

# AUDIE MURPHY RESEARCH FOUNDATION

A NON-PROFIT PUBLIC BENEFIT CORPORATION

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AP/Wide World Photos

*Audie's sister, Billie Murphy Tindol, at the Dallas, TX October 24, 1999 unveiling ceremony for the commemorative postage stamp honoring Audie Murphy. The stamp is now part of the U.S. Postal Service's Distinguished Soldiers series. The stamp is now available through all U.S. Post Offices.*

On May 3, 2000, there was a dedication ceremony at the Pentagon for the United States Postal Service's Distinguished Soldiers Commemorative Stamps. The stamps honor four American soldiers: General John L. Hines; Sergeant Alvin C. York; General Omar N. Bradley; and Lieutenant Audie L. Murphy.

The ceremony featured the Secretary of the Army, Louis Caldera, and the Chairman of the U.S. Postal Service Board of Governors, Einar V. Dyhrkopp. Guests included members of the soldiers' families. I'm glad I was able to attend and represent the Murphy family.

The Distinguished Soldiers series features black and white (or sepia) military photos. The superimposed division insignia are in color. It was fortunate that a photo of Dad, taken in the field immediately after being presented with the Medal of Honor, existed. We enthusiastically approved the stamp design.

Dad always felt that his military awards belonged to all the soldiers who served with him. I know he would have been honored to be remembered alongside these three great soldiers.

Terry Murphy

# HOW AUDIE MURPHY WON HIS MEDALS

## PART VIII

On the night of October 25—26, Audie was attempting to get a little sleep. An enemy phosphorous shell burst in the tree overhead. Murphy got a small piece of metal in the chest. But his phenomenal luck was still holding. The wound, which caused a permanent scar, was only superficial. He never got a Purple Heart for it. The law of averages, however, was about to catch up with him.

On the following morning, Audie led his platoon through a forest. The radio man beside Audie straightened up to call back a message. A sniper killed him instantly. Murphy, while leaping for the cover of a tree, gauged the approximate distance and direction of the German by the sound of his rifle. The sniper fired again. The bullet ricocheted on a tree, but ploughed through Murphy's right hip, knocking him flat and putting him in plain view of the German sharpshooter. Audie tried rolling into a partially-dug foxhole as the sniper threw off a camouflage net and fired again. "I think he must have

shot at my helmet," says Murphy. "And that was the last mistake he ever made. My head was not in the helmet." Sweeping his carbine around with his right hand and firing it pistol-fashion, Audie sent a bullet crashing through the German's head. "It was his brain or nothing," says Murphy. "That bastard would not have missed again."

Using an unloaded carbine, Murphy re-enacted his movements for me. Even in slow motion, they required only eight seconds. So, from the time he first heard the crack of the sniper rifle until the German fell dead, no more than five or six seconds could have passed. This is an example of how fast and accurately the Murphy mind and reflexes worked in a critical situation. Captain Paul Harris found Audie and got him to a medical jeep. Because of very bad weather he could not be evacuated to a base hospital for three days. In that time his wound became gangrenous. He spent almost three months in a hospital and virtually

had to learn to walk again. Still limping badly, Audie was ordered to put more convalescent men through close-order drill. Ignoring the order, he gathered his equipment together and voluntarily went back to the front while still sick. He re-joined Company B on January 23, 1945. The unit was at full strength, having six officers and about 130 men. Captain Harris had been transferred to the headquarters section of the 1st Battalion.

The 3rd Division had been assigned to eliminate the Colmar Pocket. This was a huge and dangerous bridgehead that thrust like an iron fist across the Rhine River into France. In this sector the Germans had enough men and materiel to launch a full-scale attack against the right flank of the Seventh Army. Conditions favored the enemy, who was well-supplied with armor. The 3rd Division history says that snow was knee-deep and that temperatures, even in daytime, seldom rose above 14°F. The frozen earth made digging-in almost impossible for the



*Courtesy of Marty Black*

*The unknown photographer wrote on the back of this picture: "US 3rd Inf Div Troops in the woods near Riedwihr Alsace 1945." The photo was probably taken during the battle of the Colmar Pocket which took place in Riedwihr Woods January 22 - 27, 1945.*

American soldiers.

The assault began on January 22. The 7th and 30th Infantry Regiments crossed the Fecht River and fought their way to the Ill River, capturing a small bridge known as the Maison Rouge, across the latter stream. The little bridge was to play an important part in battle developments. Anticipating its capture, the Division had rushed supplies and armor to the area so that an immediate crossing could be effected. But the first tank that tested the bridge caved-in the structure, rendering it useless for vehicles.

The 30th Infantry had already crossed the Ill. Its attack had been coordinated with a drive by the 7th Infan-

tery observers had been unable to establish radio communications with their units. Nevertheless, the 30th continued its attack. Without a vestige of cover and with no possibility of digging into the frozen earth, the 3rd Battalion was hit by ten German tanks and tank destroyers with an estimated 100 infantrymen on the outskirts of Holtzwihr. The battalion was cut to pieces. Survivors managed to fall back to the Ill.

