

I Wasn't Much, Thinks Most Decorated Texan

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He Stopped 250 Nazis, Killed 50, and Won Battle.

Farmersville, Texas, July 7. — A freckled-faced kid, fresh from European battlefields, limped down the ramp from a C-54 transport at a San Antonio airfield.

There were about 20 G.I.'s with him and he could have been their mascot. He was 5 feet 7 inches tall and weighed 134. He looked about 17. When he started down a long reception line of waiting notables, he didn't give his name to a single member of the welcoming committee.

This was Lt. Audie Leon Murphy, who held just about every combat decoration in the book, including the Congressional Medal of Honor.

This was the Murphy who made a lone stand against 250 German infantrymen and six German tanks; the kid who ran through a hail of machine-gun fire and single-handedly cleaned out prepared enemy positions; the 20-year-old youngster who came up the hard way to a battlefield commission.

He Stole the Show.

This was Murphy, back on his native Texas soil, but he looked like an Eagle Scout: Texans gasped with surprise. There were 13 generals in the group that landed at the airport. Murphy stole the show.

When Audie left Texas for the wars he was a nobody. He was quiet, kept to himself. A boy who has to start making his own living at the age of 12 doesn't have much fun.

Now flowers drifted down on him from everywhere, a crowd of 250,000 jammed the parade route in downtown San Antonio.

Going away had been simpler for Murphy. Going away had meant getting his few belongings together and kissing his two little sisters and little brother at the orphans' home goodbye and telling his big sister, "I'll sure try to do my part."

"Not Much to It."

Delighted reporters pounced on him. In amazement they wrote down the long list of awards: The Congressional Medal of Honor, the Distinguished Service Cross, the Legion of Merit, two Silver Stars, the Bronze Star, the Croix de Guerre with palm leaves, and the Croix de Guerre with silver star. He grinned at some of the questions and then, he looked so much younger than his 20 years, that it was difficult for them to identify him with his deeds.

"You have two clusters on your Purple Heart?"

"Yes," Murphy replied. They meant shrapnel in both legs and a sniper's bullet in the hip.

“I’d like to know every detail about how you won the Congressional Medal of Honor,” a girl reporter said.

Murphy’s cool green eyes studied the girl. “There wasn’t much to it,” he said.

Put in Command.

Not much! It was a January morning of this year, and the woods outside of Holtzwihr, France, were heavy and silent with bitter cold. There were 36 men, all that were left of a company of the 15th “Can Do” Regiment of the Third Division, Seventh Army. In command, succeeding the leader who had fallen the day before, were Second Lieutenant Murphy, who didn’t drink or smoke, and whose strongest cuss word was “gosh.”

Valor had boosted him from the ranks. He had become a private, first class, in Africa; a corporal in Sicily, a sergeant and staff sergeant in Italy, a second lieutenant in Southern France. Now company command was handed to him by field telephone at 3 a.m. on a freezing morning.

Hours crawled by. The company, scheduled to attack, awaited ammunition. At 10 a.m. Murphy raised his field glasses and took a long look. His mouth went dry. The enemy, camouflaged in white sheets, was attacking over the hard-packed snow with 250 infantrymen and six tanks. Murphy ordered his men out of the woods. Then he ran to his field telephone and called for artillery fire. Shells began bursting in the German ranks and Murphy dropped his telephone often to fire his rifle.

Alone With Rifle.

The Germans came on. An artilleryman yelled into a telephone; “How close are they to you?”

“Just a minute,” Murphy replied. “I’ll let you speak to them.”

An American tank destroyer approached the young officer’s position and a German 88 shell set it afire. Two men lay dead in the turret. The others bailed out and went back.

That left Murphy alone with a rifle, a telephone, and a burning tank destroyer loaded with ammunition and gasoline and likely to blow sky high at any moment.

Murphy’s accurate spotting of artillery fire had killed or wounded 50 Germans. Now he ran to the tank destroyer, climbed atop of it and manned the guns. He knew he was sitting on a time bomb, but his guns belched death for the Nazi infantrymen.

“He was completely exposed to the enemy fire,” Lt. Walter W. Weispenning, an artillery officer, recounted later. “Machine gun, machine pistol and 88 shell fire was all around him.

But He Stopped the Nazis.

“Twice the tank destroyer was hit by shell fire and Murphy was engulfed in smoke and flame. His clothing was riddled by flying fragments of shells and bits of rocks. His trouser leg was soaked with blood.”

In all, he killed or wounded 50 Germans with the machine guns. The Nazi infantry was stopped. Without the infantry, the whole attack collapsed. Only then did Murphy drop wearily off the destroyer and limp back to his company. He refused treatment for his

shrapnel wound, reorganized his company and led it in an attack that routed the enemy.

From San Antonio, after that welcome, Murphy headed for Farmersville, North Texas agricultural community. Farmersville hadn't been his home—he didn't call any place home. He was born near Kingston in Hunt County and went to school at Celeste and Greenville until he finished the eighth grade. Then he held jobs at a Greenville service station and radio shop and worked on a Hunt County farm. He enlisted in 1942.

What He's Home For.

During the long drive from San Antonio to North Texas, Murphy relaxed and his vision lazily followed the passing scene—green rows of corn, gentle hills, fat cattle in the soft tree-shade of a meadow.

“This is what I came home to see,” he said. “You can't realize how swell this is until you've been away.

“Over there it was a helluva thing. There were times when our outfit was in battle 70 to 80 days without relief. You got mad and tired and disgusted and you didn't care what happened to you. That was the way I felt on that tank destroyer and that was the way I felt when we landed near Ramatuelle in Southern France.”

It was Staff Sergeant Murphy then when his platoon piled out of the landing craft on the beach of Tropez Bay. Just inland, the Germans were strongly entrenched. Murphy repeatedly dashed through intense machine-gun fire, alone silenced a machine-gun nest.

In close combat he killed six Germans, wounded three and captured five, entirely disregarding bullets which glanced off rocks about him and hand grenades which exploded on every side. He fought like a madman because the Nazis had feigned surrender and then had cut down his buddy, Pfc. Lattie Tipton of Erwin, Tenn.

Unbeatable After That.

Tipton fell into Murphy's lap and after that the Texan was unbeatable. The action earned Audie the Distinguished Service Cross.

The youthful hero watched a tractor running down the rows of a Texas cotton field.

“They talk about bravery,” he said. “Well, I'll tell you what bravery really is. Bravery is just determination to do a job that you know has to be done. And if you throw in discomforts and lack of sleep and anger, it is easier to be brave. Coldness and wetness and disgust have gotten medals for lots of soldiers.

“Just wanting to be back in a country like this can make a man brave. I have seen many a doughfoot do many a brave thing because he wanted to get the war over with in a hurry and go home. Many a guy who wanted to come home worse than anything else in the world will stay over there forever. They are the fellows I want the honors to go to, not to me.”

Murphy pointed out across a sunny field.

“This is enough for me,” he said.