

AMERICAN WWII HERO MAKES FAMOUS ONE-MAN STAND

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(Fort Hood Sentinel) Editor's Note: *This is part two of a four part series on Audie Murphy.*

This Sunday marks the 52nd anniversary of the most famous one-man stand of World War II and, possibly, in American history.

But, even after more than a half-century, the feat itself has continued to overshadow "why" the young Texan refused to yield even one foot of frozen French ground to an overwhelming force.

On Jan 26, 1945, Audie Murphy climbed aboard a burning tank destroyer and fought off six Tiger tanks and two reinforced rifle companies, earning what is still considered today as the most famous Medal of Honor act in World War II.

"The one thing that has never really come out about that action is why he did that," Larryann Willis, told a *Fort Hood Sentinel* reporter last week.

Willis, secretary/treasurer of the Audie Murphy Research Foundation in Santa Clarita, Calif., said Murphy took the gamble because he was the last defense against the attacking enemy and possible encirclement or breakthrough of the 15th Infantry.

Her statements are backed up by military researchers, including the noted Col. Harold B. Simpson in his book "*Audie Murphy-American Soldier*," published

by the Hill Junior College Press 30 years after the battle.

Simpson's research concluded that a German "breakthrough, properly exploited, could endanger the entire 3rd (Infantry) Division position. And Murphy knew that with control of the road, the Germans could "punch a hole in the 15th Infantry's defense line" and overrun its regimental headquarters and possibly put several thousand soldiers of the 3rd Inf. Div. in peril.

The short Medal of Honor narrative only mentions Murphy saved his company from possible encirclement and destruction." And Murphy himself barely mentions it in "*To Hell and Back*," his autobiographical novel and movie.

Either way, Murphy never really seemed to care about the medals or glory, just the men of his unit and friends he left buried across Europe.

Willis, and others who have studied Murphy, agree his desire to protect his people is the major reason Murphy performed and earned many of his medals.

While Murphy's legend is centered around his Medal of Honor action, his lore actually began on the Anzio beachhead during some of the toughest fighting Co B, 15th Inf, 3rd Inf Div would ever see.

Information provided by Stan Smith, president of the Audie Murphy Fan Club, shows Murphy's first Bronze Star came on March 2, 1944, in an incident highlighted in "*To Hell and Back*."

Murphy leaves his squad behind and crawls to within 15 yards of a disabled Tiger tank. After throwing two Molotov Cocktails at the beast, he destroys it with a grenade launcher.

The Oak Leaf Cluster was added May 8, 1944, as a result of many hazardous patrols Murphy led at Anzio. According to Smith's records, it was for "exemplary conduct in ground combat."

On Aug. 15, 1944, Murphy landed in France and almost immediately earned the Distinguished Service Cross.

Murphy liked to work alone, putting only himself at risk, Willis said. But this time, he agreed to let Pvt. Lattie Tipton help out - at Tipton's insistence.

Operating alone on an enemy fortified hill, Murphy first killed two German soldiers in close combat and then started a series of duels with foxhole occupants. After his ammunition expired, he journeys back down the hill and retrieves a light machine gun from a squad that is pinned down and refuses to move.

Murphy takes the gun and crawls back up the hill and cleans out the foxholes. Then Tipton joins him and immediately kills two Germans with two shots, after they shoot off part of his ear.

After killing a couple of more defenders and knocking out another gun emplacement, Tipton stands up to accept what appears to be a German surrender

and is immediately gunned down.

He was Murphy's best friend and the Texan, known for his humor and his temper, goes wild. "I remember the experience as I do a nightmare. A demon seems to have entered my body," Murphy recalled in "*To Hell and Back*."

Murphy then kills two more Germans with a grenade and finds the gun crew that faked surrender and killed Tipton. He kills them all and does not stop firing until his weapon is empty.

Then he grabbed an enemy machine gun and, firing from the hip, he charges the stronghold and wipes out all remaining resistance.

"His extraordinary heroism resulted in the capture of a fiercely contested enemy-held hill and the capture of the entire enemy garrison," the DSC citation reads.