The same fate befell the 1st Battalion on the outskirts of Riedwihr. The 2nd Battalion managed to cross the Ill, but was thrown back by a murderous armor assault. Artillery pieces attempting to support the infantry from the west bank of the Ill were zeroed by the Ger-

ion and succeeded in reaching the Bois de Riedwihr. Still without armor, the 1st was soon knocked out of the woods by raging Germans. But the battalion refused to retreat to the Ill. The men scrambled into holes dug by artillery shells and waited for a probable counter-attack which did not come.

Audie remembers that he dropped off to sleep that night and his hair froze to the ground. He was still wearing bandages for the hip wound. On the following day he was knocked down by a mortar-shell blast. His lower legs were peppered with steel fragments which he carries in his flesh to this day. Thus he acquired a third Purple Heart.

With his legs bleeding and burn-



*Courtesy of the Texas Military Forces Museum*

*January 22, 1945, the bridge over the Ill River at Maison Rouge collapsed, hampering the Army's ability to deliver heavy artillery to the Colmar Pocket battleground.*

try on the right flank, and a similar push by French Army units on the left flank. The immediate objective was a large forest, known as the Bois de Riedwihr, which stretched between the powerfully fortified villages of Holtzwihr and Riedwihr.

On the afternoon of January 23, the 30th captured the forest and reached the outskirts of the two villages. The advance had been so rapid that the forward artil-

lery observers had been unable to establish radio communications with their units. Nevertheless, the 30th continued its attack. Without a vestige of cover and with no possibility of digging into the frozen earth, the 3rd Battalion was hit by ten German tanks and tank destroyers with an estimated 100 infantrymen on the outskirts of Holtzwihr. The battalion was cut to pieces. Survivors managed to fall back to the Ill.

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man and destroyed. With the 30th battered, under strength, and badly disorganized, the 15th Infantry Regiment was committed to the attack on January 24. The 3rd Battalion went in first, but was stopped by a counter-attack. The 1st Battalion, to which Audie belonged, was thrown into the battle. It moved through the battered 3rd Battal-

ing from the mortar fragments, Murphy did not stop for first aid. In the furious fighting, Company B was becoming rapidly decimated and needed every man that could walk or crawl. Although the wounds were painful, and aggravated by the bitter cold, they were not seriously disabling. Audie limped through the remaining battle for the Colmar Pocket.

During the night of January 24—25,

engineers succeeded in bridging the Ill River, enabling armor to cross. Three tanks joined the 1st Battalion. Two were destroyed by the Germans; the third, with its main gun out of commission, had to withdraw from the fight.

But more armor was sent up. The 1st Battalion fought its way into the Bois de Riedwihr again, and headquarters were established in a farmhouse. By midnight on January 25, Company B had penetrated 600 yards but had to stop because of an ammunition shortage. Having started the fight with 134 men and seven officers, the company had been cut to two officers and approximately 34 enlisted men. The others had been killed, wounded, or frozen beyond a capability for fighting. In three days of ferocious combat, the 3rd Division had paid heavily for its advances.

Around one o'clock on the morning of January 26, fresh supplies and five replacements reached Company B. The figures are approximate as Murphy depended upon memory in giving them; but the records bear him out as being very nearly right.

A senior officer—a first lieutenant—was in charge of Company B when it was ordered to advance to the southern edge of the forest and hold the line until relief was sent. As the Germans were still in the woods, but in poor strength, the company moved through the night with bursts of precautionary fire but had no fight. Reaching their destination, the exhausted men tried to dig in, but could barely chip the frozen ground. Thus they were without cover except for the outer fringe of trees. During the night, the senior officer was wounded by mortar fire. He was evacuated, and Murphy was ordered by telephone to take over. Having started with the company as a private, he was now the commanding officer.

As the darkness wore through, Audie kept his men stamping around in the snow to keep their feet from freezing. He feared a dawn attack from the Germans and knew that his battered outfit could not stand up against it. But he formed his lines, using a tank destroyer and five armored vehicles from the 3rd Reconnaissance troop to protect his right flank. Company A, equally exhausted and bat-

tered, connected loosely with his left flank. A second tank destroyer had selected a position some forty yards ahead of the lines. Between the two tank destroyers, a forward artillery observer, Lieutenant Walter Weispfenning, had taken a post with a field radio.

After having his machine-gun crew set up its weapon, Murphy established a command post in a drainage ditch ten yards in front of the rear tank destroyer. He had a carbine, a field map, a pair of binoculars and a telephone that connected with 1st Battalion headquarters a

said that he was afraid he would get stuck if he moved off the road and did not budge. The forward tank destroyer had a whole field in which to maneuver on its left. The time of the enemy attack varies on record from ten in the morning until two in the afternoon. The latter is usually given. Murphy does not remember: he says that he had lost all sense of time. The day remained dull and cloudy, but ground visibility was good.

