a human being every day. I always knew that whatever gifts the good Lord gave me I would develop through hard work and dedication, which would allow me to leave something of value behind after my days on earth are gone. ★

MichaelDanteWay.com