Information from the Research Foundation indicates Murphy actually killed all the German soldiers on the hill as none surrendered.

In about a three week period in October 1944, Murphy earned two Silver Stars, was wounded for the second time and received a battlefield commission.

The first Silver Star came on Oct. 2, when Murphy single-handedly rescues an ambushed patrol by killing all eight ambushers near Cleurie Quarry in France.

Smith's information shows the second came just three days later when Murphy, alone, "crawled 50 yards under a severe enemy machine gun and rifle fire to a

point 200 yards from a strongly entrenched enemy. For an hour, Audie directed artillery fire upon the enemy, killing 15 Germans and inflicting 35 casualties."

During October, as throughout 1944 and 1945, Murphy continued to stalk and kill snipers. He did not allow snipers to kill his men without revenge.

Simpson pointed out that Murphy "out dueled snipers with little or no fanfare." And, the snipers had high powered scopes while Murphy used his trusted carbine with a wired stock broken right in his hands by a motor shell.

That was how he got his first purple heart Sept. 15, 1944. The second came Oct. 26, where he escaped sure death by welding his carbine like a pistol to kill the sniper that had just shot him in the hip.

He was trying to recover from that serious wound when he fought the battle of the Colmar Pocket near Holtzwihr, France. With temperatures about zero, Murphy's company was ordered to hold the only road the enemy could use to threaten the American position.

The fight was so furious on Jan. 25, all officers except Murphy were killed and 102 of the 120 men were killed or wounded before they reached their assigned position on the edge of the woods.

Murphy, the lone surviving officer, was wounded but kept going. He took over command of the company.

That night, two M-10 tank destroyers from the attached 601st Tank Destroyer

Battalion joined Murphy and his now depleted 18-man company, and it got colder.

The next afternoon, the Germans attacked right at Murphy's position with six Tiger tanks and approximately 250 infantry. The tank destroyers, which had open turrets and were built on a Sherman chassis, could not damage the German armor.

But the Tiger's 88-mm guns quickly put one M-10 out of action and the other got stuck in a ditch trying to improve its firing position, a move that rendered its guns useless.

Murphy did what he always seemed to do. He ordered his men back to cover while he stayed. Alone again, except for his field phone, map and carbine.

Willis said Murphy realized "somebody had to hold that road." She added that later in life Murphy recalled there was nothing else to do but try to hold the road by directing artillery fire, and that was a one-man job.

Using his map and phone, Murphy directed and corrected the barrage as he emptied his carbine at the ever-closing infantry. As the tanks and riflemen closed in, along with the artillery Murphy himself self directed, he refused to budge.

Then he made the decision that forever changed his life. He climbed onto the 31-tons of burning tank destroyer and employed its 50-cal. machine gun on the infantry, all the while continuing to direct artillery almost on top of his own position.

At one point, when the officer on the other end of the phone asked how close was the enemy, Murphy replied, "Hold the phone and I'll let you talk to one of the bastards." Another time, when the officer thought Murphy might be dead and asked if he was still there, Murphy asked him, "And, what are your plans after the war?"

The battle raged and Murphy continued to fight an enemy that sometimes was only 10 yards away. One thing that confused the Germans was that none of them could locate Murphy because they never believed anyone would be on that burning time bomb. Luckily, smoke from burning diesel fuel covered his position.

Even the enemy tank commanders kept away from the tank destroyer thinking it would blow up at any minute. Three more 88-mm rounds hit the tank destroyer while Murphy fired away for an hour without receiving a single wound.

Finally, the Germans gave up.

They could not dislodge this determined American and retreated. Just seconds after Murphy got down and headed for the woods, the tank destroyer exploded and remained there for years after the war.

After vacating the tank destroyer, Murphy joined his unit and led a successful counterattack.

Reports vary, but most agree that Murphy personally killed at least 50 of the enemy that day. Some accounts go up to 100. Overall, Murphy is credited with killing 241 enemy soldiers during

World War II. He stayed with his unit to the end of the war. Bullets missed him by inches. Countless duels were won.

Audie Murphy's storied life ended in an airplane crash near Roanoke, Va., on May 28, 1971. He was buried in Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors.