

THE WOUNDED ARKANSAS LEGEND WHO SAVED HIS BATTALION'S POSITION IN WW2

VERSATILITY IN ACTION

**HE DID IT ALL WITH HONOR –A GIFTED FOOTBALL PLAYER, WW2-MEDAL OF HONOR WINNER,
SUCCESSFUL BUSINESSMAN AND LT. GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF ARKANSAS**

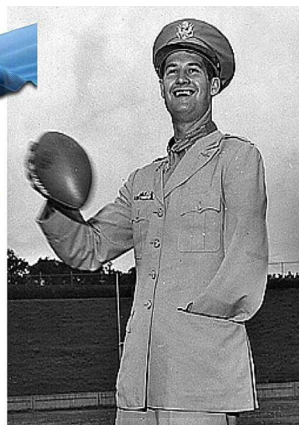
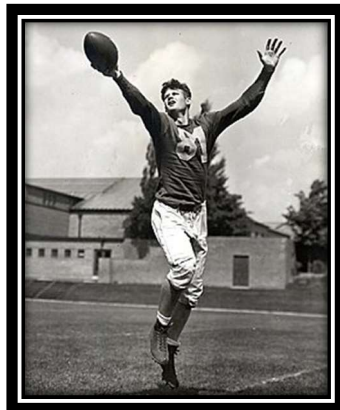
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ARKANSAS' VERY OWN

MAURICE L. "FOOTSIE" BRITT

JUNE 29, 1919 – NOVEMBER 26, 1995



INTRODUCTION

The world of sports is often said to serve as but a shadow or reflection of war. There are physical rigors, stressful scenarios, and often the need to pit man against man in a battle for victory. But occasionally, that shadow meets reality, and an athlete excels not only in the field of sport but the field of battle.

Such was the case for a man Arkansas is proud to claim as one of their own, Maurice "Footsie" Britt. Known for his size 13 shoes which partially led to the nickname "Footsie" growing up, Britt was a physically dominating man who would take his athletic ability from High School to the University of Arkansas, to the Detroit Lions, and Italy in World War 2.

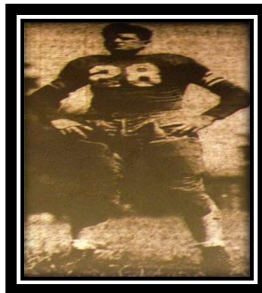
And while he might have played wide receiver in the NFL, if you had asked the Germans they would have thought he was a Quarterback from the way he relentlessly hurled grenades at them on his path to receiving the Medal of Honor and just about every other award for gallantry one could fit on a uniform.

AN ARKANSAS LEGEND (WARTIME)

Maurice Britt was born in Carlisle, Arkansas in 1919. From the first time he set foot on the field, his athletic prowess became apparent, and he excelled at any sport he attempted. But he was more than just an athlete. ***This gifted man would become the valedictorian of Lonoke High School in 1937 on his way to an athletic scholarship in both football and basketball for the University of Arkansas.***

While in college, he participated in the Army Reserve Officer's Training Corps. Upon graduation in 1941 was commissioned a Second Lieutenant of Infantry.

However, the gifted Britt had eyes on the gridiron and in 1941 went on to play wide receiver for the Detroit Lions. He had received a partial deferment for active duty to finish the 1941 season. When that was up, he joined Company L, 3rd Battalion 30th Infantry Regiment of the 3rd Infantry Division.



Maurice Britt, date unknown

In October of 1942, the division set out for North Africa and the subsequent invasion of Morocco that would serve as the kickoff for this gifted athlete's career in the field of battle. Serving as a platoon leader for L Company, Britt landed at Casablanca on November 8th, 1942, and fought the half-hearted French resistance, quickly taking Fort Blondin.

After the brief campaign in Casablanca, Britt's regiment was assigned to serve as the personal bodyguards for Churchill and Roosevelt at the Casablanca Conference in early 1943. Later in the year, the 3rd Division began training and preparations for the invasion of Sicily.

Once he landed ashore in Sicily in July of 1943, the next 5 months would see continuous action for Britt and the men of the 3rd Division. He participated in what would be one of the longest foot marches of the war covering over 54 miles in just 33 hours to take Palermo.

During the campaign to take Sicily, Britt established himself as a capable and highly respected leader of men.

A TREK THROUGH ITALY

By September, Britt and the 3rd Division were storming the beaches of Salerno in what would be his third amphibious landing.



During action outside of Salerno, Britt led an assault on an enemy machine gun position and went on to receive the Silver Star for his leadership and gallantry in the face of the enemy and one of his four Purple Hearts.

However, it would seem that gallantry awards would come as naturally to him as a touchdown on the football field. In October of 1943, he led his men in a river crossing of the Volturno River and engaged the heavily entrenched enemy. Here, he would receive the Bronze Star Medal with a "V." Yet, it would be action in central Italy near Mignano that would earn him the nation's highest military honor.

On November 10th, a German attack threatened the battalion's position. Seizing the initiative, Britt took a company of men and led a counterattack straight into the face of 100 battle-hardened German soldiers.

The fighting was up close and very intense, involving small arms, machine guns, and as many grenades as they could get their hands on. During the intense fighting, Britt took a bullet wound to the side, and his body was littered with grenade fragmentation.



Britt refused medical evacuation and was personally credited with killing 5 German soldiers and wiping out an enemy machine gun crew. Despite his wounds, he threw over 32 fragmentation grenades at the enemy with the strength and speed of an elite NFL player.

His aggressive actions were credited with saving the battalion position and the men of his company. For his actions that day, he was awarded the Medal of Honor and recognized for inexplicable gallantry.