At two in the afternoon—let us say—the Germans swarmed out of Holtzwihr. The attacking force consisted



*National Archives*

*M-10 tank destroyer. January 20, 1945*

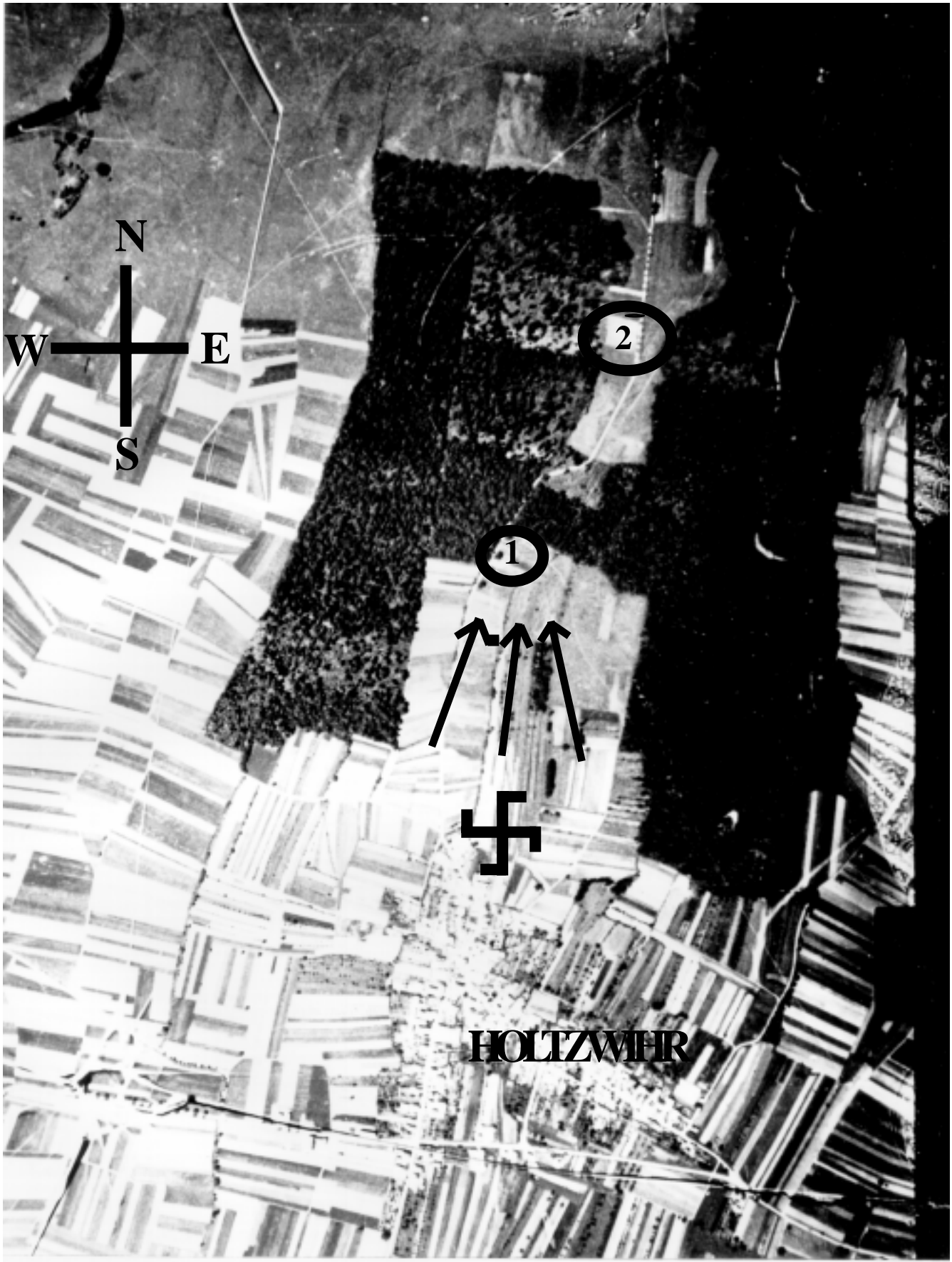
ter, connected loosely with his left flank. A second tank destroyer had selected a position some forty yards ahead of the lines. Between the two tank destroyers, a forward artillery observer, Lieutenant Walter Weispfenning, had taken a post with a field radio.

After having his machine-gun crew set up its weapon, Murphy established a command post in a drainage ditch ten yards in front of the rear tank destroyer. He had a carbine, a field map, a pair of binoculars and a telephone that connected with 1st Battalion headquarters a mile deep in the forest. A clouded dawn brought no attack. Audie felt relieved. A battalion was supposed to fan through Company B and hit Holtzwihr. But it had not arrived. Murphy pondered his situation. His company was stretched across the butt-end of a large U whose sides were formed by two great fingers of trees that led toward Holtzwihr. The heavily fortified village was in plain view over the snowy fields. The two tank destroyers were astraddle a narrow dirt road which ran from Holtzwihr to deep within the Bois de Riedwihr. **If German armor got into the forest, it would have to travel this roadway.**

Murphy woke up the commander of the rear destroyer and told him he had better get the vehicle off the road. Flanked on one side by the three-foot-deep drainage ditch and on the other by trees, it would be in no position to maneuver in case of an enemy attack. The commander

of six Jagdpanther tanks and an estimated 250 infantrymen, who were wearing white capes to make themselves inconspicuous against the snow. Apparently the Germans were determined to wrest the Bois de Riedwihr from the Americans, who had paid so dearly for the area in a heavy loss of men. The forest was of considerable importance because a control of it meant an ultimate domination of the two enemy strong-points in Holtzwihr.

