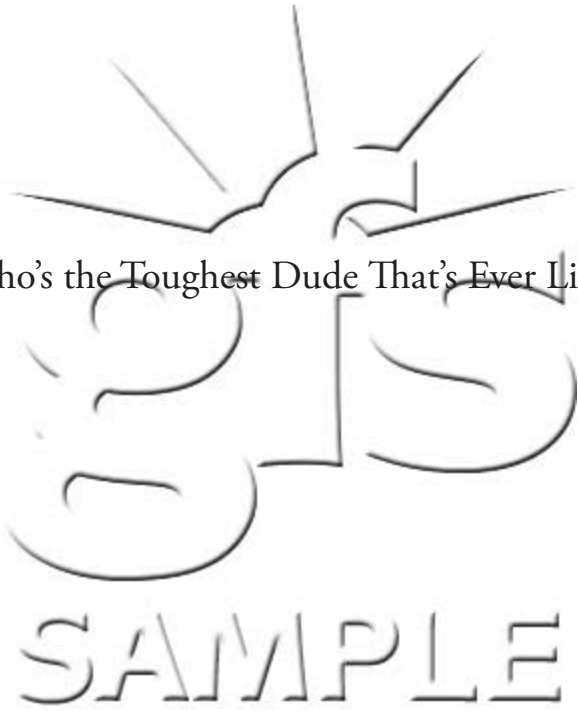
Who's the Toughest Dude That's Ever Lived?



WHO'S THE TOUGHEST DUDE THAT'S EVER LIVED?

GARY MOHLER

SAMPLE

NEW YORK
LONDON • NASHVILLE • MELBOURNE • VANCOUVER

Who's the Toughest Dude That's Ever Lived?

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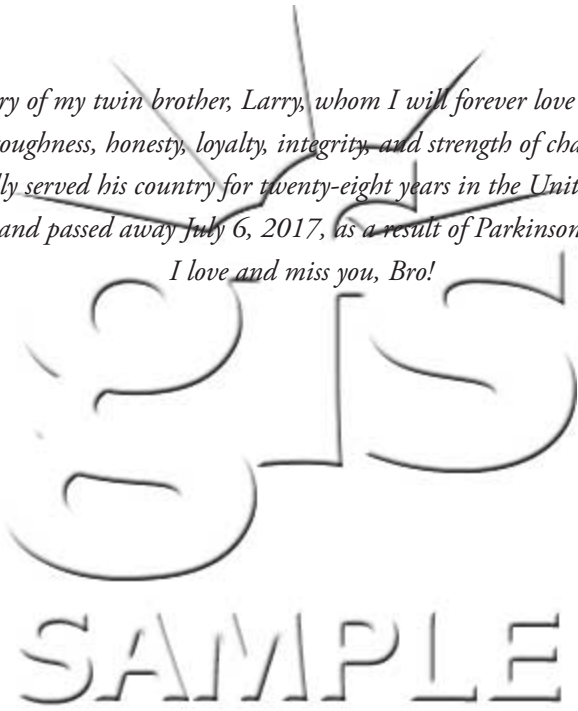
To the memory of my twin brother, Larry, whom I will forever love and admire for his toughness, honesty, loyalty, integrity, and strength of character.
Larry faithfully served his country for twenty-eight years in the United States Border Patrol and passed away July 6, 2017, as a result of Parkinson's disease.
I love and miss you, Bro!



CONTENTS

SAMPLE

SAMPLE

PREFACE

From my table I spotted the dude walk through the restaurant door. He was average height, probably 180 pounds, a full beard, and wearing a hoodie and baggy pants. He brushed past the hostess and went straight to the checkout counter, about fifteen feet from where I was sitting.

I had a bad feeling. Trouble? Robbery? My senses came to full attention. My eyes and mind were glued to the dude. Am I tough enough to take him? How would I take him down?

Just then a waitress appeared from the kitchen and addressed the dude by name. "Mr. Roberts, I have your carryout." I relaxed.

Have you ever found yourself in a similar situation? If so, did you have the same reaction?

Let me introduce myself. My name is Gary Mohler. I was born in 1942, during World War II. As of this writing, I am seventy-nine years old, so I've seen and experienced a lot of life. I taught school for forty-four years. I'm pretty much a common dude, just like most of you guys.

As far as toughness goes, I've always considered myself a reasonably tough guy. I started studying jujitsu and karate while in college and have continued studying various forms of the martial arts throughout my life.

Toughness is a subject I have contemplated from my teenage years through my adult life. I enjoy macho-man movies and physical sports. I think most guys can identify with me there.

SAMPLE

We measure ourselves against other males, if only in our minds. *Am I faster? Am I stronger? Can I endure more? I bet I could take that dude.* We are always comparing ourselves with the next guy.

Be it Rambo or John Wayne, we get a great adrenaline rush watching them dismantle one bad guy, or a whole group of bad guys. We envision ourselves in their place, a one-man wrecking crew, wreaking havoc on the adversary.

I fully believe one reason many guys play sports, especially contact sports, is to measure themselves against other guys in toughness and not get thrown in jail. In fact, we get cheered for it. Why are we like that? I don't know. Chalk it up to testosterone if you want, but it is the way we are made.

I got to thinking about what it means to be "tough," I mean really "tough," and the thought struck me, "Who is the toughest dude who's ever lived? Does such a person exist?"

I toyed with the thought of writing a book about tough dudes, but then reality set in. I had never written a book. I didn't know how to write a book. I had no idea where to start.

I kept putting the whole book thing off. I tried to clear it from my mind, but it would not go away. It had me by the nape of my neck and wouldn't let go.

Eventually, I gave in and decided to pursue the answer to the question, "Who's the Toughest Dude That's Ever Lived?" and see where it took me.

I began by posing the above question to other men, though I have been amazed by the interest from women, too.

Responses could include any man who has ever lived. I even broadened the field to include characters who live only in our imaginations, like Dirty Harry and Rambo. Though they couldn't compete for the title of Toughest Dude That's Ever Lived, it was my belief that these characters would help articulate how toughness is defined in the male psyche.

Then I designed a survey comprised of two questions:

1. Who's the Toughest Dude that's ever lived?
2. Why do you consider him to be the Toughest Dude that's ever lived? (I soon realized that the "why" is just as important as the "who.")

SAMPLE

From a combination of face-to-face and online surveys, I received over four hundred responses. I don't claim that the results are scientifically valid, but they seem to indicate that the respondents represent a quasi-accurate cross section of men.

Before the surveys, I had the preconceived belief that some dudes would receive just one or a few votes, some would receive more votes, but no one individual would stand way above all the others in numbers of votes. No one would be the undisputed winner.

However, I wanted to find out for sure. Was my belief correct or is there actually a Toughest Dude That's Ever Lived? At a minimum I would learn about a number of tough dudes who are worthy to include in my book and therefore make an interesting read.

In my mind the definition of toughness was pretty simple: a guy who could kick everyone's butt like Bruce Lee. Or someone who could endure inhuman pain and suffering like Sir William Wallace.

However, as the votes came in, I began to realize that the definition of toughness is not really simple at all. In fact, it is quite complex. From the responses, I received a revelation! I had conceived a very narrow concept of toughness. There are many ways to define toughness. There is not only physical toughness but mental toughness, leadership toughness, spiritual toughness, plus more. As a result, my book had just become more complex and way more interesting. Now I knew I had to write it.

For all the different tough dudes receiving votes, I reviewed the respondents' reasons for choosing them. I selected men who exemplified different types, or a combination of types of toughness, and I researched their lives. From those studies I chose which tough dudes to include in my book, and I wrote a short biography of each. The biographies are the "meat" of the book. They focus on the types of toughness each tough dude exhibited. Primarily, they include samples and situations from each individual's childhood and adult life that influenced his toughness development. The biographies clarify how that development played out in each of their lives, with descriptions and experiences that reveal windows into their personalities, minds, hearts, and souls. I have carefully documented the sources for the facts in each chapter in an Endnotes section at the end of the

SAMPLE

book, as well as a full bibliography, in case you'd like to check behind me or do your own research.

From the surveys and research, I drew some inferences. A couple inferences were surprising. One was shocking!

Inferences:

1. After reading about the lives of the men nominated, I realize I am not tough. In fact, compared to them, I am not tough at all. After reading this book, some of you may reevaluate where you fall on the toughness continuum as well.
2. There are many ways to define toughness.
3. If I were to do the surveys again, many of the men nominated would most likely be the same. Some would be different.
4. I will reveal my fourth inference later in the book.

I urge you to keep an open mind and read to the end of the book. Some of you will agree with my fourth inference. Some of you will find my fourth inference controversial. And a few of you may totally disagree with my fourth inference to the point that you will want to throw the book in a corner and never pick it up again.

SAMPLE

Chapter 1:

FREEDOM!

