

John James Kedenburg

(The first of several articles on this subject)

The Medal of Honor is the most prestigious medal for gallantry that America awards to members of the Armed Forces. Of the 3459 Medals awarded since 1861, 257 were awarded to Irish born recipients, twice as many as have been awarded to any other foreign born group. Many other Irish-Americans, too, have earned the Medal of Honor, such as the two heroes we feature in this essay.

John James Kedenburg is a local hero. He is the nephew of Mary Jane Bohan Kedenburg, a member of the Irish Cultural Society. John was born in Brooklyn on July 31, 1946 and died in Vietnam on June 13, 1968. He grew up on Long Island, graduating from St. Christopher's Grammar School in Baldwin and from Baldwin High School. Over six feet tall and strong, John played right guard on Baldwin's championship football team of 1964. He enlisted in the U.S. Army at the age of 19, following in the footsteps of his grandfather, who served in WWI; and his father, in WWII, and two uncles who were killed in WWII.



John volunteered for the Special Forces, known as the Green Berets, made famous in a popular song of the time and in a John Wayne movie. Special Forces soldiers are highly trained in unconventional warfare, often in close contact with foreign or guerrilla forces. It was in John's capacity as advisor to South Vietnamese troops deep in enemy held territory that he was killed. His death in the jungles of Vietnam and his valorous behavior that resulted in his being awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor are detailed in his Citation as follows:

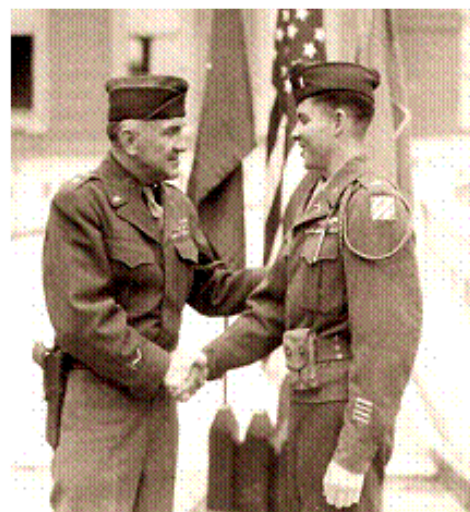
For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty, Sp5c. Kedenburg, Forward Operating Base 2, 5th Special Forces Group J(Airborne), distinguished himself while serving as advisor to a long-range reconnaissance team of South Vietnamese irregular troops. The team's mission was to conduct counter guerrilla operations deep within enemy-held territory. Prior to reaching the day's objective, the team was attacked and encircled by a battalion-size North Vietnamese Army Force. Sp5c. Kedenburg assumed immediate command of the team which succeeded, after a fierce fight, in breaking out of the encirclement. As the team moved through thick jungle to a position

from which it could be extracted by helicopter, Sp5c. Kedenburg conducted a gallant rear guard against the pursuing enemy and called for tactical air support and rescue helicopters. His withering fire against the enemy permitted the team to reach a preselected landing zone with the loss of only one man who was unaccounted for. Once in the landing zone, Sp5c. Kedenburg deployed the team into a perimeter defense against the numerically superior enemy force. When tactical air support arrived, he skillfully directed air strikes against the enemy, suppressing their fire so helicopters could hover over the area and drop slings to be used in the extraction of the team. After half of the team was extracted by helicopter, Sp5c. Kedenburg and the remaining three members of the team harnessed themselves to the sling on the second hovering helicopter. Just as the helicopter was to lift them out of the area, the South Vietnamese team member who had been unaccounted for after the initial encounter with the enemy appeared in the landing zone. Sp5c. Kedenburg unhesitatingly gave up his place in the sling to the man and directed the helicopter pilot to leave the area. He then continued to engage the enemy who were swarming into the landing zone, killing six enemy soldiers before he was overpowered. Sp5c. Kedenburg's inspiring leadership, consummate courage and willing self-sacrifice permitted his small team to inflict heavy casualties on the enemy and escape almost certain annihilation. His actions reflect great credit upon himself and the U.S. Army.

John Kedenburg lives on in the memory of his family and is honored by a grateful nation.

Audie Murphy was born on June 20, 1924, in Texas , one of thirteen children, to a poor tenant farmer who was a cotton sharecropper. Audie was the seventh child and third son born to Emmet Murphy. The Murphys were dirt poor and Audie left school in the 5th grade. Audie's mother died at a young age and his father deserted his family. On June 30, 1942, turned down by the Marines because he was too short and too light (5'5", 112 pounds), he was inducted into the Army. He returned home at the end of the war with 37 medals including three Purple Hearts and the Medal of Honor.

On January 26, 1945 Audie earned the Medal of Honor for action in the Riedwihr Woods near Holtzwihr , France . Murphy's company had been reduced to 18 men out of a full complement of 235 men. As the only officer left, Audie was put in charge of the company



and ordered to advance to the edge of the forest and hold the line until relieved. The Germans assaulted with six heavy tanks supported by 200 German infantry. Sensing that the situation was desperate, Audie ordered his men back to an alternate position. Murphy, however, mounted a burning American tank and began spraying the advancing German infantry while directing artillery fire on his own position. He kept up his deadly fire and managed to kill and wound approximately 50 to 100 Germans and confuse the rest, causing them to withdraw. Murphy jumped from the burning tank just seconds before it exploded.

After leaving the service and returning home, Murphy became an instant celebrity as an author and actor. His book "To Hell and Back" was a bestseller, and in 1955 Universal Pictures made it into a successful movie. Audie appeared in 44 pictures from 1949-1971.

Audie Murphy was killed in plane crash at the age of 47. He is buried at Arlington National Cemetery and his grave site is one of the most popular among visitors. At his funeral an officer remarked that Audie Murphy was from another age, that of Sir Lancelot of King Arthur's Knights. No doubt true, but we think that there was a good deal of Brian Boru in Audie Murphy's blood too.

(Written by Joseph Mc Cormack, 2005)

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