The attack was preceded by a huge barrage of big shells. In the noise and confusion Murphy could not tell whether the fire was coming from the tanks or enemy artillery. But it was lethal. Company B's machine-gun crew was knocked out. The rear tank destroyer was hit flush by an 88mm projectile. It pierced the thin armor, killing the commander and gunner. The explosion also started a fire inside. Murphy thinks the grease and the uniforms of dead men were fed to the flames.



*Courtesy of Patrick Bauman & Mike West*

July 1951 aerial photograph of the Colmar Pocket battleground: (1) indicates Audie Murphy's position on the M-10 tank destroyer. (2) indicates 1st Battalion headquarters.



*Courtesy of the Texas Military Forces Museum*

*This German view of Murphy's position on the M-10 tank destroyer clearly shows the density of the forest and the tactical importance to the Germans of the access road. Had Company B not held the road the German tanks and troops would have overrun 1st Battalion headquarters, thus cutting off and surrounding the U.S. troops in the woods.*

What remained of the crew bailed out and disappeared into the forest.

The German tanks, using the fingers of trees for partial cover, fanned out and advanced, firing fast and viciously. The five reconnaissance vehicles which had formed Company B's right flank fell back before the furious onslaught. Being light, and having rubber tires, they did not get stuck in the snow.

The lead tank destroyer definitely asserted itself. A newspaper account mentions only two men in the crew: Staff Sergeant Joseph Tardif and Corporal Robert Hines. The latter alternated between firing the 90mm cannon and the .50-caliber machine gun. Tardif sprayed the oncoming infantrymen with a .30-caliber machine gun. Audie says: "I saw the enemy tanks get direct hits with 90mm shells, but they did not cause the Jagdpanthers even to falter. They continued to advance steadily."

Attempting to maneuver the lead tank destroyer into a new position, the

crew lost control of it. The tank destroyer slid into the drainage ditch and refused to budge. Its guns were left at a useless angle; so the crew, apparently consisting only of Hines and Tardif, climbed out and fled to the forest. In this desperate moment, Lieutenant Weispfenning's radio failed. Audie urged him to get back into the forest while he tried to contact the artillery through battalion headquarters. Weispfenning fell back but remained in the area to be of any possible use.

Murphy, certain that the remnants of Company B could not survive the German attack, ordered his men back to a previously designated portion about a half-mile deep in the forest. He remained at the front to correct artillery fire over the field telephone. "It was not a heroic act," says Audie. "I figured if one man could do the job, why risk the lives of thirty-odd."

Murphy did not attempt to protect himself by keeping a curtain of artillery fire between himself and the enemy sol-

diers. He put the fire directly on top of the Germans, meanwhile sniping frenziedly with his carbine at individual soldiers.

But the enemy attack continued. A nervous lieutenant called from battalion headquarters repeatedly to ask how close the Germans were. "If you'll just hold the phone, I'll let you talk to one of the bastards," Audie finally replied. This became a classic remark of the war.

With his carbine ammunition exhausted and the Germans about to swarm over his position, Murphy was about to fall back. Then he noted the .50-caliber machine gun on the turret of the burning tank destroyer and made the most audacious decision of his combat career. When the flames hit the fuel and ammunition, the tank destroyer would blow up. It was only a matter of time. But how much time? Audie had not the slightest idea.

"Then I saw Lieutenant Murphy do the bravest thing I had ever seen a man do in combat," says Walter





*Courtesy of After the Battle magazine*

*This painting by George Campbell which appeared in After the Battle, Number 3 © 1973, is an accurate depiction of Audie Murphy's "one-man strongpoint" in the Colmar Pocket Action. After the Battle, Number 3 © 1973 is available from RZM Imports, Inc., 1 Pomperaug Office Park 102, Southbury, CT 06488. Tel: (203) 264-0774. Fax: (203) 264-4967.*

Weispenning. "With the Germans only a hundred yards away and still moving up on him, he climbed on top of the burning tank destroyer and began firing the .50-caliber machine gun at the krauts. He was completely exposed and silhouetted against the background of bare trees and snow....Eighty-eight millimeter shells, machine-gun, machine-pistol, and rifle fire crashed all about him."

The tank destroyer commander, whom Murphy had urged to get under cover, was sprawled halfway out of the hatch. His throat had been cut. Audie dragged the dead body out and threw it in the snow so that it would not interfere with traversing the machine gun. Having brought the field telephone along, he asked battalion headquarters to keep the line open. A sergeant manned the headquarters end of the telephone to receive immediate corrections for the artillery fire. "I did not know how I would get out of that situation," says Murphy, "but for some reason I didn't care a damn."

Some accounts say that Audie used his machine gun against the enemy tanks,

forcing them to "button up." He says that this was completely false. "I would not waste my ammunition on something that direct hits by 90mm shells could not slow down," he states. "I concentrated on the foot soldiers, believing that the tanks would not advance very far without them." Another observer, Sergeant Elmer Brawley, says: "The German infantrymen got within ten yards of Lieutenant Murphy, who killed them in the draws, in the meadows, in the woods—wherever he saw them."

