

Virginia plane crash claimed Audie Murphy's life 25 years ago Tuesday

Greenville Herald Banner

May 27, 1996

Brad Keller
Herald Banner Staff

This weekend marks the 25th anniversary of the death of Audie Murphy, Hunt County native and the most decorated soldier of World War II.

Murphy was born near Kingston and attended school in Greenville, one of nine children born into a family of sharecroppers. His mother died in 1940 when Murphy was 16 and the family broke up, with Murphy's two youngest sisters, Nadine and Billie, and a younger brother being placed in Boles Home orphanage.

Murphy enlisted in the United States Army inside the old Greenville Post Office when he turned 18 on June 20 1942 and joined the Third Infantry Division.

He was appointed to a second lieutenant in 1944 and served in North Africa and in all European theaters. On Jan. 26, 1945, Murphy's unit was attacked by German troops near Colmar, France. Murphy climbed aboard a burning tank destroyer and with its machine gun killed around 50 enemy troops.

Murphy went on to receive two dozen U.S. medals, including the Medal of Honor, the Distinguished Service Cross, the Silver Star, the Legion of Merit, the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart, which he received after a bullet shattered his hip and left the Army with the rank of Major. Later, he also received the Army's Outstanding Civilian Service Medal.

He returned to the United States on June 14, 1945 and bought a home south of Greenville and claimed his three siblings from the orphanage.

Murphy was said to have considered a career in veterinary medicine when he returned, but was lured to Hollywood by the likes of James Cagney. He went on to have a successful acting career in motion pictures beginning in 1948. He starred in some 40 films, including *The Red Badge of Courage* (1951) and his life story, *To Hell and Back* (1955).

On May 28, 1971, Murphy was among six people killed in a plane crash near Roanoke, Va. He was interred June 3, 1971 at Arlington National Cemetery and also remembered with services in Farmersville. The same day, Congressman Ray Roberts of Texas officially entered Murphy's death into the Congressional Record.

On May 14, 1991, the City of Greenville designated the downtown railroad overpass as the Audie L. Murphy Memorial Overpass.