**Major Edward J. Murphy- Signal Paratrooper and Commander**

This article provides a comprehensive examination of Major Edward J. Murphy, an esteemed U.S. Army officer whose life was characterized by profound military dedication, a deep commitment to his family, and an intellectual passion for military history. The analysis delves into his distinguished career, the tragic circumstances of his death during Operation Enduring Freedom in 2005, and the lasting impact he left on his comrades, family, and the broader military community.

**A Distinguished Military Career**

Major Ed Murphy, a 36-year-old native of Charleston, South Carolina, embodied a lifelong commitment to military service.1, 2 His journey began early, as he completed basic training between his junior and senior years of high school.1 He was an ROTC graduate of the University of South Carolina, holding the distinct and somber recognition as the only ROTC graduate from that institution to be killed in the line of duty.1, 2 This singular sacrifice underscores the profound personal cost of military service and establishes his unique place in the university's history, serving as a powerful symbol of ultimate dedication for future generations of cadets and alumni. Before commissioning as an officer in the Signal Corps, Major Ed Murphy gained foundational experience as an enlisted infantryman and a cavalryman with 4/7 CAV in Korea, having initially graduated as a tanker from the University of South Carolina.3 This progression from combat arms to a technical support branch highlights a significant capacity for adaptation and a readiness to embrace new challenges and diverse skill sets within the military.

His career was marked by a series of significant assignments and qualifications that demonstrated his versatility and expertise. Major Ed Murphy was a highly skilled Airborne Ranger and a certified Jumpmaster, indicating his proficiency in elite infantry and airborne operations.1, 2 His notable assignments included service with the 82nd Airborne Division, the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment (specifically as S6 of 2-505 PIR), the 82nd Signal Battalion (including service in Bravo Company), the Ranger Training Brigade, and the Southern European Task Force (Airborne) (SETAF).1, 2, 3 His operational experience also included deployment in support of Operation Joint Forge.2

Beyond his operational duties, Major Ed Murphy was a dedicated scholar of military affairs. He was a 2003 graduate of the Command and General Staff College, where he earned his Master of Military Art and Science (MMAS).1 His MMAS dissertation thesis, focused on The Battle of Eylau, reflected a deep intellectual curiosity and a dedication to understanding the strategic and tactical intricacies of warfare. As an avid admirer of Napoleonic history, he meticulously created thousands of miniature soldiers to reconstruct and study significant battles, showcasing a commitment to mastering both the practical and theoretical dimensions of his profession.1 This intellectual pursuit, alongside his diverse assignments, reveals a continuously learning military professional who sought to understand the broader context and historical precedents of conflict.

Major Ed Murphy's distinguished service was recognized with numerous awards and decorations, including the Meritorious Service Medal, Joint Service Commendation Medal, the Army Commendation Medal with 3 Oak Leaf Clusters, Army Achievement Medal with 1 OLC, Humanitarian Service Medal, Overseas Service Medal, NATO Medal, Army Service Ribbon, National Defense Service Medal, Master Parachutist Badge, and the Ranger Tab. He also held Italian Jump Wings.2

Described by those who knew him, Major Ed Murphy was more than just a soldier; he was a kind man who brought humor and laughter to his surroundings, while simultaneously upholding high standards and demanding the best from those he served alongside.1 He was known as a "stocky Irishman who took the mission seriously, without ever taking himself seriously," possessing the ability to quickly navigate through chaos and ensure his paratroopers executed missions effectively.3 A poignant testament to his character and priorities is found in his last email home: "Don’t worry about me. I’m fine and safe. I just miss you and my family very much. I love you more than you could ever know. I cannot begin to tell you how I long to be in the comfort, safety, and protection of your loving arms and our wonderful home".1, 2 This message reveals the profound love and longing he held for his family, even amidst the inherent dangers of his deployment.

**From Ben Powers.** “The first thing that always comes to mind when I remember my friend Ed Murphy is laughter. The facts that Ed was a tremendous Soldier speak for themselves: son of an 11th Airborne paratrooper, former enlisted infantryman, former CAV officer, ranger qualified, jumpmaster qualified, military historian… his CV is both extensive and impressive. But none of that gets to the heart of the man. Ed was just a fun guy to be around regardless of what we were doing. He had a quick wit, a ready smile and knew how to use humor to keep a tough situation under control. I first met Ed in late 1993 when he joined B Company, 82d Signal Battalion. I had only been a member of the company for seven months and I was mightily impressed with Ed as a newly assigned officer. He was returning from overseas and his collection of ribbons from his assignment to the 2nd Infantry Division (a grand total of maybe five at a time when most LTs in Division had two), along with his silver bar and prior service made him seem greatly experienced. But what struck me most about Ed was that he just did not take himself seriously. As he was getting settled in, I asked him to join me and my fiancé, KC, for lunch at a Chinese restaurant. Nothing out of the ordinary there. When we were served, my Korean soon-to-be wife asked for chopsticks and Ed eagerly requested a pair as well. Since he was just coming back from Korea, that seemed normal. But when the meal was served, Ed immediately grabbed his chopsticks, split them apart and proceeded to tap them together over his head like Chad Smith from the Red-Hot Chili Peppers counting off a song. He then launched into a drum solo across the serving dishes while KC alternated between looking at him in astonishment and me in bewilderment that I had invited this guy to lunch. Ed merely finished his set and proceeded to start eating like nothing had happened, while I collapsed in laughter. After that introduction, we were buds, our bond cemented by shared appreciation for the absurd. Any training meeting or other event invariably would start off with a joke or some bizarre action, normally initiated by Ed. Need an ridiculous guidon for a prop blast? One set of granny undergarments emblazoned with the Battalion Commander’s official portrait coming up. Need an ice breaker at a hail and farewell? Send Ed up to the karaoke machine and watch the magic happen. Maybe not musical magic, but comedy gold. It got to the point that after I’d been in the company for about a year and a half and new platoon leader was due to report, our long-suffering commander, Tom Martin, called Ed and me into his office and stated that ‘maybe humor isn’t the right way for you two to greet our new officer.’ Unfortunately for Captain Martin, the new PL, Mark Veno, was cut from the same cloth and the shenanigans continued apace. But not taking ourselves seriously did not mean we did not take the mission seriously. Being in the 82d meant a lot to us and we strove to uphold the Division and Battalion legacies. As I stated at the beginning of this remembrance, Ed was a fine officer and soldier, but what made him Ed wasn’t the badges he earned and schools he completed, but the joy he brought to everyday life in Bravo Company. I’ll never think of Ed without a smile crossing my face at the thought of some long-gone nonsense we shared to make life in a high tempo unit a little more fun.” 17

**The Tragic Loss in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF-2005)**

Major Ed Murphy's life of dedicated service culminated in a tragic loss during Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan. The period between mid-2005 and early 2009 was a complex phase of the conflict, as the United States Army sought to balance its ongoing counterterrorism efforts with the increasing demands of the war in Iraq. During this time, the U.S. aimed to reduce its military footprint and transfer security responsibilities to an international coalition, even as a growing insurgency challenged these efforts.4 Ghazni province, the site of the helicopter crash, was a region experiencing heightened insurgent activity, with Taliban forces frequently targeting both military and civilian entities.5 U.S. forces primarily operated from key logistical hubs such as Bagram Air Base, located north of Kabul.6, 7 The 173rd Airborne Brigade, with which Major Ed Murphy was volunteering, had deployed to Afghanistan in 2005 as part of OEF VI, conducting operations along the volatile Pakistan border.3, 8

Despite his assignment as Deputy J-6 for SETAF at Caserma Ederle in Vicenza, Italy, a senior communications staff officer role 1, 2, Major Ed Murphy demonstrated exceptional dedication by volunteering to work directly with elements of the 173rd Airborne Brigade at their combat outposts in Afghanistan.3 This decision to seek out frontline engagement, beyond the requirements of his high-level staff position, underscores a profound sense of personal responsibility and a proactive leadership approach. It highlights his desire to be directly involved in supporting troops on the ground, showcasing a selfless commitment to the mission that extended beyond his official duties and placed him in harm's way.