The smoke boiling from the tank destroyer hatch was both a blessing and a hindrance. Although providing some concealment, it interfered with the visibility essential for Murphy's line of fire. That is why the Germans, numbering twelve, got to a spot within ten yards of Audie. "With all of that crackle of firearms and big shells exploding all around, they probably did not even hear my machine-gun fire, much less guess its point of origin," he says. "When I first saw them, they had stopped in the drainage ditch directly in front of me and were frantically dis-

cussing something." He whirled his machine gun on them, killing them all.

But the tanks had definitely spotted Murphy. Two 88mm shells were slammed into the tank destroyer. "And," says Weispenning, "Lieutenant Murphy was enveloped in clouds of smoke and spurts of flame." When the smoke cleared, Audie was still holding his position. The headquarters sergeant, hearing the explosions over the phone, yelled: "Are you still alive, Lieutenant?" With grim humor Murphy replied: "Momentarily, sergeant. And what are your postwar plans?"

"I remember getting the hell shook out of me," he said. "But that was nothing new. I also remember that for the first time in three days my feet were warm."

The accounts say that the Germans concentrated their attack upon this "one-man strong-point." Lieutenant Colonel Keith Ware later stated that the enemy was making an "effort to recapture the woods at any cost." That small road which Murphy was holding was all-important for the German advance. Some of the enemy infantrymen got through the lines

loosely held by the battered 3rd Battalion. They stalked through the forest, cutting telephone wires, and finally reached the vicinity of the farmhouse serving as headquarters for the 1st and 2nd Battalions. The regimental commander, Colonel Hallett Edson, hastily organized the headquarters personnel into a fighting unit. Using two Flakwagons, the clerks and typists attacked the infiltrated Germans and threw them back. This small battle was going on a mile behind Murphy's position.

The clouds broke for a single brief period during the entire day. Fighter-bomber planes from the 1st TAF happened over. Murphy kindly had the artillery mark the German positions on his far left with smoke shells. The pilots dived and started strafing. The enemy attack, although slowed, still pressed forward. Once more the infantrymen threatened to overrun the strong-point held down by a single man. In another completely audacious maneuver, Audie called down the artillery fire upon his own position. "I figured that I could luck it out of that bar-

rage if the krauts could," he said.

He did more than luck it out. With the final ferocious barrage, the Germans apparently realized that somebody, somewhere, had them zeroed by the artillery. And they could not explain the mysterious machine-gun fire that had been cutting their ranks to pieces. The enemy infantry began to fall back toward Holtzwihr. The tanks, still firing at Audie with machine guns, also started backing away. "I can understand why the kraut infantrymen missed me," says Murphy. "But I can never forgive the German tank-men for their poor marksmanship. It was real sloppy."

The retreat came just in the nick of time. Murphy, attempting to call battalion headquarters for another artillery correction, found that his telephone line had been cut. The Germans were on the run—and without artillery he could do no more. Lieutenant Weispfenning states that Audie's trouser legs were "soaked with blood." Sergeant Elmer Brawley says: "Lieutenant Murphy was worn out and bleeding profusely. He was also covered

with dust and soot that must have obscured his vision."

As a matter of fact, Murphy's skin had not been touched during the furious battle in which he got the concentration of enemy fire. But only by some miracle of chance and the luck of the Irish had he escaped death. The field map, which he had held in outstretched hands, was riddled with rock and shell fragments. So was his officer's raincoat. But no new metal had touched his body. The blood came from the old mortar wounds which had been re-opened by the frenzied action.

Audie crawled off the tank destroyer and limped back into the forest without looking back. "I was too scared and exhausted to care whether I was shot or not," he says. Shortly afterward, he heard the tank destroyer blow up. A citation, which credits him with killing and wounding about fifty Germans, says: "He made his way to his company, refused medical attention, and organized the company in a counter-attack which forced the Germans to withdraw." In his testimony Ser-



*Courtesy of the Texas Military Forces Museum*

*Soldiers heat coffee with a blowtorch. January 27, 1945.*



geant Elmer Brawley says: "Lieutenant Murphy, refusing to be evacuated, led us in a strong attack against the enemy, dislodging the Germans from the whole area."

Murphy says: "I don't remember any strong counter-attack. Not many Germans were left in our area of the woods. I took the men left alive in Company B back to our original position in the front lines." And, although frozen and exhausted, they held the ground until relieved the next day.

On January 27, the 3rd Battalion of the 30th Infantry Regiment captured Holtzwihr with ease. The battalion had been organized and strengthened by a number of replacements. However, Holtzwihr was but a shell of a fortification. The Germans, doubtless demoralized by the failure of their attack on the previous day, had pulled out most of their men and materiel, leaving a rear-guard to cover their retreat. The 3rd Division history states: "Lieutenant Audie Murphy stopped the attack practically single-handed." Other accounts refer to the furious battle as "Audie Murphy's wild one-man stand." But Murphy says: "No man stands out there in the front all alone; not for long he doesn't. Help must, and does, come from somewhere if he is to survive." Nevertheless, according to all records, he held that forward post in the front line for an hour. In that position he absorbed the bulk of the enemy attack. And he was alone.

