

Audie Murphy's birthplace fading Greenville citizens hope for preservation

By OT HAMPTON

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It's a lonely looking old shack where Audie Murphy was born.

Sitting on the edge of what used to be a cotton patch, a few miles north of Greenville, its desolation doesn't offer a very fitting tribute to the little freckled-faced warrior many remember as the greatest soldier in America's history.

The house rapidly is falling to the ground. Its roof and white pine floors already have rotted away, along with the inner walls, doors and front porch. About the only part that has escaped deterioration is the chimney, but that, too, soon will disappear. Souvenir hunters are taking the hand-made bricks, one by one.

Folks in Greenville say they would like to see the home preserved as a historical monument. But money is a problem.

The Hunt County Historical Society has talked about trying to save the house, but nothing tangible has been accomplished.

In February, Gov. Dolph Briscoe was requested to organize a statewide campaign to purchase and restore the clapboard house, as a memorial to Murphy. He promised he's do everything he could and turned the project over to the adjutant general.

The adjutant general said he thought the 3rd Infantry Division Association (Murphy served with the 3rd in World War II) might be interested in preserving the house, but he wasn't sure.

Now, after months of frustration, those who want to save the house are right back where they started.

When Murphy last visited the little house, just before he made the movie, "To Hell and Back," he told a friend it was the only home he'd ever loved.

In the early 30s, when the Murphys nearly starved, he used to hunt rabbits along a nearby creek to help keep his family in food.

"That's where I first learned to shoot a rifle," Murphy has been quoted as saying. "I usually had only two or three shells and I had to make every one of them count."

The 130-pound Texan enlisted in the U.S. Army on June 30, 1942, a few days after his 18th birthday. Navy recruiters thought he was too scrawny, so they turned him down.

After basic and advanced training, the Army sent Murphy to Casablanca. in North Africa. He was assigned to the 15th Infantry Regiment of the 3rd Infantry Division. He saw action in Africa, Sicily, Italy and France.

He was a battlefield genius who fought the enemy with everything from a bayonet to field guns. Officially, he's credited with killing or capturing 240 Germans during the 39 months he served in the European Theater.

He won the Congressional Medal of Honor and every other medal on the list.

They said the little farm boy was fitted superbly for combat. His reflexes were reputed to be incredibly fast and he had the kind of mind that could instantly size up a situation and see how to handle it.

His commanding officer said he had an
“uncommon amount of guts and courage.”

Murphy was killed in an airplane crash near
Roanoke, Va., on Memorial Day, 1971.