"The prisoner wishes to say a word." In the movie *Braveheart* there is one sickening, revolting scene that will forever be etched in my mind. Any man who has seen the movie remembers it well. It is the infamous torture scene. William Wallace has been accused of high treason. He is to undergo purification by pain.

At the onset of the scene, Sir William Wallace, tied on a cart, is brought to the place of purification. As he is delivered to the purification platform, the crowd jeers and pelts him with garbage. On the platform the torturer unveils an assortment of instruments for the "purification" process: knives, blades, axes, and a long wooden handle with a hooked blade on one end. When Sir William refuses to beg for mercy, he is hanged by the neck. He wretches and chokes. Then he is lowered back to the platform just short of unconsciousness. The torturer instructs Wallace to rise to his knees in submission, but he struggles to his feet and defiantly looks his torturer squarely in the eyes.

"Rack him." Ropes are attached to his wrists and his ankles, and he is hoisted up by the arms in one direction as his legs are pulled the opposite way by a horse, so that he is suspended in midair. Wallace grimaces. The terrible tension on Wallace's limbs has to cause excruciating pain and, almost surely, his arms and legs are pulled out of joint. But even in extreme agony, William Wallace refuses to recant. He refuses to say a solitary word. Finally, he is dropped back to the platform.

Next, Wallace is stretched out horizontally and tied to a cross-shaped, square log. His arms are extended and tied on each side of the cross, much like in a crucifixion. The hooked blade is used to rip his shirt from chest to crotch. I can feel many of you men already starting to squirm. What happens next, the film does not show, but Wallace's face tells the story through its contorted expressions. His body shudders and he gasps for air. In reality, William Wallace is being emasculated. That is, his penis and testicles are being cut off.

By this time the crowd has taken pity on Wallace and is crying out for the torturer to have mercy. His torturer once again encourages Sir William to beg for mercy. As Wallace struggles to speak, the torturer declares, "The prisoner wishes to say a word." In one final heroic act of defiance, William Wallace musters the strength to yell out one word, "FREEDOM!" With that, the executioner ends Wallace's life with one fatal swing of his axe.

If we have seen the movie, we all have that brutal torture scene branded forever in our memories, both mentally and emotionally. We writhed as his manhood was cut off in front of that crowd which included women and children. We couldn't see it, but we could feel every agonizing rip, slash, and cut. And all of this while he was still alive and conscious! We identified with William Wallace, questioning ourselves, measuring ourselves against his courage, each man asking, "Would I have the resolve to endure that kind of inhuman torture?"

SAMPLE

Chapter 2:

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

Survey Response

"He (William Wallace) was a Scottish knight who became one of the main leaders during the wars of Scottish independence. Convicted of treason, he was hanged, drawn, and quartered. Since his death he has obtained iconic status far beyond his homeland. He never gave up; he never cracked and went to his grave for the freedom of his country."

Let's look more deeply at the evidence. Most of us are familiar with the movie, but who was William Wallace, really?

In 1286, King Alexander III of Scotland died one stormy night when his horse fell off a cliff. His three-year-old granddaughter, Margaret, assumed the throne, but she died in 1290, leaving Scotland without a monarch.

Scotland was in political disarray, so King Edward I of England was asked to step in and help choose the next monarch. He agreed, with the stipulation that he be recognized as the lord paramount of Scotland. It was agreed to, and in 1292, John Balliol was enthroned as Scotland's new King.

SAMPLE

But King Edward had ulterior motives and demanded the Scots pay taxes to England and give military service to England. The Scots renounced their obligations to Edward and responded by trying to secure an alliance with France. When the Scots resisted, King Edward moved his army into Scotland and attacked the city of Berwick. The Scots fought back at the Battle of Dunbar, but Edward crushed them. He imprisoned Balliol in 1296 and set himself up as King of Scotland.

In 1297, a year after the English invaded Scotland, William Wallace (c. 1270–1305) enters history as a man who had his freedom wrested from him and would go to his grave to get it back. His unrelenting pursuit of freedom and independence in the face of overwhelming opposition turned William Wallace into one of the most famous historical figures of all time.

Much of William Wallace's life is veiled in mystery and legend. But we do know that he was born around 1270, the son of Sir Malcom Wallace, who was a small landowner in Renfrew, Scotland. William Wallace, like many heroes, has grown bigger than life. But certain of his exploits have been established in history.

Lanark, Scotland, was the headquarters of English High Sheriff William Heselrig. Heselrig was charged with dispensing justice in his realm. In May 1297, during one of Heselrig's courts, Wallace, along with some soldiers, killed the high sheriff and all of his men.

