

AUDIE MURPHY DID A LOT MORE THAN 'WIN A BUNCH OF MEDALS'

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As a member of the Third Infantry Division on its campaigns from North Africa through Sicily, Salerno, Anzio, Southern France, and into Germany, I served for three years with Audie Murphy in helping to win the war.

I never won any medals like Murphy -- nor do I consider myself a hero. I was just another soldier doing what I could to carry out my assignments and [come] back home in one piece. We all lived with death around us at all times. Home seemed a far distant and almost impossible dream. Few today realize that in 1942 the Germans had conquered most of Europe, Africa and the Mid-East with the help of their Italian Allies, and that the Japanese had taken control of the Pacific. Democracy seemed doomed.

The thought of victory was only a dream. Hitler and Mussolini today in old newsreels look like comic characters, not the killers of millions of innocent people.

Their armies were professionals, well trained and supplied, and ours was made up of civilians hastily gathered together with minor training and sent off to win a war.

As we sailed across the ocean, the enormity of our mission engulfed many of us with a hopelessness that we would [n]ever be able to go home again. It was inconceivable that a bunch of amateurs could take on the best armies in the world and actually win.

As we moved slowly and dangerously through Sicily and Italy, the courageous exploits of one of our own Third Division soldiers spread through the ranks of how Audie Murphy had helped turned the tide through his personal bravery. He gave little thought to his own life, and time after time was able to inspire others to fight in situations that appeared hopeless.

His heroics brought him something he didn't really want: a battlefield promotion to Lieutenant, where he proved that in addition to personal heroism, he was capable of leading others in battle. Seeing him standing in a jeep as we trudged into battle, and hearing his rallying cry when we were ready to run, gave us the stamina we needed to continue.

Young people today should relate to the fact that when Murphy won a grand total of 32 awards he was only 19 years old, with what many called a baby face. Today's youth will probably not be asked to make the sacrifices that Murphy did, but they should realize that without the young hero's willingness to make the supreme sacrifice, they might not be living in a free country today.

Having witnessed the deaths of many young men in the prime of their lives in winning an almost hopeless war, I am sometimes dismayed today to see that their sacrifices go mostly unappreciated.

On Veteran's Day last month there was little fanfare showing appreciation for those from World War II, Korea, Vietnam and the Persian Gulf.

In fact, the newest veterans from the Persian Gulf conflict are still fighting their own government to prove their injuries and illnesses were related to the conflict.