

Audie Murphy
World War II's Most Decorated Soldier

by
MSG Glen Vela

L579
SGM Estrada
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Outline

I. Introduction.

A. References.

Audie Murphy. To Hell and Back. Holt, Rinehart and Winston 1949

Graham, Don. No Name on the Bullet New York: PenguinBooks1989

Murphy Audie Audie L. Murphy Memorial Web Site <http://www.audiemurphy.com>

B. My research focused on Audie Murphy, one of the most celebrated heroes of World War II.

II. Body.

A. Early years

B. Life in the Army

1. Weapons

2. Training

3. Discipline

4. Heroic acts

C. Life after the Army

III. Closing.

A. Summary

B. Questions

C. Conclusion

Audie Murphy, World War II's Most Decorated Soldier

Since the earliest days of statehood, Texans have answered the call of duty to defend the United States and protect its interests. From the war with Mexico to the current conflict in the Middle East, the Lone Star state has produced its share of military heroes, however none more celebrated or decorated than Audie Leon Murphy. Audie Leon Murphy was born in Kingston, Texas on June 20, 1924. Although some accounts place his actual birth date in 1925, most children during this time period were born at home which contributed to Texas' poor record keeping. Audie was one of 12 children, but only eight of his brothers and sisters survived to adulthood.

The Murphy house hardly qualified as a house since it was more like a shack. They had no radios, books, magazines or amusements for the children. The kind of poverty that the Murphys lived in was the kind of poverty that sends kids into the streets or into neighbors' homes to find something to do. Growing up, Audie picked cotton and also became a very skilled hunter. He first started hunting with a slingshot then became an expert with a rifle. Audie also hunted small game to help feed the family, a skill that would benefit him later in life.

When he was ten years old, his father left his mother and turned his back on the family. When Audie turned 12, his mother decided he could quit school and become the head of the family. When Audie was only 16, he survived another devastating blow when his mother died. He watched helplessly as his brothers and sisters were split up between orphanages or relatives.

Seeking an escape from this type of life he looked to the Marines but since he was only five feet five inches tall the Marines told him he was too short. Still desperately needing money to

help support his family, he tried to join the Army paratroopers but they wouldn't take him either. Reluctantly, he settled on the infantry which turned out to be a lucky thing for the Army.

In June 1942, Audie passed his physical and was sworn into the Army. He boarded a bus and headed for boot camp at Camp Wolters, located approximately 100 miles southwest of Fort Worth, Texas. At boot camp Audie earned the nickname "baby" from his First Sergeant because he was one inch shorter than the average height of all the other Soldiers.

Although Audie was usually meek, mild and reserved he was a different person with a rifle and bayonet in his hands. He loved the rifle range, but only qualified as a marksman. He was not used to shooting from fixed positions, but at spot shooting he was remarkable. He would volunteer for extra time on the range just so he could fire the machine guns that he loved.

Despite his fine showing in basic training, his company commander thought he was too small for a combat unit. He thought that schooling as either a cook or a baker was what Audie needed, but Murphy would have no part of that. He wanted to fight, so he managed to stay in an infantry combat unit. After graduating basic training, Audie visited his family and friends back home. He wore a marksmanship badge with the rifle bar and the expert badge with the bayonet bar. Later these achievements became overshadowed by the ribbons and decorations he brought back from Europe.

Audie attended Advanced Infantry Training (AIT) at Fort Meade, Maryland. He went through more training in marksmanship, field maneuvers, and the obstacle infiltration course. At Fort Meade, Audie staved off another attempt to assign him to a safe job; his company commander wanted him to work in the Post Exchange.

His training continued until January 1943, when he was reassigned to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. He reported to the 15th Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division (3ID) which was preparing for deployment to North Africa. On February 20, 1943, they shipped out to fight in the Tunisian desert. Although the fighting there was fierce, Audie's unit arrived too late to see any combat in North Africa. However, while deployed in Africa, the 3ID underwent arduous 30 mile marches that finished with Soldiers either crawling across a field under live machine-gun fire or making an amphibious landing. Later they admitted that this training got them ready for what they faced in the mountains of Italy.