On April 6, 2005, Major Ed Murphy was among 18 individuals killed when the CH-47 Chinook helicopter he was aboard crashed in Ghazni, Afghanistan.2, 3, 9, 10 The helicopter, identified by its call sign "Windy25," belonged to F Company, 159th Aviation Regiment, known colloquially as "Big Windy".11 The incident occurred near Ghazni city, approximately 120-125 kilometers southwest of Kabul.7, 9, 12, 13

Official U.S. military statements attributed the crash to severe weather conditions, specifically a heavy dust storm, and reported "no indication of hostile fire".7, 9, 13 However, the Taliban militia quickly claimed responsibility, asserting they had shot down the helicopter with an 82mm gun, a claim that could not be independently verified.13 This immediate contradiction in the reporting of the crash highlights a critical aspect of conflict: the information environment often becomes a battleground itself. The U.S. narrative, emphasizing an accidental cause, likely aimed to avoid boosting enemy morale or acknowledging a successful attack. Conversely, the Taliban's claim served as a propaganda tool, designed to project strength and demoralize coalition forces. This dynamic demonstrates how information control and narrative construction are integral components of modern warfare, influencing public perception and strategic outcomes, and often making definitive, immediate attribution challenging in contested operational areas.

The crash resulted in the loss of all 18 individuals on board, comprising 14 soldiers, 1 Marine, and 3 civilian contractors.14 At the time, it was the deadliest U.S. military helicopter crash in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban in 2001.11, 13, 14

**Enduring Legacy and Remembrance**

The loss of Major Ed Murphy had a profound and lasting impact on his family and community. He was a loving husband to Barclay and a devoted father to his children, Eddie, Elly, and Luke. 3 His active role in their lives, including coaching teams and playing Barbies, illustrates his deep personal connection and commitment as a father.2 The grief experienced by his family, friends, fellow service members, and the Italian community where he resided remains palpable.3 His final email home, expressing deep love and longing for his family, serves as a poignant reminder of the personal sacrifice inherent in military service and the emotional toll of deployment.1, 2

In the wake of the CH-47 Chinook crash, the Windy25 Memorial Fund was established as a 501(c)3 charity by alumni of "Big Windy" (F Company, 159th Aviation Regiment).11 The fund's primary mission is to honor the fallen service members, particularly the 18 individuals lost in the April 6, 2005, crash, and to provide support to surviving military families.9, 14 Its central activity is an annual fundraising 5K race, the Windy25 Memorial 5K, held in Las Vegas, Nevada, a location chosen for its significant military presence, accessibility, and vibrant atmosphere.9 The initial race in March 2011 successfully raised over $36,000 with 300 participants, growing to 500 runners in its second year. By December 2012, the fund had raised over $82,000, with all proceeds directly benefiting TAPS (Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors). 13

Major Craig Wilhelm, who commanded F Company, 159th Aviation Regiment at the time of the crash, was a driving force behind the fund's creation.9, His motivation stemmed from a profound sense of duty and a desire to support the families affected by the tragedy.11, 15 The establishment and sustained success of the Windy25 Memorial Fund represent a powerful act of collective resilience and community building in the face of shared loss. Wilhelm's observation that the fund has created a "family" among those affected, stating, "It may not be a family we wanted, but it's a family that we are happy to be part of because we know what they're going through" 11, 15, reveals that the fund's value extends beyond financial contributions. It serves as a continuous support network, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual understanding among the bereaved families and unit alumni. This demonstrates a powerful ripple effect of the crash, transforming individual grief into a collective, active commitment to remembrance and support, thereby creating an enduring community that transcends the initial loss.

The memory of Major Ed Murphy and the other fallen service members continues to serve as a source of inspiration for those who knew them.3 The sentiment articulated by Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., "Grief is not the end of all. Our dead brothers still live for us, and bid us think of life, not death--of life to which in their youth they lent the passion and joy of the spring," is deliberately invoked to frame their sacrifice not as a finality, but as an enduring source of motivation and vitality.3, 16 By connecting Major Ed Murphy's story to this historical reflection on military sacrifice, his individual death transcends a specific tragic event to become a universal symbol of enduring inspiration. This intellectual framing imbues his legacy with a timeless quality, positioning him not merely as a statistic of war, but as an enduring reminder of the values for which he served, encouraging the living to embrace life with passion and purpose.