After Lanark, William Wallace became synonymous with Scottish rebellion. With his leadership ability, Wallace was able to build a large enough force to start retaking Scottish lands.

The English grew concerned about hanging on to their last remaining territory in Northern Scotland, the city of Dundee. The English's major problem in getting to Dundee and securing the city was that they had to cross Stirling Bridge. Wallace was keenly aware of this and that's where his forces were waiting. The bridge was so narrow that only two horsemen could cross the bridge side-by-side. Aware of their precarious situation, the commander of the English forces, the Earl of Surrey, decided to cross the river in spite of the exposure.

That is just what Wallace and his men were counting on. Despite their numerically superior numbers, three thousand cavalry and up to ten thousand infantry, Surrey's forces were annihilated. William was smart. He allowed half of the English to cross and then killed the English as fast as they could cross the

SAMPLE

bridge. A charge by one of Wallace's captains caused the English infantry, which had been sent across the bridge first, to retreat into the advancing cavalry. The sheer weight caused the bridge to collapse and many English drowned.

Another version states that when Surrey's forces were being slaughtered, he lost his nerve, ordered the bridge to be destroyed, and retreated. Soon thereafter, William Crawford, with four hundred Scottish heavy cavalry, finished running the English completely out of Scotland.

King Edward's treasurer in Scotland, Hugh de Cressingham, was killed in the battle. It was rumored that his body was flayed, and his skin sliced into small pieces as souvenirs of the Scottish victory, to show disdain for the English.

William Wallace was not only a tough dude, but he was also a smart dude, and he was crafty. He adopted battle strategies that were radically incompatible with the conventional methods of warfare. He utilized the terrain and used guerrilla tactics. His army ambushed its enemies instead of squaring off against them. Using these techniques Wallace was able to defeat forces with superior numbers.

After his victory at Stirling Bridge, William Wallace was knighted, possibly by Robert the Bruce, the future king of Scotland. He was also proclaimed guardian of Scotland and leader of its armies.

Sir William led a raid into Northern England. His goal was to demonstrate to Edward that Scotland could do to England what England had done to Scotland.

In the summer of 1298, England invaded Scotland at Roxburgh. Again, Wallace was clever. He continued his guerrilla warfare and wouldn't let the English draw him into an open fight.

Wallace was patient, waiting for the enemy to exhaust its supplies. Unfortunately, Edward discovered where Wallace's forces were hiding, which resulted in the Battle of Falkirk. Edward forced Wallace into an open battle. Wallace's battle plan, while sound, was no match against superior numbers of experienced soldiers, along with superior Welsh and English long bowmen.

Sir William barely escaped with his life. His military reputation was ruined, and by September 1298, Wallace had decided to resign as guardian of Scotland. He was succeeded by Robert the Bruce. But that defeat did not dissuade Tough Dude Sir William Wallace. He was relentless in his courageous pursuit for Scottish independence.

SAMPLE

There is evidence that Sir William went to France to plead Scotland's case before King Philip IV and to ask for assistance in the Scottish fight for independence.

In 1303, Wallace returned to Scotland. Under the cover of darkness, William arrived on the farm of William Crawford. The English, still seething to capture Sir William, heard rumors of William's arrival in the area and closed in on the farm. A chase was engaged, but Wallace was able to escape.

Wallace continued to evade capture until August 5, 1305, when he was betrayed by John de Menteith, a Scottish noble loyal to Edward.

Wallace was taken to Westminster Hall in London and tried for treason. His response to the treason charge was, "I could not be a traitor to Edward, for I was never his subject."

Following his "trial" on August 23, 1305, Sir William Wallace faced purification by pain.

Let's revisit that horrendous experience. Wallace was probably not racked as shown in the movie. However, he was hanged until almost dead, and he was emasculated. But the film makers did not show the depths of depravity of Wallace's ordeal. His torture in actual life was much worse than portrayed. Sir William was not only pelted with garbage, but excrement as well. He was completely naked throughout the ordeal. Wallace was jeered and ridiculed by the spectators. What embarrassment and shame he had to feel. It was like a theatrical performance, with women and children in the audience.

Sir William had already been "drawn" before he got to the execution venue. That is, he had been tied to a wooden panel or piece of fence and dragged behind a horse for three-and-a-half miles.

We didn't see the part where his abdomen was ripped open, and his intestines pulled out and burned in front of his eyes. It is likely that his intestines were cut from his body by inserting the curved blade into his anus, achieving a bloodless severance.

