

## AUDIE MURPHY/JOHN WAYNE: WHO'S THE HERO---?

*By Don Meyer, Consulting Editor  
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Hi gang. In early June I received a phone call and an "offer I couldn't refuse."

My grandson, Steve, asked me to come to his sixth grade class on June 6, and give a talk on World War II. June 6 of course, was the 50th anniversary of the Allied landings on the Normandy beaches, otherwise known as D-Day.

Being somewhat of a WWII history buff I accepted the offer. Although my own service in the war was in the Pacific with the Army, I did feel I had enough knowledge of the entire war to give an informative speech, at least from an amateur's perspective.

There was a reason I accepted the challenge of a classroom discussion with these youngsters.

A couple of recent news articles had triggered a curiosity in me that I just couldn't dismiss. What is it our kids are being taught in the classrooms of today? Do they have any knowledge of the sacrifices it took by their fathers, grandfathers and great grandfathers to give them the good and mostly idyllic lifestyle they live? Quite honestly, I must say I was a bit disappointed. Perhaps I expected too much from 6th graders, ages ranging from 12 - 14 years.

I began by asking two questions. "Does anyone know who Audie Murphy was? What were the major turning points in the war against Germany and Japan?"

I received no response to either question

so I knew this class really had no knowledge of WWII except that it took place. I was informed later that there will be studies of that part of our history later in their learning cycle. I wonder. I think that if I had addressed a high school class with the same questions I still wouldn't have had a response.

Sure, I know these events took place more than 30 years ago, but the years 1941-1945 were probably the most important of this century. Our kids ought to have more knowledge of this era and I think that the school boards have been allowing our kids to waste their precious school time on irrelevant subjects and not focusing enough on the basics they need for their future, and the future of all of us.

### Critical Times

The answer of course, to the first question I asked is that the late Audie Murphy was the most decorated soldier of WWII. (I'll have more to say on Murphy a bit later in this article). Additionally, most historians agree that D-Day was a turning point for the Allies in the war on one front, while the battle of Stalingrad in Russia was another. In the Pacific, in the war against Japan, the Battle of Midway changed the course of the war on that side of the globe.

Hey, gang, listen to these figures. Serving in the war during those fateful years included 16,353,659 service men and women. Roughly one out of 16 was

either killed or wounded (Killed - 405,399; Wounded - 671,278). There were 59 nations at war (Allies - 50; Axis 9). Our population at that time in the 48 states was 131,669,275 or, in other words, nearly 17% of our entire population was in military uniform during those turbulent times.

Don't you think that an event in our history as massive as WWII, and that affected as many of our citizens as it did would warrant more study by our school kids than they're presently receiving?

Don't get me wrong, these are intelligent youngsters who want to learn. They ask good questions and really showed a lot of interest. Even the teacher was surprised at the casualty statistics. I've just got this strong feeling that children today are being led off in the wrong direction by our educators. They teach little or nothing about the roles unions have played in our history. Everything seems to be geared towards the pursuit of financial gains.

I've been invited back for next year and I'll be interested in finding out if they've added any improvements to their curriculums.

### **Ridiculous Comparison**

In the Milwaukee Journal editorial on 6-6-94 titled "**Lessons for today in D-Day trip**" their Editorial Board wrote this ridiculous nonsense that gives you some idea of the need to properly educate our young people. When an editorial writer can write "Perhaps we have learned that, while war must sometimes be waged, it is almost never the bloodless, black-and-white, 90 minute spectacle that John Wayne and Audie Murphy portrayed."

The Journal ought to place the genius who wrote that tripe in the same 6th grade classroom I spoke to. He needs to be educated.

John Wayne in the same breath as Audie Murphy? Sure, John Wayne played the hero in many war films. I enjoyed most of his films and yes, he was a giant in the movie industry. The only trouble was, he never served in the military. He made a ton of money during the war while others, like Audie Murphy, were serving their country. Did any of you see the movie "*The Green Berets*"? There was John Wayne with his belly hanging out over his belt fighting the war in Vietnam all by himself. And you know something, people actually believe he's some kind of a war hero because the media built him up to the point where I truly think he believed it himself.

Now let's take a look at Audie Murphy who the Journal portrayed as a phony movie hero.

He was born near Kingston, Texas on June 20, 1924. When WWII broke out, he tried to enlist in the Marines, Navy, and Paratroops and received the same answer - **too small** . At the time he was 5 feet 4 inches tall and weighed 120 pounds. He was finally accepted into the Army on June 20, 1942.

After serving his basic training in Texas he joined the 3rd Infantry Division in Sicily. By the time his service was completed following the end of the war in May 1945 he had fought in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, France, and Germany.

### Awarded Honors

He received a battlefield commission and became a 2nd lieutenant in 1944. He had earned 37 military awards, citations and decorations including every American medal for valor including our nation's highest, The Congressional Medal of Honor, and our next highest, the Distinguished Service Cross. He was decorated 3 times by the French government and once by Belgium. Murphy was wounded in action 3 times, returning to his unit each time to fight again.

This boyish, soft-spoken Texan didn't smoke and drank little, if at all. He was loyal to his friends, and even later in life he refused to take any movie roles that would glorify war or that took advantage of his own fame as a military hero.

According to ... (several autobiographies on Audie Murphy) 433 men received the Medal of Honor in WWII, and 39 of them were from Murphy's 3rd Division. Of the original 235 - man roster of his Company B, only 2 remained by the end of the war, Audie and a Supply Sergeant. All the rest had been wounded or killed.

He had risen from a plain Buck Private to 1st Lieutenant in command of his own company before he was 21 years old. He later served as a Captain in the Texas National Guard.

Murphy was featured on the front page of Time Magazine on July 16, 1945, and that article and photo stirred the interest of movie actor James Cagney who was in the process of forming his own production company with his brother Bill.

Cagney invited Murphy to Hollywood where the late actor took the youthful ex-soldier into his home. Cagney took a fatherly interest and liking in Audie and helped him get started in the business of making movies. Audie also learned how to ride horses on Cagney's horse farm, and this helped him immeasurably in his upcoming western films.

His first film "*Beyond Glory*," was in 1948 and his last was "*A Time For Dying*" in 1969. In between he had acted in a total of 45 films, including the classic legend of his own exploits "*To Hell and Back*." In 1955 he was voted the most popular actor in Western films, and later was to try his hand, largely without success, as a producer.

Tragedy struck when Audie Murphy was killed in the crash of a private airplane near Roanoke, Virginia on May 28, 1971. He was a month short of 47. The war's greatest hero had survived two years of fierce combat, only to be felled by a crash into a fog-shrouded mountain during a flight that probably should never have been taken because of weather conditions.

Murphy was buried with full military honors near the tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National cemetery, and is the second most-visited gravesite next to President Kennedy's.

I ask you, Crest readers, where do you think we ought to place the credibility of an editorial staff like the Milwaukee Journal that considers a John Wayne on the same pedestal with Audie Murphy? I'd call it disgraceful and irresponsible journalism at best, and incompetent at the very least.

Perhaps some of you are asking, "Why this interest in a war hero who's been dead for 23 years? What does it have to do with a union newspaper like the Crest?"

### **Society Needs Help**

My answer is that we have a lot of veterans in the UAW, both retired and active. As veterans we have an obligation to those who served their country to remember and cherish their memories. The 50th Anniversary of D-Day stirred those memories in many of us.

Also, a recent article appearing in the San Antonio Express News and reprinted in the Milwaukee Journal wrote about a 200-member Medal of Honor Historical Society that began lobbying about 10 months ago for a commemorative stamp honoring Audie Murphy on the 50th anniversary of the actions that earned him the nation's highest award for valor.

The U.S. Postal Service turned down their request without an explanation. Can you believe that, brothers and sisters? I've seen entertainment figures placed on our first-class postage that were known drug abusers, and they won't consider honoring a great American hero like Audie Murphy? What kind of priorities do our Postal Authorities have in Washington? Is this country going nutso?

I've written letters to Senators Kohl and Feingold, and Congressman Jerry Kleczka regarding this subject and so far have received an answer from Herb Kohl's office informing me they have forwarded my letter to postal authorities.

Kohl supports the proposal and suggests those interested write to--

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