The story of the Holtzwihr action is so fantastic that I have checked it in every way I could. Murphy, from boredom and utter weariness, has let his combat record be distorted at will. In his book *To Hell And Back*, he played down his own achievements in trying to capture the "feel" of a few infantrymen at war. The motion picture, based on the book, took complete dramatic license in the name of innocence and action. It failed utterly to catch the true personality of the man behind the medals. He is as tough as steel, yet completely sensitive. His turbulent, brooding mind can still make split-second decisions. He is no idealist. His iconoclastic nature causes him to cut through all human pretension to get at the core of things. His reflexes are the fastest of any person I have ever known.



*Courtesy of Billie Murphy Tindol*

*Photo was probably taken in mid- February, 1945, after the Battle of the Colmar Pocket, while Audie was on leave in Paris, France.*

In 1949 I checked the official Army records that state the reason he was awarded the Medal of Honor. He had made a supreme gamble with his life to protect the men of Company B. His citation reads: "Lieutenant Murphy's indomitable courage and his refusal to give an inch of ground saved his company from possible encirclement and destruction, and enabled it to hold the woods which had been the enemy's objective."

The tank destroyer, when I saw it in 1948, had been dragged off the road. The entrance top had been blown off, and the inside was heavily charred. The three punctures made by the 88mm shells were similar to the holes a .22 rifle bullet makes in a tin can. My findings jibed with the

written accounts.

I had read the testimony submitted by Lieutenant Walter Weispfenning before I met him. When I asked if the details were true, he laughed: "They were as accurate as I could remember under the circumstances. When a man is figuring on getting his butt shot off any minute—and I did—he does not think how the details will look in print. But Audie earned the Medal of Honor time and again, and I was only happy that my testimony finally helped him get it." Despite his wounded legs, Murphy continued fighting at the head of Company B until the last remnant of the Colmar Pocket fell on February 6. The 3rd Division received a Presidential Citation; also a Croix de Guerre with Palm

from a grateful France.

On February 18, with mission completed, the 3rd Division was pulled out of action to rest and reorganize for an assault against the Siegfried Line. It returned to combat on March 15. By this time, processes for getting Audie the Medal of Honor were going through channels. His superior officers, fearing he would be killed before the award could be made, took him out of the front lines and gave him liaison work. At least they thought they had. Perhaps Murphy over-reacted to the term "liaison." His commanding officers certainly did not intend for him to establish liaison with the enemy. But this almost happened.

Audie and Captain "Red" Coles, in a jeep driven by a sergeant, seemed to have ranged considerably beyond the front lines. Rounding a bend in the road they suddenly came upon about four hundred enemy soldiers. Heavily armed, the Germans were merely taking a rest-break. It was too late for the trio to back off. The only chance they had against death or capture was through a bluff. Murphy ordered the sergeant to continue driving straight forward at a leisurely pace.

The nervous chauffeur started to balk; but the two officers brought him back in line by threatening to shoot him themselves. It was no time for penny-ante. With one hand on a .50-caliber machine-gun trigger and the other waving cordial greetings to the Germans, Audie looked supremely confident. So did Captain Coles. He was also waving to the enemy soldiers with one hand while fingering a weapon with the other. The Germans, doubtless thinking that a regiment was directly behind the advance party of three, returned the greetings and allowed the jeep to pass without so much as a challenge. The trio managed to hide out until the Seventh Army caught up with them.

Murphy forgot to tell me such stories when we were working on his book. Twenty-two years after the incident, he ran into Coles in a California cocktail lounge. And the ex-captain refreshed the Murphy memory.

Audie pulled a similar bluff during the final days of the Colmar Pocket. Both the Germans and the Americans were suf-

fering from severe battle exhaustion; their uniforms, unchanged for days, were crusted with mud. Company B had taken a group of prisoners, and, having disarmed them, sat down to rest about thirty yards from a road. The sound of approaching enemy tanks suddenly reached them. It was too late to get out of sight, so Murphy grabbed a German helmet and clapped it upon his head. He also hastily suggested that his men do likewise. Three tanks and a sprinkling of German infantrymen roared by. Audie, carrying his bluff to the hilt, waved casually at them. The Germans, doubtless identifying the helmets as their own, returned the salutation and proceeded down the road.

Murphy is still a great one for bluffing. We were walking across a studio lot when we ran into his agent and lawyer. Audie, so weak from a recent operation that he was hanging on my shoulder to walk, stopped and eyed the two men coldly. "Well," he said, "what are you guys stealing today?" The men took the question seriously. "What do you mean?" the agent asked. "When two thieves get together, they're bound to steal something," said Murphy. With that he walked on. "You've got to keep them racked back," he explained. "They'll spend the rest of the day wondering what I've found out about them."

While still on liaison duty, Murphy got word that Captain Paul Harris, back with Company B, had been killed near the Siegfried Line; the unit had bogged down. He didn't say anything to anybody. Getting the approximate location of Company B from headquarters, he conned a telephone-wire stringer into driving him to the front. Armed with a carbine and the inevitable hand grenades, he found Company B, took the men through the Siegfried Line, and instructed the young lieutenant in charge to keep under cover until contacted by other units. Not a shot was fired during the maneuver. The Germans had already pulled out. But Company B, which had fought so valiantly, had finally collapsed from a bad case of battle nerves. I learned this story only after one of the members wrote Audie long after the war to thank him for pulling Company B out of that

spot.

