

The Biography of Audie Murphy

Audie Leon Murphy was a legend in his own time. A war hero, movie actor, writer of country and western songs, and poet. His biography reads more like fiction than fact. He lived only 46 years, but he made a lasting imprint on American history. Audie was born on a sharecropper's farm in North Texas on June 20, 1924. As a boy, he chopped cotton for one dollar a day and was noted for his feats of derring-do and his accuracy with a gun. He had only 5 years of schooling and was orphaned at age 16.



After being refused enlistment during World War II in both the Marines and Paratroopers for being too small (5'5") and underweight (110 lbs), he enlisted in the U.S. Army a few days after his 18th birthday. After basic training at Camp Wolters, Texas, and advanced training at Fort George G. Meade, Maryland, Audie was sent overseas. He was assigned to the famous 15th Infantry Regiment of the 3rd Infantry Division where he fought in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, France, and Germany. He earned a battlefield commission for his courage and leadership ability as well as citations and decorations including every medal for valor that America gives. He was also awarded three French and one Belgian medal. Lieutenant Audie Murphy was the highest decorated soldier in American history.

Discharged from the Army on September 21, 1945, Audie went to Hollywood at the invitation of movie star James Cagney. He remained in California for the rest of his life and was closely associated with the movie industry, both as an actor and a producer. He acted in 44 films, starring in 39 of them. His best known film was "To Hell and Back," adopted from the best selling book of his war experiences by the same name. Most of his movies were westerns. In 1955, Audie Murphy was voted the Most Popular Western Actor in America by the Motion Picture Exhibitors. Audie wrote the lyrics to 16 country and western songs, the most popular of which was "Shutters and Boards," written with Scott Turner in 1962. The song was recorded by over 30 pop singers, including Jerry Wallace, Dean Martin, and Porter Waggoner. He was an accomplished poet; unfortunately, only a few of his poems have survived.

In 1950 Audie joined the 36th Infantry Division ("T-Patchers") of the Texas National Guard and served with it until 1966. He was a Mason and a Shriner and belonged to several veterans organizations. Audie Murphy was killed in a plane crash on a mountain top near Roanoke, Virginia on May 28, 1971. Fittingly, his body was recovered 2 days later on Memorial Day.

(Adapted from text taken with permission from on January 3, 2005.)