

# Living up to the legend: Sgt. Morales, Sgt. Audie Murphy clubs recognize today's best NCOs

Sgt. Chad T. Jones

Weighing in at 98 pounds, Sergeant Morales probably didn't use size to obtain his troops' respect. Neither did the 5-foot-5-inch, 110-pound Sgt. Audie Murphy. Instead, both legendary Soldiers earned their troops' respect with their actions.

Sergeant Morales is a fictional composite that has become a living portrait of the NCO Creed. He led by example, particularly when it meant getting his hands dirty. Morales started every day doing physical fitness training with his troops and spent the rest of it making sure their missions and needs were being met. For three years, Morales, a squad leader for an engineer battalion in Europe, learned about his Soldiers, kept them informed and watched out for their welfare. In return his squad performed at a high level, and none of his troops were reported AWOL.

"The Morales story is an azimuth to guide young NCOs in the right direction, said Sgt. Maj. of the Army Kenneth O. Preston. "The story serves as a yardstick to measure your own performance in all areas from training and performance to taking care of Soldiers and families."

While Morales is a fictitious character created to give NCOs

an example of how to lead, Audie Leon Murphy lived a life fiction writers couldn't create.

Murphy started life as the son of a poor Texas sharecropper, and he almost ended it as one since the Marines and Army Paratroopers turned him away because of his small stature. A third attempt to join turned out to be the charm for Murphy who enlisted as an infantryman, shortly after his 18th birthday, in 1941.

In mid-1943 Murphy received his baptism by fire when the 3rd Infantry Division landed in Sicily. There, despite the best efforts of his commander to keep him from fighting, Murphy distinguished himself as a resourceful and effective Soldier and earned the rank of corporal.

He was promoted to sergeant after his actions during a night patrol in Salerno, Italy, led to the capture of several German soldiers. Murphy triumphed over German soldiers, near fatal wounds and even a case of Malaria before he was discharged from the Army as a sergeant so he could accept a battlefield commission to second lieutenant. On Sept. 21, 1945



Illustration by Spc. Ryan Swanson

Murphy was permanently discharged from the active-duty Army as a first lieutenant. Nearly 60 years later, he is still remembered for his heroic acts as a sergeant, which helped him become the most highly decorated Soldier during World War II.

“Sgt. Audie Murphy was important to the Army because he set the standard for the Corps of Noncommissioned Officers by what he did,” said Staff Sgt. Courtney Moore, a chemical operations specialist with the XVIII Airborne Corps, Fort Bragg, N.C.

“The way he displayed pure leadership and motivation is what we all should have inside of us,” he said.

In 1988 the leadership at Fort Hood, Texas, formed a club to honor Murphy. Sixteen years later, the Sergeant Audie Murphy Club (SAMC) is considered the most prestigious NCO organization in the Army, according to 1st Sgt. Stuart Edick, XVIII Airborne Corps, who was inducted into the club in 1996.

“To be a member of the Sergeant Audie Murphy Club proves you have successfully demonstrated you are a leader and, over a period of time, made contributions to the NCO Corps. It means that you take care of yourself, your Soldiers and the Army,” said Edick.