During the invasion of Sicily, Audie finally saw action. He went ashore with the 15th Infantry near dawn on July 10, 1943, at Licata. He landed at Salerno to fight in the Voltuno river campaign and then at Anzio as part of the Allied force that fought its way to Rome. Five days after landing in Sicily, Audie received a promotion to Corporal and was finally assigned to front-line duty. His unit withdrew from Italy to train for Operation Anvil-Dragoon, the invasion of southern France.

Throughout these campaigns, Murphy's skills earned him advancements in rank; many of his superior officers were transferred, wounded or killed. On October 14, 1944, Audie was called to the regimental headquarters where he and two other soldiers were sworn in as officers. His commander ordered them to shave, take a bath and get back up to the front lines.

Audie was the epitome of a great leader; he was well-trained, savvy, and alert. During combat he usually carried three weapons: a .45 revolver in his belt, a rifle slung over his shoulder, and a carbine in his hands. He always wanted as much firepower on hand as he could carry. His unit could apply accurate small arms fire at the right place and at the right time. He

didn't show any favoritism in killing; he killed snipers, machine gunners, or anyone else threatening his unit. On numerous occasions he tracked and killed enemy snipers. On one trip he brought back the rifle of a dead sniper and his unit displayed it in the chow hall as a war trophy. He also knocked out tanks, directed artillery fire, and later captured Germans on night patrols.

Audie had his own way of enforcing discipline. One time an inexperienced replacement argued with him about an order to help dig holes to bury dead cows. They needed to bury the cows as the smell was intolerable. The recruit continued to argue until finally Audie drove his fist into the recruit's stomach and punched him in the jaw. The recruit said he was going to report Audie, but Audie shot back, "We left regulations in the rear. They are too goddamned heavy to carry." (Graham 57)

On January 26, 1945, near the village of Holtzwihr in eastern France, Murphy's forward positions came under fierce attack by the Germans. Against the onslaught of six Panzer tanks and 250 infantrymen, Murphy ordered his men to fall back. Alone, he mounted an abandoned burning tank and with a single machine gun, stopped the enemy's advance. Although wounded in the leg during the firefight, Murphy remained there for nearly an hour, repelling the attack of German soldiers on three sides and single-handedly killing 50 of them. His courageous performance stalled the German advance and allowed him to lead his men in the counterattack which ultimately drove the enemy from Holtzwihr. For his actions Murphy was awarded the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest award for gallantry in combat. (Graham 92)

Audie Murphy's website claims that by the end of the war, Murphy was the nation's most-decorated Soldier, earning an unparalleled 28 medals, including three from France and one from

Belgium. Murphy was wounded three times during the war, yet in May 1945, when victory was declared in Europe, he had still not reached his 21st birthday.

On September 21, 1945, Audie was released from the Army as an active member and reassigned to inactive status. He returned to a hero's welcome in the United States. His picture appeared on the cover of Life magazine. During this same time, actor James Cagney invited Murphy to Hollywood to start an acting career. Audie went on to make more than 40 films. His first part was just a small one in "Beyond Glory" in 1948. The following year he published his wartime memoirs To Hell and Back, which received good reviews. Later he portrayed himself in the 1955 movie version of the book.

In addition to acting in motion pictures, Murphy also became a successful country music songwriter. In spite of his fame and fortune, the trauma of war affected him a great deal and he suffered considerably with what is known today as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Audie had a difficult life, suffering from a number of addictions, depression, and insomnia. In 1971, Audie Murphy died when the private plane he was flying in crashed during heavy fog near Roanoke, Virginia. He was buried with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery.

Although quite a few heroes have emerged from recent conflicts, Audie Murphy remains at the forefront of this nation's memories. Even with only three years active service as a combat Soldier in World War II, Audie is still known as one of the best fighting combat Soldiers in history. His accomplishments during this period are the most significant and will probably never be repeated by another Soldier, given today's high-tech type of warfare. Although the United

States Army has always stated that there will never be another Audie Murphy; he remains the epitome of what each and every Soldier today should strive to become.

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Graham, Don. No Name on the Bullet New York: PenguinBooks1989

Murphy Audie Audie L. Murphy Memorial Web Site <http://www.audiemurphy.com>