During the war, Murphy used bluff only when he thought nothing else would succeed. He had great respect for the Germans as fighters, and he liked plenty of firepower to use against them. As a liaison officer, he had a jeep upon which was mounted a .50-caliber machine gun. To that weapon he added a case of hand grenades, several rifles, and two German submachine guns. He fully intended to use the whole arsenal if he ran into trouble. "I had no intentions of letting myself be captured as long as I could pull a trigger or heave a grenade," he says.

Toward the end of the war Audie was in an Austrian village when the Germans were surrendering by the thousands. He and another lieutenant were walking along a street when they spotted a German colonel still wearing his pistol. Murphy stood by while his companion approached the colonel and said: "Please, sir, may I have your sidearm?" Audie looked again and his blood ran suddenly cold. Leaping forward, he said: "Don't say *please* to this sonofabitch. Tell him to give you his goddamned gun."

The German winced and handed over his pistol. Murphy had thought the scar-faced colonel might be Otto Skorzeny, described during the war as "the most dangerous man in Europe." Audie explained: "We had a rumor that the 30th Infantry Regiment had captured Skorzeny and given him a pass. During the mopping-up phases of the war, we had been warned to watch out for Skorzeny. He was an exceedingly dangerous man." As it turned out, however the man was not Skorzeny.

The incident with the German colonel illustrates Audie's no-nonsense tactics in dealing with the enemy. His graphic language was also typical. While shooting a picture at Fort Lewis, he heard captains asking enlisted men to carry out orders *please*. "A bullet can travel a hundred yards while you're saying *please*. And you don't have that kind of time in combat," said Murphy.

Murphy was invited back to Washington to receive the Medal of Honor from President Harry Truman. But he elected to get the award in the field where it had been won. It was General Alexander Patch



*National Archives*

*Audie Murphy was presented the Medal of Honor and the Legion of Merit in Salzburg, Austria by General Alexander Patch, Commanding General of the 7th Army, June 2, 1945.*

who made the presentation on June 2, 1945, in Salzburg, Austria. Immediately afterward, the General bestowed upon Audie the Legion of Merit. In part, the citation reads: "Lieutenant Murphy's personal bravery, his skill in imparting his own knowledge of enemy tactics to his men, and his voluntary assumptions of hazardous patrols and missions have benefitted his unit to an immeasurable degree."

As for the "personal bravery," Murphy says: "I have grappled with fear all of my life. I never went into combat without feeling fear twisting my intestines into knots. I suppose this happened to every man, no matter how cool he seemed to be."

With the Legion of Merit, Audie became the soldier most decorated for valor in the entire American armies of World War II. His nearest competitor was Captain Maurice Britt, also of the 3rd Infantry Division. For some reason, Britt apparently did not get the Legion of Merit, which he undoubtedly deserved. But he

also failed to receive a second Silver Star. After the war, Audie was awarded the Legion of Honor Chevalier by France; and the Croix de Guerre with Palm by Belgium; and a Croix de Guerre with Silver Star by France. "The most decorated soldier" is a tenuous term. High military brass receive many medals from various countries for general merit. But for sheer valor in combat, Murphy is probably the most decorated soldier in the history of American warfare. In this nuclear age, and with time limits on combat service, no other soldier is likely to surpass him. Audie survived seven major battle campaigns. They were Tunisia, Sicily, Naples-Foggia, Rome-Arno, Southern France, the Rhineland, and Central Europe. For each he was awarded a star to be worn on his Theater ribbon. Of all the decorations he is perhaps proudest of the Combat Infantryman Badge, which was given to thousands of fighting foot soldiers.

Murphy is generally credited with killing, capturing, and wounding 240 Germans. I myself gave out that figure after

checking citations, testimonial statements by eyewitnesses, newspaper accounts, *History of THE THIRD INFANTRY DIVISION In World War II* and personal letters to Audie. Typical of the last was one written by a man expressing profuse gratitude for saving his life. I asked Murphy what happened. "Not much," he said, "This guy and another soldier had their heads down right in the middle of some close combat. A silly, careless thing to do. A German with a machine pistol sneaked up on them. But before he could shoot, I killed him."

All of the stories written about Murphy's combat deeds vary considerably; and he does not have the slightest idea of how many enemy soldiers he put out of action. When groups of Germans tried to surrender to him toward the end of the war, he sent them back to the rear area to give themselves up. Murphy was too busy with front-line activities to become involved with men who merely wanted to surrender. Although his Medal of Honor citation lists the German casu-



Mrs. Rosemary H. Tyree, First Lt. Audie L. Murphy and Mrs. Frances H. Dillon, left to right, stand under the colors of the Eighth Service Command while receiving medals from Brig. Gen. W. A. Collier, chief of staff.

## Lt. Audie Murphy Awarded French Croix de Guerre

First Lt. Audie L. Murphy, Farmersville, the nation's most decorated infantryman, added the French Croix de Guerre to his list of medals in ceremonies Wednesday at the Eighth Service Command drill ground, Young and Austin.