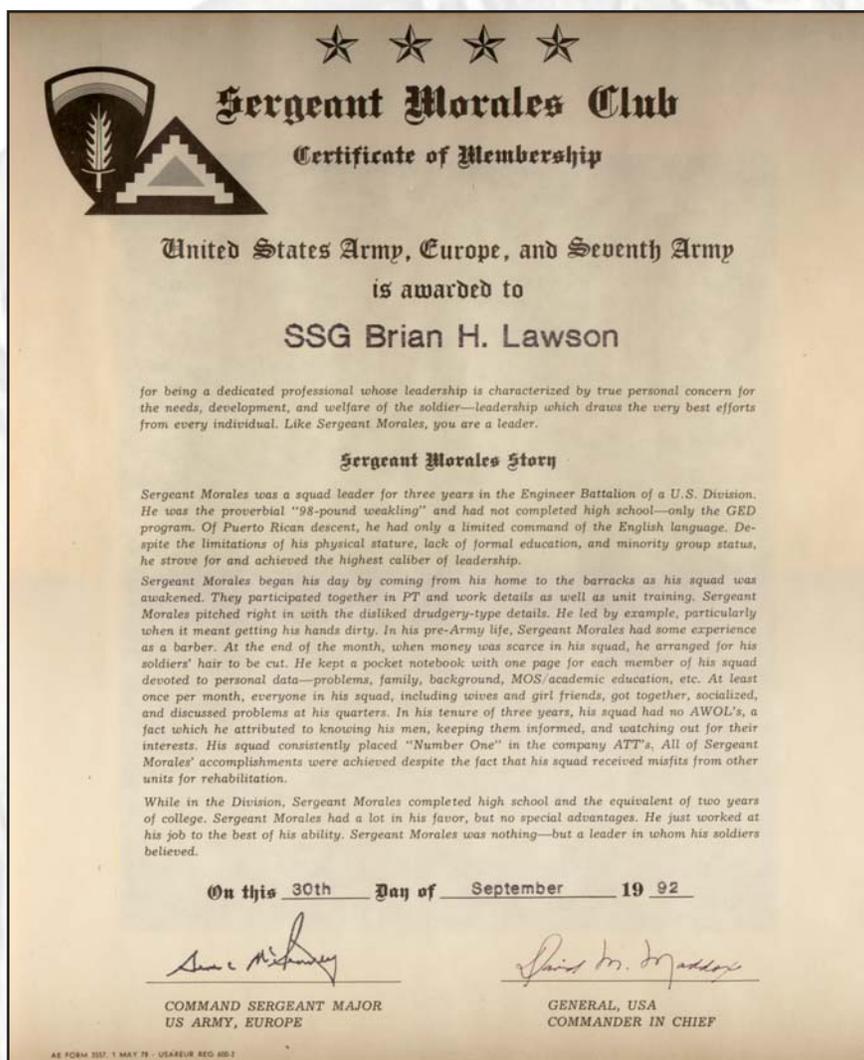
Just as Murphy’s achievements set the bar for NCOs stationed in the United States, the legendary Morales has done the same in Europe.

Soldiers stationed in Europe have honored Sergeant Morales’ integrity and personal courage since 1973, each time an Army NCO is inducted into the Sergeant Morales Club (SMC).

“Being a Sergeant Morales Club member proves that you are the best,” said Master Sgt. Victor Pedraza, G3 NCOIC, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, V Corps, Heidelberg, Germany. Pedraza was inducted into the SMC in 1993.

“Being a member of the Sergeant Morales or Sergeant Audie Murphy clubs for any NCO means belonging to a very elite group of professionals who have demonstrated excellence in leadership,” said Preston, who was inducted into the SMC in 1981 and is an honorary member of the SAMC.

NCOs who hold the rank of corporal through sergeant first class and are serving in a Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) or Forces Command (FORSCOM)



**The certificate is given to all Soldiers who earn the right to be a Sergeant Morales club member. Now a sergeant major assigned to the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, Sgt. Maj. Brian Lawson is proud of his induction.**

unit are eligible to become an SAMC member. The Sergeant Morales Club is open to all Soldiers, corporal through sergeant first class, who are serving in Europe.

NCOs who’ve earned the honor of being an SAMC or SMC member can look forward to benefits far greater than the Sergeant Audie Murphy Medallion given to every SAMC member or the plaque given to SMC members, said Edick.

“If two Soldiers have done everything they are supposed to do and one is a member, the SAMC member is [more likely] going to get the promotion,” said Edick.

“Just preparing and living the Morales [and Murphy] stories set NCOs ahead of their peers,” said Preston. “Those NCOs who achieve membership into these elite organizations are sought after for special events because of their credibility.”

Getting a leg up on your peers isn’t the only perk club members receive, said Pedraza.

“By becoming a member you not only know that you are the top of the crop, but there are a lot of senior NCOs that sit on those boards and see a young sergeant trying to prove that he or she is the best and being an SMC member proves that you are.”

