

Audie Murphy: A hero forever

By Mary Ficklen

“Was he in the Army before or after he made movies?” a friend asked about Audie Murphy.

A fan of his, she had seen many of his Westerns as a child. He starred in nearly 40 shoot-‘em-ups in the ‘50s and ‘60s.

“He was in the Army before the movies,” I said.

Heroes fade quickly.

First Lt. Audie L. Murphy, the most decorated soldier of World War II, received 33 medals and commendations. He served in the Third Infantry Division, received a battlefield promotion, survived eight campaigns and several wounds.

The young Murphy was slight, 5-foot-6, 130 pounds, with bright blue eyes, curly brown hair and handsome features. He was shy, he said the heroes “were the guys who did not come home.”

I met the lieutenant when I was assigned to write a three-minute radio tribute to him. He was so self-effacing and I so awed that I was unable to connect with him. I have no copy of the tribute.

The seventh of 12 children, Mr. Murphy grew up in the Farmersville-Greenville area. He became a crack shot providing “Hoover rabbits” for the household. His tenant-farmer father deserted the family for long periods

during the Depression. With about a fifth-grade education, Audie left school as a teenager to go to work. After his mother died, he enlisted in the Army. He was 17.

Mr. Murphy became an outstanding fighting man and officer, respected by veteran soldiers and a model for replacements sent to his unit.

Mr. Murphy sometimes told them, “You stay here, I’ll take care of this.”

He said it in northern France when he took charge of a tank destroyer and stopped a tank and infantry assault. A number of battle survivors credit him with saving their lives.

I have never seen one of his movies.

I didn’t want to reduce a real-life hero to a Technicolor image? I wanted to remember the boylike lieutenant and the real good guy rather than a character in a white hat.

Mr. Murphy was one of the millions of ex-GIs who had to make a living. Powerful mentors, good looks and country charm made a place for him in Hollywood. He became a hero to kids and to Western fans, wrote some country songs. He died in a plane crash in 1971.

Terry Murphy, his son, and others have set up the Audie Murphy Research Foundation to preserve his memory. They need information from people who knew him. You can write

the foundation at 18008 Saratoga Way, Suite 516, Santa Clarita, Calif. 91351, or call toll-free, 1-888-314-AMRF or check the Web site: www.sagelink.net/~rrodgers/.

The nonprofit corporation will help libraries and schools keep alive the memory of veterans, including First Lt. Audie Murphy, good guy.

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