We didn't see his chest being split open and spread and his heart pulled from his chest. It is said that a torturer proficient in his craft could extricate the heart while it was still beating.

Finally, he was beheaded. Wallace's head was dipped in tar and embedded on a pike atop London Bridge. His body was chopped into four parts and each part was separately displayed in Newcastle, Berwick, Perth, and Stirling.

SAMPLE

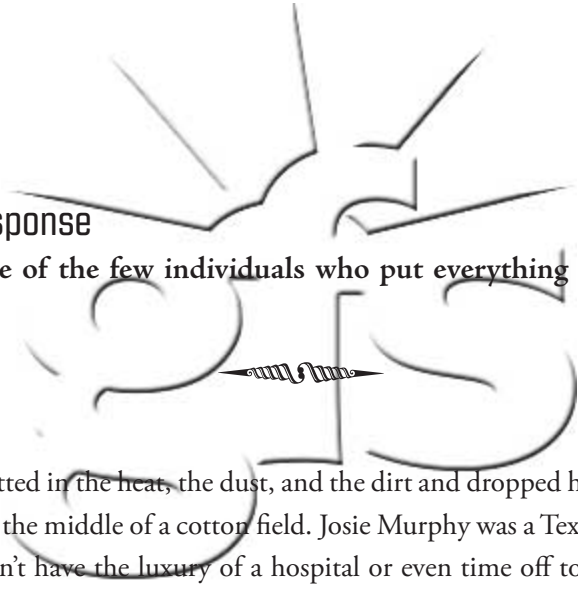
Why would a person be willing to suffer such an agonizing death? William Wallace believed in an ideal, a cause, so much so that he was willing to suffer and die for that cause. That sacred cause was FREEDOM! He was totally committed. Nothing could dissuade him, not riches, not titles, not lands, nothing. In the movie, Sir William declared, "Every man dies, but not every man really lives." That was his belief, his truth. He would just as soon die if he couldn't live as a free man. The fact that Sir William Wallace was willing to sacrifice his life to win his country's independence has elevated him to hero status in the eyes of the Scottish people and to a host of other people around the world. Sir William Wallace has become the "face of freedom." His memory lives on as the ultimate example of one of the greatest freedom fighters of all time!

So, could I have endured what Sir William Wallace endured? In all honesty, I don't know. I think every man reading this book is faced with that same most difficult and probing question. I do know this: Sir William Wallace was one incredibly tough dude!

SAMPLE

Chapter 3:

HELL ON EARTH



Survey Response

"He was one of the few individuals who put everything else above his own life."

She squatted in the heat, the dust, and the dirt and dropped her seventh child right in the middle of a cotton field. Josie Murphy was a Texas sharecropper. She didn't have the luxury of a hospital or even time off to birth her child in the shack she called a house. It demonstrates just how cruelly difficult life was if mothers had to work literally right up to the time of delivery. And as for Josie Murphy, she couldn't have dreamed that she had just given birth to one of the bravest and the most decorated soldier in American history.

Audie Leon Murphy (1925–1971) was born June 20, 1925, the son of Emmett and Josie Murphy. Leon, the name young Audie went by, had to be tough even in his childhood. By the time Leon was five he was hoeing and picking cotton alongside the rest of the family. There wasn't time to play and only limited time for school. Audie discovered just existing was a full-time job. He left school in the fifth grade and went to work full time in the cotton fields to help his family.

Emmett drifted in and out of his family's lives. He must have drifted back in a number of times, because he fathered twelve children with Josie. In 1940, he deserted them altogether, leaving his family without its main source of income and leaving Leon an angry young man, a loner with a very short fuse.

Leon became quite skilled with a rifle and helped feed the family by killing small game. His rifle skill would prove critical in combat, not just for himself but for his comrades.

Sixteen-year-old Leon suffered a life-altering blow in 1941 when his mother passed away from endocarditis and pneumonia. This tragedy stayed with Audie his whole life. Audie revealed, "She had the most beautiful hair I've ever seen. It reached almost to the floor. She rarely talked, and always seemed to be searching for something. What it was I don't know. We didn't discuss our feelings. But when she passed away, she took something of me with her. I've been searching for it ever since."

From early childhood Audie dreamed of being a soldier and tried to enlist after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Unfortunately, because he was only seventeen, he wasn't old enough. Counting that to be a minor detail, he convinced his sister to provide an affidavit with a falsified birth date.

