

GREENVILLE LIBRARY PROVIDES SERGEANT AUDIE MURPHY CLUB MEMBERS OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLORE THE SOLDIER'S PERSONAL LIFE

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Audie Murphy's hometown rolled out the red carpet recently for two Test and Experimentation Command noncommissioned officers nominated for induction into the Sergeant Audie Murphy Club at Fort Hood.

And, they returned the favor by finding a forgotten treasure.

On a "staff ride" to Greenville, Texas, to learn more about the life of American's most decorated soldier and namesake of the exclusive club, Sgt. 1st Class Norbert D. Bowen and Sgt. Wesley Lowe, both caught the spirit of this NCO icon-Audie Murphy.

In a special room located in the new Greenville Library, Bowen and Lowe found a personal glimpse of the individual from childhood until his untimely death in an airplane crash in 1971.

Looking at old photos of Murphy as a child and reading a report card from grammar school-As, Bs, and Cs-Lowe said he was able to better visualize the man and put pictures to the stories he had read about "Murf."

Gail Slater, the librarian responsible for the special room, pointed out and explained many of the pictures and

memorabilia to the two wide-eyed sergeants.

The one question she could not answer from Lowe was "what was in the old Army foot locker sitting under the table?"

Slater knew Murphy's locker had not been opened for at least 11-years. However, curiosity also grabbed Slater and she went in search of the key.

The key finally found, Slater, the sergeants, Greenville Banner-Herald photographer Stan Golightly and reporter Brian Keller, gathered around the old locker as it was carefully opened.

Inside were two photo albums with assorted photos, predominantly from the opening ceremony of the original Audie Murphy Room, the idea of the local Army recruiting sergeant, at the old library in 1973; some duplicate photos of those already on the wall; the foot locker shipping label, in his (Murphy's) own handwriting, when he shipped the locker home after the war; and several other random photos and advertisements from Audie Murphy Movies.

From the photos in the locker, Bowen posed another mystery. Several showed a rose garden dedicated to the memory of Greenville's favorite son. There was a sun dial and marble bench with an inscription honoring Audie Murphy.

"Where is this rose garden?" Bowen asked. Slater said, to her knowledge, it no longer existed. "Then what happened to the sun dial and marble bench?" Unknown-"but maybe Donna Smith at the post office knows," explained Slater.

Before moving on to the post office, Slater wanted to know more about the Sergeant Audie Murphy Club. With a great deal of pride, Bowen and Lowe quickly changed from tourists to ambassadors and explained the club's origin and workings.

At the Greenville Post Office, Smith of the Postal Advisory Council, showed the two sergeants all the efforts that have been made to obtain a commemorative postage stamp in honor of Audie Murphy.

"We have tried three separate times and are now embarked in a country-wide petition drive to try again," Smith explained as she showed the volumes of support letters and correspondence used in previous attempts in obtaining a stamp.

"What we did get last year, for our first "Audie Murphy Day" (June 20) was a special envelope and commemorative stamp cancellation," she said, presenting Bowen and Lowe with the last special cancellation post cards that were also offered on June 20. The post cards have the original Audie Murphy library display on the front.

Next stop was the old Greenville Post Office where 17-year old Audie Murphy enlisted in the Army in 1942. That would have concluded the "staff ride," but Bowen was still concerned about

what happened to that marble bench.

Bowen had a "hunch" and asked Golightly to guide him to the old library building. Following a search of the grounds, there, in the parking lot median of the vacant building, surrounded by over-grown vines, Lowe found the bench in perfect condition.

Bowen excitedly confirmed the inscription "Audie Murphy Rose Garden Memorial erected by the Post and Plant Garden Club, 1975." Believing this bench was historically significant and vulnerable, Bowen made sure the Greenville newspaper was notified of the bench's location.

Heading back to Fort Hood, the two NCOs came upon one last tribute to Audie Murphy by the people of Greenville - "The Audie Murphy Memorial Overpass" that took travelers to the Audie Murphy Memorial Highway (US 69).

"This trip was educational, professionally rewarding-and something I will always remember," Lowe said on the trip back home.

"This was the most enlightening experience I have ever had in my 13 years of service," Bowen said. Both sergeants agreed Greenville was a place that all club members should visit.

When Bowen and Lowe were inducted into the Sergeant Audie Murphy Club, they had a very special appreciation for the honor because they both felt a kinship and bond with the man known by his friends as "Murf!"