Lieutenant Murphy, now on terminal leave before he is released from active duty, will leave Dallas

at 9:27 a.m. Thursday by American Airlines for Hollywood to be interviewed by the James Cagney studio. Cagney is interested in making a movie of Murphy's Army career.

Two posthumous awards were presented. Brig. Gen. W. A. Collier, Eighth Service Command, chief of staff, made the presentation. The citations were read by Lt. Col. W. H. Crawford, Headquarters Command.

Mrs. Frances H. Dillon, also of Farmersville, received the Silver Star awarded her husband, Second Lt. Neville H. Dillon, who died in action Dec. 21, 1944. Lieutenant Dillon was cited for gallantry in the battle which took his life.

Mrs. Rosemary H. Tyree, 4204 West Potomac, received the Bronze Star for her husband, T-Sgt. William Tyree Jr., who won the award "for meritorious achievement in connection with military operations against the enemy from May 1, 1944, to April 24, 1945." He later was killed in action.

Mrs. Mary Smolka, Forney, was unable to be present but will receive a second Bronze Star as a posthumous award to her late husband, S-Sgt. Steve Smolka, for heroism last Oct. 27. He died of battle wounds.

*Audie Murphy received the French Croix de Guerre with Silver Star at a special ceremony in Dallas, TX on September 19, 1945 .*

*Almost three years later, on July 19, 1948 in Paris, France, the French government also presented him with the French Legion of Honor and the Croix de Guerre with Palm.*

alties in the Holtzwihr action as fifty, an eyewitness to the entire battle differs. This was former PFC Anthony Abramsi. In his written testimony, he states that Murphy killed or wounded at least one hundred of the enemy soldiers with “his directed artillery fire and his machine gun.” Both figures are, of course, approximations. Nobody bothered to count the bodies lying in the snowy fields before Holtzwihr. It is my belief that the number of casualties that Audie was instrumental in causing and the number of prisoners he took likely add up to far more than 240.

Murphy was returned to his native state, Texas, for a furlough on June 14, 1945. This was just a few days before his twenty-first birthday. In a special ceremony in Dallas, TX September 19, 1945, he was awarded the French Croix de Guerre with Silver Star. I have a newspaper account of this incident, but I have never found a citation to back it up. This is nothing unusual. Had I not kept his citations on file over the years, Murphy would have probably lost them all. He had a lack of interest in his own war achievements. I knew him for eleven years before I ever saw his medals. His wife finally had his medals mounted in a case for their two sons. Otherwise he would likely have misplaced those too. “The war,” he said recently, “floats through my mind like flotsam and jetsam. It is no big thing. But when the war was on, somebody had to fight it. Hitler was not playing marbles. People seem to forget that these days.”

Audie was discharged from the Army as a first lieutenant on September 21, 1945. On that same day he came to Hollywood. James Cagney, who met him at the airport, told me: “I knew Murphy only from his photographs. In reality he was terribly thin. His color was bluish gray. I had reserved a hotel room for him. But he looked so sick that I was afraid to leave him alone. I took him home and gave him my bed. This was after a three-month rest from combat. The war had taken a horrible toll on his nerves.”

Years later Audie made a very pertinent statement to an interviewer, “Despite everything, I loved the damned Army,” he said: “For a long time it was father, mother, and brother to me. It made me somebody, gave me self-respect.”

In 1950, he joined the 36th Division of the Texas National Guard, remaining with the outfit until he had worked up to the rank of major. Then, because of the movie work pressure, he had himself put on the list of inactive reserves.

When starring in his first picture, he was quoted by a publicity man as saying: “I’d rather face a German machine gun than a motion picture camera.” Murphy commented: “Obviously the guy that dreamed up that line had never faced a German machine gun.” From his first arrival back in America, he was usually too tired and indifferent to care how his war story was distorted. This account of how he won his medals will, I hope, set the record straight.

*David “Spec” McClure  
—1971*



*Courtesy of Mrs. Tommy Riddle*

*Thomas L. Riddle, Jr., Audie. Murphy and Erwin C. Seehafer.*

1945



*Courtesy of Marion Long*

*Roy Rogers and Audie Murphy promoting THE CHEVY SHOW which aired September 27, 1959. During the television show, Roy Rogers, Audie Murphy and Eddy Arnold sang together. To date the Audie Murphy Research Foundation has not been able to locate a copy of the show itself.*

## ***Special Thanks To:***

**DASHLINK, INC. of Killeen, TX for sponsoring the internet address dedicated exclusively to the  
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We hope that you have enjoyed this newsletter. Since this is the first newsletter that we have sent out via the Internet, we would like to know if you encountered any problems receiving it.

We still need people who would be willing to print and mail copies of the new newsletter to at least one person who does not have Internet access. If you can help please email us at [Audiemurphy@juno.com](mailto:Audiemurphy@juno.com).

Even though this new method of delivering the newsletter has helped to reduce our mailing expenses, we still need your continued financial support to help cover the costs of interviewing people and collecting and preserving photos, newspaper and magazine articles and artifacts — as well as maintaining the website and making educational materials available to schools.

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