Being considered the best of the best and a standards bearer for NCOs to follow is not an easy task, said Pedraza. Neither is becoming a member of one of these elite clubs.

"If I was to say there is nothing hard about becoming a member, I would be lying," said Pedraza.

Soldiers must meet height, weight, physical training and weapons standards to even be considered. But, as Edick said, it takes more than being a good marksman to become a member of one of these clubs.

"An SAMC member is not just involved in self-improvement. [He or she is] someone whose Soldiers are taking correspondence courses and doing well on the Army Physical Fitness Test. It is someone who is pushing Soldiers up because the Army is run [by] Soldiers," said Edick.

Any Soldier wishing to become an SMC or SAMC member must survive a selection process that can last more than six months and begins with a recommendation from a current club member, said Pedraza.

Then, Soldiers must compete in battalion, division and corps selection boards hosted by current club members.

Unlike promotion boards that test a Soldier's technical ability and tactical knowledge, SMC and SAMC board members question Soldiers' tactical knowledge, leadership skills and hands-on skills, said Edick.

For example, instead of asking a Soldier, "What is a zero card?" an SMC board member may hand a candidate a Soldier's zero card and ask the candidate what he'd do to tighten up his Soldier's shot group, he explained.

Candidates field questions about drug abuse, drinking and driving and other controversial issues.

"One way you can't go wrong with the board is to stick with what the Army policy is," said Edick. "Some people try and guess what board members want to hear, but it's not what the board members want to hear, it's the Army's policy and how to apply it."

Soldiers appearing before the boards are also expected to recite the 881-word Sgt. Audie Murphy story or 570-word Sergeant Morales story.

Supportive leadership and present club members can be very helpful to candidates preparing for the boards, said Moore, who was inducted into the SAMC in 2002.

"Leaders can help Soldiers prepare for the board by giving them the opportunity to figure things out for themselves. Specifically those tasks involving Soldier issues," Moore said. Also leaders can help by being honest on a Soldier's NCOER. After all, the mission of the SAMC is to continually develop the Corps of the Noncommissioned Officer," Moore said.

Edick added that every club member has an obligation to help at least one Soldier join the ranks of these elite organizations. That is why he created [http://geocities.com/stuart\\_edick](http://geocities.com/stuart_edick). The Web site helps Soldiers prepare for the SAMC board by providing users with links to Army regulations and field manuals, as well as sample board questions and a direct link to the Sgt. Audie Murphy Web site.

"The hardest part about getting ready for the board was getting my leader's book together," said Pedraza.



*Each Sgt. Audie Murphy Club member receives the same medallion.*

All candidates must bring their leader's books to their board appearances, "and it needs to be a true leader's book," said Edick. "Not something pretty, but something you are working out of. It has to show you know your Soldiers' strengths and weaknesses."

Soldiers selected to be a member of one of these elite organizations must be prepared to meet the expectations that come with being the best," said Pedraza.

"I expect an SAMC member to be someone I don't have to micromanage," said Edick. "It would be someone I can give a task to and know it will be accomplished."

"Sgt. Morales or [Sgt.] Audie Murphy Club members form an immediate image of their fellow members' capabilities," said Preston. "They have instant credibility when they walk into a new organization because of the high, strict standards established by the namesakes themselves and further enforced by the senior command sergeants major who chair the selection boards."

Nobody knows for sure how high in the ranks Sgt. Morales's character and integrity would have taken him because his fictitious career was cut short by an author's pen. Just like nobody knows how high Murphy could have climbed had he chosen to stay in the Army. Instead he parlayed his heroics into a successful movie career that included his self portrayal in the famous movie "To Hell and Back." He also enjoyed a successful songwriting career.

What is known is that the greatest honor paid to these reknowned Soldiers wasn't the formation of the clubs that bear their names. Instead, it's the quality of the Soldiers who strive to be members in them.

For more information on how to join the SAMC go to <http://www.tradoc.army.mil/tpubs/regs/r600-14.htm>. Information on the SMC is available in USAREUR Regulation 600-2, (Leadership – USAREUR Sergeant Morales Club).