**Author’s Note**

I served side by side with Ed in the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment at Bragg and later in the 141st Signal Battalion in Bad Kreuznach, Germany. I was there in the 141st Signal Battalion S-1 shop the exact moment he walked in and signed in. I asked him what the hell he was doing there and where he was going to be assigned. He said, I am going to be the Charlie Company Commander! I could not have been any happier because I was the Charlie Company First Sergeant and I knew we were going to make a great Command Team, and we did. As we progressed through our command time, in typical Ed Murphy fashion, he let me take all the credit for any success that the company had but we both shared in the accolades that came later from the Battalion Commander and his staff. Working as a fine-tuned machine we were able to produce some of the finest non-airborne signal soldiers in the European theater. It seemed like we were destined to stay in the field constantly throughout our deployment. When we had garrison time, we made the most of it by ensuring we developed a tight company that could solve military and civilian problems without much churn in the day-to-day operations. We had a mutual respect that extended into our private lives, and we became great friends. After I retired in 2000, we stayed in contact. When he took over HHC Ranger Regiment at Fort Benning, he asked my wife Bhavna and I to come down and attend his change of command ceremony. What an honor for my wife and me. This was Ed’s second company command and again he was a great commander and leader for those rangers.

Ed and I shared a passion for beer, bourbon, paratrooper gear, and of course military history. I think of him often and regret we didn't do more together. RIP my brother!

**Conclusion**

Major Ed Murphy's life was a testament to multifaceted dedication: a committed soldier, a respected leader, an insightful military historian, and a loving family man. His unique sacrifice, as the sole ROTC graduate from the University of South Carolina to die in the line of duty, underscores the profound personal cost of military service. The tragic circumstances of his death during Operation Enduring Freedom in the "Windy25" Chinook crash, along with 17 other individuals, highlight the inherent dangers and complexities of modern conflict.

Major Ed Murphy's legacy is not merely one of loss, but of enduring remembrance and inspiration. His proactive leadership, exemplified by his decision to volunteer for frontline duty, speaks to a profound commitment beyond the call of duty. The establishment and sustained efforts of the Windy25 Memorial Fund, driven by his comrades, demonstrate how shared grief can forge powerful communities of support, transforming individual sorrow into collective resilience. Ultimately, Major Ed Murphy's story continues to inspire, reminding us that the lives and sacrifices of those who serve are not an end, but an enduring source of passion and purpose for those who remain. His life serves as a powerful embodiment of duty, honor, and selfless service.

**Rest in Peace Commander! Rangers Lead the Way!**

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The following table provides a comprehensive list of those who perished in the April 6, 2005, CH-47 Chinook "Windy25" crash:

| Rank | Name | Age | Hometown | Unit/Assignment |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Major | Edward J. Murphy | 36 | Charleston, S.C. | U.S. Army Southern European Task Force, Camp Ederle, Italy (Deputy J-6 for SETAF) 3, 4, 12, 14 |
| Chief Warrant Officer 2 | David Ayala | 24 | New York, N.Y. | F Company, 159th Aviation Regiment, 12th Aviation Brigade, Giebelstadt, Germany 11, 13, 14 |
| Chief Warrant Officer 2 | Clint J. Prather | 32 | Cheney, Wash. | F Company, 159th Aviation Regiment, 12th Aviation Brigade, Giebelstadt, Germany 11, 13, 14 |
| Master Sgt. | Edwin A. Matoscolon | 42 | Juana Diaz, Puerto Rico | Division Artillery, 25th Infantry Division (Light), Schofield Barracks, Hawaii 14 |
| Sgt. Maj. | Barbaralien Banks | 41 | Harvey, La. | Division Artillery, 25th Infantry Division (Light), Schofield Barracks, Hawaii 14 |
| Staff Sgt. | Charles R. Sanders Jr. | 29 | Charleston, Mo. | F Company, 159th Aviation Regiment, 12th Aviation Brigade, Giebelstadt, Germany 11, 13, 14 |
| Staff Sgt. | Romanes L. Woodard | 30 | Hertford, N.C. | 1st Battalion, 508th Infantry Regiment, Camp Ederle, Italy 14 |
| Sgt. | Stephen C. High | 45 | Spartanburg, S.C. | Army National Guard's 228th Signal Brigade, Spartanburg, S.C. 14, 16 |
| Spc. | Daniel J. Freeman | 20 | Cincinnati, Ohio | 1st Battalion, 508th Infantry Regiment, Camp Ederle, Italy 14 |
| Spc. | Chrystal G. Stout | 23 | Travelers Rest, S.C. | Army National Guard's 228th Signal Brigade, Spartanburg, S.C. 14, 16 |
| Spc. | Michael K. Spivey | 21 | Fayetteville, N.C. | F Company, 159th Aviation Regiment, 12th Aviation Brigade, Giebelstadt, Germany 11, 13, 14 |
| Pfc. | Pendelton L. Sykes II | 25 | Chesapeake, Va. | F Company, 159th Aviation Regiment, 12th Aviation Brigade, Giebelstadt, Germany 11, 13, 14 |
| Spc. | Sascha Struble | 20 | Philadelphia, N.Y. | 1st Battalion, 508th Infantry Regiment, Camp Ederle, Italy 14 |
| Capt. | David S. Connolly | 37 | Boston, Mass. | Army Reserve's 1173rd Transportation Terminal Battalion, Brockton, Mass. 13, 14 |
| Sgt. | James S. Lee | 26 | Mount Vernon, Ind. | Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 142, Marine Aircraft Group 42, 4th Marine Aircraft Wing (attached to Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 773) 14 |
| Civilian Contractor | Ronald Wade | 46 | Emory, Texas | Halliburton (civil foreman) 14 |
| Civilian Contractor | Lance Bret | 56 | Spring Valley, Calif. | Halliburton (vector control specialist) 14 |
| Civilian Contractor | Sy Jason Lucio | 28 | Clyde, Ohio | Halliburton (electrician) 14 |

**Endnotes**

1. **Major Edward J. Murphy biography and personal life details.** <https://www.windy25.org/maj-ed-murphy.html>
2. Major Edward J. Murphy military awards and decorations. <https://patriotallamerica.com/fallen-soldier/2021-59/>
3. Major Edward Murphy 82nd Signal Battalion. <https://www.airbornesignal.com/copy-of-gwot-edgerton>
4. Operation Enduring Freedom, May 2005-January 2009.(<https://history.army.mil/Portals/143/Images/Publications/Publication%20By%20Title%20Images/O%20titles%20PDF/operation-enduring-freedom-2.pdf>)
5. Military operations Ghazni Afghanistan 2005. <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/asia/afghanistan0905/3.htm>
6. Military operations Ghazni Afghanistan 2005.(https://www.dla.mil/Portals/104/Documents/Headquarters/History/DLA%20in%20OEF.pdf?ver=a4UISWhFkY0Mo\_cZrG1gGA==)
7. Helicopter crash Ghazni Afghanistan April 6 2005. <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/world/archives/2005/04/08/2003249598>
8. 173rd Airborne Brigade OEF VI operations Ghazni Bagram 2005. <https://www.skysoldiers.army.mil/About-Us/Our-History/>
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11. Operation Enduring Freedom April 6 2005 helicopter crash victims. <https://www.stripes.com/theaters/europe/2025-07-18/windy-25-memorial-18481143.html>
12. DoD casualty release April 6 2005 Afghanistan CH-47 Chinook crash names. <https://www.stripes.com/news/2005-04-12/dod-identifies-afghan-helicopter-crash-victims-1917570.html1>
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14. DoD casualty list CH-47 Chinook crash Ghazni April 6 2005. <https://www.scguard.ng.mil/History/Fallen-Heroes/>
15. Operation Enduring Freedom April 6 2005 helicopter crash victims. <https://mob-traffic.com/2023/04/12/creating-a-5k-legacy-the-courage-of-windy25/>
16. Full context of Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. quote 'Grief is not the end of all. Our dead brothers still live for us, and bid us think of life, not death--of life to which in their youth they lent the passion and joy of the spring.' <https://speakola.com/ideas/oliver-wendell-holmes-memorial-day-speech-1884>
17. Ben Powers' recollections of Major Ed Murphy.