

AUDIE MURPHY CLUB HONORS BEST NCOs

*By Sergeant Cy Gillespie
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On a bitterly cold afternoon, with a foot of snow blanketing the frozen ground, a lone soldier wounded earlier in the day, virtually single handedly thwarted a vicious enemy attack on his company's position. When the smoke cleared, the quiet, unassuming man had stopped two advancing rifle companies and six heavy tanks.

The day was January 26, 1945 and that act won Audie Leon Murphy the Congressional Medal of Honor; our nation's highest decoration. That act, coupled with many other examples of heroism and leadership displayed by Murphy, elevated him to the "American Hero" status that he still holds today, 25 years after his untimely death.

A closer look into the life of Audie Murphy reveals that he not only stood out as a heroic representation of soldierly courage and valor, but that he also embodies practically every desirable leadership trait that we, as leaders, aspire to today. Hence, what greater title could be more appropriate for a distinguished leadership organization than the Sergeant Audie Murphy Club.

The Sergeant Audie Murphy Club was conceived by Command Sgt. Maj. George L. Horvath III, former FORSCOM command sergeant major, in 1989 as a mirror of the already famous European Theater's Sergeant Morales Club. The Sergeant Audie Murphy Club was designed to honor outstanding noncommissioned officers who exhibit exemplary leadership traits. It is non-

MOS specific and all noncommissioned officers, regardless of rank, are eligible for induction.

In today's modern Army, competition for promotions has become increasingly tough. Gone are the days of the cold war and its looming specter of the communist threat. Consequently, gone are the days of the "unlimited" defense budgets. Instead, we must deal with mandated requirements to streamline our defense forces--better known as the infamous drawdown. The drawdown has forced those of us who want to stay in the service to work harder with less resources. Decreased promotions and increased competition are but two of the many consequential outcomes of the mandated reduction of force.

Membership in the Sergeant Audie Murphy club is considered a catalyst that can and will catapult a soldier's career. Membership can and often does contribute significantly to a soldier's potential for selection into the senior noncommissioned officer ranks. Even so, most of us want to believe that our leaders seek membership for more selfless reasons, such as making a difference, taking care of and positively influencing fellow soldiers or other noble causes. Unfortunately, the real impetus for many NCOs' quest for membership is with promotions in mind. They view promotion in the service as the climbing of the proverbial corporate ladder, another tangible mark of success in their "careers." Thus to many NCOs, membership in the Sergeant Audie

Murphy Club often is reduced to a mere rung on the aforesaid ladder.

While none of us can claim perfection in all that we do, we, as leaders, can take a close look at how our personal goals compare with the needs of those placed in our charge. Membership in the Sergeant Audie Murphy Club should not be thought of as just another rung climbed or another obstacle surmounted. It should not be considered as the climax of our preparation, studying and board appearances; or as a reward for being a great leader. Instead, it should be viewed as the beginning of a commitment to the highest standards of professional leadership. A promise to soldiers that they will always be taken care of. This is what the Club was designed for, and it should be embraced accordingly.

Preparation for the induction board is a unique process that validates competency and self-confidence. It isn't an exercise in memorization and regurgitation. Instead, it is simply the verification that the candidate measures up to the Club's leadership standards. NCOs should already know whether or not they are Club material before they accept the challenge. The board only serves to confirm what the NCO already should know about himself or herself.

This is not to say that nervousness won't rear its ugly head and cause some to second guess themselves--it will. Boards designed to scrutinize the very mettle of a person always seem to turn ordinary stomach butterflies into C-5 cargo planes! Regardless of how many study guides you pour over or how many hours of midnight oil you burn in preparation, when it's suddenly your turn to deliver those three knocks on the door, there

always will be fleeting shivers of self-doubt. The saving grace is that you will be more self-confident at this board than at any other. They just want to see what kind of leader you are. Since most candidates have a pretty good grip on what kind of leaders they are, there should be few surprises during the board appearance.

Many of us know or have known sterling NCOs who we consider to be the epitome of a Sergeant Audie Murphy Club member. But for whatever reason, they refuse to take the challenge. A myriad of reasons are often given by these stellar performers to justify their obstinate opposition to becoming members. Some claim to hate boards, while others like to focus attention toward current members, pointing out their shortcomings and substandard performance. Some feel they are not going to get promoted no matter what they do, so why bother doing anything. Still, others feel they don't need a board to tell them how good they are. These leaders have missed the point and must be given positive encouragement to give it "the old college try" with the idea in mind that induction is a commitment to continued excellence, not a ticket punch.

My own procrastination mirrored many of the same illegitimate excuses given by others over the years. In retrospect, I must have been the source of great frustration to my platoon sergeant in Germany. I absolutely refused to go to the Sergeant Morales board. Perhaps he saw something in me that I couldn't see (we are our own worst critics). My adamant refusal ultimately prevailed (...horse to water ... drink), and I didn't go.

My return to the continental U.S., coupled with a new sense of self confidence fostered by my recent basic NCO course graduation, made me look at things differently. Armed with a desire to demonstrate my potential and competency as a leader, I sought out the opportunity to meet the Sergeant Audie Murphy Club challenge. The boards were as much my chance to evaluate the Club as they were for the Club to evaluate me. I was more curious than scared, and the challenge excited me. I made it through with a few brain cramps along the way and was ultimately inducted. Like I said before, none of us can claim perfection in all things, but my induction serves as a reminder of what I represent and my responsibility to ensure that my soldiers are taken care of the best way I know how.

No, we are not perfect and we cannot divorce ourselves from our human nature to mess things up from time to time. However, if we, as leaders, remember that the Army is not as much a career as it is a noble "profession of arms," we can focus on the needs of those we lead with a more selfless view. Our solemn duty is to train our soldiers to fight and survive in defense of our nation's interests. As leaders of warriors, there is no greater responsibility or honor. Induction into the Sergeant Audie Murphy club will not guarantee success in fulfilling your leadership responsibilities, but will serve as a constant reminder of the momentous burden we shoulder when it comes to leading and caring for soldiers.

(SGT Cy Gillespie is a squad leader in the Honor Guard Platoon of the Military Police Company, Law Enforcement Activity and is the president of the Fort

McPherson Garrison Sergeant Audie Murphy Club. Gillespie was inducted into the Sergeant Audie Murphy Club in May, 1996.)