NOT DONE YET

After recovering from his wounds, Britt had a little more fight left in him when he took part in the invasion of Anzio in January 1944. He continued his legacy of aggressive action in the face of enemy fire and was reported to have even gotten a German gun position to reveal its location by completing calisthenics right in front of them to give them a target.



In February, his war would come to an end when an artillery shell landed nearby **leading to the partial amputation of one of his arms.** Britt returned home with any hopes of a post-war football career dashed, but as a local Arkansas legend who made the entire nation proud.

For his actions at Anzio, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for heroism. He came home from the war with the complete set of the top 4 military honors available to him.

Shown below in sequence from highest (1) to lowest (4)



1. Medal Of Honor 2. Distinguished Service Cross 3. Silver Star 4. Bronze Star

Maurice Britt became the first person in American history to earn all the army's top awards, including the Medal of Honor, while fighting in a single war, WW2



MEDAL OF HONOR (MOH)

THE NATION HIGHEST MILITARY AWARD

CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARDING OF THE CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR TO

CAPTAIN MAURICE L. BRITT

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Disdaining enemy hand grenades and close-range machine pistol, machinegun, and rifle, Lt. Britt inspired and led a handful of his men in repelling a bitter counterattack by approximately 100 Germans against his company positions north of Mignano, Italy, the morning of 10 November 1943. During the intense firefight, Lt. Britt's canteen and field glasses were shattered; a bullet pierced his side; his chest, face, and hands were covered with grenade wounds. Despite his wounds, for which he refused to accept medical attention until ordered to do so by his battalion commander following the battle, he killed 5 and wounded an unknown number of Germans, wiped out one enemy machinegun crew, fired 5 clips of carbine and an undetermined amount of M1 rifle ammunition, and threw 32 fragmentation grenades.

His bold, aggressive actions, utterly disregarding superior enemy numbers, resulted in the capture of 4 Germans, 2 of them wounded, and enabled several captured Americans to escape. Lt. Britt's undaunted courage and prowess in arms were largely responsible for repulsing a German counterattack which, if successful, would have isolated his battalion and destroyed his company.

Britt received his Medal of Honor on the UA football field during the 1944 commencement ceremony.



HIS POLITICAL CAREER



After the war, Britt would engage in a career of business and politics going on to become a two-time Lieutenant Governor of the State of Arkansas.

He served as the seventh Lieutenant Governor of Arkansas during the administration of Governor Winthrop Rockefeller from 1967 to 1971. *Rockefeller and Britt were the first Republicans to serve in the state of Arkansas's top two offices since Reconstruction.*



Victory Special" train during Winthrop Rockefeller's reelection campaign; 1968. (Left to right): Maurice "Footsie" Britt, Patricia Britt, Winthrop Rockefeller, Jeanette Rockefeller, Virginia Hammerschmidt, and John Paul Hammerschmidt.

After leaving office, Britt was appointed by the Nixon administration as district director of the Small Business Administration. He served in that capacity from 1971 to 1985.



In 1986, Britt came out of political retirement to seek the Republican gubernatorial nomination. He polled only 3,116 votes (13.9 percent) to 13,831 ballots (61.9 percent) for former Governor Frank D. White. A third candidate, Wayne Lanier, received 4,576 votes (20.5 percent) in a low-turnout primary. White was thereafter defeated in the general election for a second time by future U.S. President Bill Clinton.

PERSONAL LIFE

On September 18, 1948, Britt gave the dedication speech for War Memorial Stadium in Little Rock (Pulaski County), which was named to honor those who lost their lives in World War I and World War II.

Britt was a leader in civic affairs too. He was past state chairman of the Crippled Children's Hospital, Easter Seals, and the Federal Executive Association. He was a member of the Arkansas Sports Hall of Fame and received the National Collegiate Athletic Association Sports Achievement Award.

Britt settled in Fort Smith, where he joined a furniture manufacturing business owned by his wife's family. He and Nancy had three children: Andrea, Maurice Jr., and Nancy Lea. In 1963, he relocated to Little Rock and established his own aluminum product manufacturing business.

He eventually divorced Nancy. His second marriage was to Patricia Allbright Britt on November 12, 1966; she died on December 1, 1993, 2 years before his death.

Britt died of heart failure in 1995 at the age of 76 in the John L. McClellan Memorial Veterans Hospital in Little Rock. He was one of two lieutenant governors in state history to lie in state in the State Capitol Rotunda, the other being Winthrop Paul Rockefeller, the son of Governor Winthrop Rockefeller.

The coffin was open, and Britt's military coat hung from the back of his favorite rocking chair, which was placed next to the body. His medals and a military cap were placed on a nearby table. An Army Sergeant stood at the head of the casket throughout the six hours that Britt lay in state.



Services were held in the Calvary Baptist Church of Little Rock, where Britt was a member. Burial was in Little Rock National Cemetery.

Britt had three daughters, Andrea Schafer and Nancy McDermott, both of Lonoke, and Patricia Anne Britt of Falls Church, Virginia; two sons, Maurice Lee Britt, III (born ca. 1950), and his wife, Dee Britt, of Royal, Arkansas, and Timothy Watson Britt (born ca. 1955) of Little Rock; one brother, B. A. Britt (born ca. 1925) of Carlisle; twelve grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.

Britt was a distant cousin of the late Henry M. Britt of Hot Springs, the 1960 Republican gubernatorial nominee against Orval Eugene Faubus. He was a cousin to internationally known actress Dorothy Lamour.



Arkansas Medal of Honor Memorial
State Capitol Little Rock, Arkansas
Located on the grounds of the Arkansas State Capitol.
Honoring Arkansas' Greatest Military Heroes
Dedicated 18 November 2000



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