



THE MUSEUM OF WESTERN FILM HISTORY

Audie Murphy

June 20, 1925 – May 28, 1971



Audie Leon Murphy was one of the most decorated American combat soldiers of World War II, receiving every military combat award for valor available from the U.S. Army, as well as French and Belgian awards for heroism. At the age of 19, Murphy received the Medal of Honor after single-handedly holding off an entire company of German soldiers for an hour at the Colmar Pocket in France in January 1945, then leading a successful counterattack while wounded and out of ammunition.

Audie Murphy eventually became the most decorated U.S. soldier in World War II. Though he was only 21 years old at the end of the war, he had killed 240 German soldiers, had been wounded three times, and had earned 33 awards and medals.

Born June 20, 1925 in Kingston, Hunt County, Texas, to Josie Bell (Killian) and Emmett Berry Murphy, poor sharecroppers. Murphy left school in fifth grade to pick cotton and find other work to help support his family; his skill with a hunting rifle was a necessity for putting food on the table.

In 1940, Murphy's father deserted the family for good, and his mother passed away a year later. Moved to do something to honor his mother's life, Murphy's older sister helped him to falsify documentation about his birth date to meet the minimum-age requirement for enlisting in the military. After being turned down by the Navy and the Marine Corps he enlisted in the Army. In February 1943, he left for North Africa, where he received extensive training.

In August 1944, Murphy's division moved to southern France as part of Operation Dragoon. It was there that his best friend, Lattie Tipton, was lured into the open and killed by a German soldier pretending to surrender. Enraged by this act, Murphy charged and killed the Germans that had just killed his friend. He then commandeered the German's machine gun and grenades and attacked several more nearby positions, killing all of the German soldiers there. Murphy was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions.

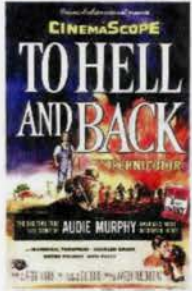
Over the course of World War II, Murphy witnessed the deaths of hundreds of fellow and enemy soldiers. Endowed with great courage in the face of these horrors, he was awarded 33 U.S. military medals, including three Purple Hearts and one Medal of Honor.



In June 1945, Murphy returned home from Europe a hero and was greeted with parades and elaborate banquets. *LIFE* magazine honored the brave, baby-faced soldier by putting him on the cover of its July 16, 1945 issue. That photograph inspired actor James Cagney to call Murphy and invite him to Hollywood to begin an acting career. Despite his celebrity, however, Murphy struggled for years to gain recognition.

Cagney Productions paid for acting and dancing lessons but was reluctantly forced to admit that Murphy--at least at that point in his career--didn't have what it took to become a movie star. For the next several years he struggled to make it as an actor,

But jobs were few, specifically just two bit parts, in *Beyond Glory* (1948) and *Texas, Brooklyn & Heaven* (1948). He finally got a lead role in *Bad Boy* (1949), and starred in the trouble-plagued production of MGM's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1951), directed by John Huston. While this film is now considered a minor classic, the politics behind the production sparked an irreparable fissure within the ranks of the studio's upper management. The film, with virtually no female presence (or appeal), bombed badly at the box office. Murphy, however, had already signed with Universal-International Pictures, which was putting him in a string of modestly budgeted Westerns, a genre that suited his easygoing image and Texas drawl.



In 1949, Murphy published his autobiography, *To Hell and Back*. The book quickly became a national bestseller, and in 1955, after much inner debate, he decided to portray himself in the film version of his book. The movie was a hit setting a box-office record for Universal that wasn't broken for 20 years. It was finally surpassed by *Jaws* in 1975.

One of his better pictures was *Night Passage* (1957), a Western in which he played the kid brother of James Stewart. He worked for Huston again on *The Unforgiven* (1960). *The Texican* (1966), his lone attempt at a new, European form of inexpensive horse opera, to be known as the Spaghetti Western, was unsuccessful.

Murphy would go on to make 44 feature films, most were westerns. Three of the films were made in Lone Pine. In addition to his acting career, Murphy was also a successful rancher and businessman. He bred and raised thoroughbred horses and owned several ranches in Texas, Arizona and California. He was also a songwriter, and penned hits for such singers as Dean Martin, Eddy Arnold, Harry Nilsson, Charley Pride and many others.



Suffering from what would today be termed posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), he slept with a loaded handgun under his pillow and looked for solace in addictive sleeping pills. In the last few years of his life he was plagued by money problems, but refused offers to appear in alcohol and cigarette commercials because he did not want to set a bad

example.

On May 18, 1971, Murphy was aboard a private plane on his way to a business meeting when it ran into thick fog near Roanoke, VA, and crashed into the side of a mountain, killing all six aboard. He was buried with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery. According to cemetery records, the only grave site visited by more people than Murphy's is that of assassinated President John F. Kennedy.



The Museum's Audie Murphy exhibit includes movie posters, copy scripts, framed collage of awards & ribbons, framed *LIFE Magazine* cover July, 1945 and a large picture of the Audie Murphy U.S. Commemorative Stamp issued May 3, 2000