During basic training Audie earned his Marksman Badge and Expert Badge. In 1943, he was shipped overseas to Casablanca, French Morocco. The Army was beginning to recognize his leadership ability. While there, Audie Murphy was promoted to private first class and then to corporal.

Toughness shows in action. On July 10, the Third Infantry landed at Licata, Sicily, where Murphy was assigned as a division runner. He got his first combat experience while on scouting patrol when he killed two escaping Italian officers.

In September 1943, Audie participated in the mainland Salerno landing at Battipaglia in southwestern Italy. Murphy and two other soldiers were ambushed while scouting along the Volturno River. The enemy killed one American, but Audie and the other soldier answered the attack by killing five Germans with machine gun fire and hand grenades.

The Army again recognized Audie Murphy's leadership qualities. In December 1943, Audie was promoted to sergeant. Then in January 1944, he was promoted to staff sergeant. Following the Battle of Cisterna, he was promoted to platoon sergeant of Company B.

SAMPLE

Murphy moved with the Third Division to Anzio, Italy, located south of Rome. While securing shelter in an abandoned farmhouse, Sergeant Murphy and his men wiped out the crew of a German tank. Audie then crawled toward the target until he was within rifle grenade range and destroyed the tank. For his heroic action, Audie received the Bronze Star. Audie Murphy was demonstrating that he was one ultra-brave, tough dude.

Murphy took part in the first wave of the Allied invasion of Southern France. Audie's platoon landed on Yellow Beach near Ramatuelle and was making its way through a grape vineyard when it was surprised by Germans. Murphy grabbed a machine gun and returned fire, killing two enemy and wounding another. Two Germans came out of a house waving a white flag. When Audie's best friend, Lattie Tipton, moved toward them, he was cut down by machine gun bullets from the house. Audie, thinking only of his men, moved toward the house under intense fire, killing six Germans, wounding two, and taking eleven prisoners. Audie exclaimed, "I remember the experience as I do a nightmare. A demon seems to have entered my body. My brain is coldly alert and logical. I do not think of the danger to myself. My whole being is concentrated on killing." Audie won the Distinguished Service Cross for his bravery.

Audie Murphy continued earning decorations and promotions. He was awarded his first Purple Heart when he took a hit in his heel from a mortar shell blast. He got his first Silver Star for killing four Germans and wounding three at a machine gun nest at L'Omet Quarry in the Cleurie river valley, France. Three days later Sergeant Murphy courageously crawled forward carrying a radio toward a German position and directed fire toward the enemy for an hour while the enemy aimed fire directly at him. After the Allies took the objective, they counted fifteen Germans killed and thirty-five wounded. For his heroic actions Murphy received a Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster for his Silver Star. He was awarded a battlefield commission to second lieutenant. This resulted in his promotion to platoon leader.

Audie Murphy put his earlier hunting experiences to good use. He became especially adept at stalking and killing snipers. While en route to Brouvelieures in northeastern France, Lieutenant Murphy's platoon came under fire from a German sniper group. Murphy captured two snipers but was then wounded when

SAMPLE

a sniper's bullet glanced off a tree and struck him in the hip. Audie turned the tables on the sniper by shooting the sniper between the eyes. For this injury Audie Murphy received another Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster for his Purple Heart. Unfortunately, it took three days before he could be evacuated because of rain and mud. Audie ended up in a hospital where gangrene was removed from his injured hip. This resulted in loss of part of his hip muscle. But Tough Dude Audie Murphy didn't let that stop him, and in three months he was back with his platoon.

Although Audie Murphy displayed numerous acts of heroism during the war, two incidents stand out in establishing Audie as a heroic and selfless leader. The first incident I previously recounted, when Audie's best friend, Lattie Tipton, was killed and Audie single-handedly took out the German stronghold.

The second incident occurred in January 1945, in the Colmar Pocket in France, at the town of Holtzwihr. Germans had held the area for several months. As the Allies moved against the Germans, they came under a strong counterattack by six German tanks and two hundred German infantrymen. By this time Company B, which at one time contained 235 men, was down to just eighteen men and two tank destroyers. Lieutenant Murphy was the only officer, so he was made company commander.

Though massively outnumbered, Murphy and his men were ordered to maintain their positions. One tank destroyer slid into a ditch and was disabled. The Germans hit the other M10 tank destroyer, setting it on fire. As the commander of Company B, Murphy ordered his men to take cover in some trees while he remained exposed at his position covering their withdrawal. He directed artillery fire using his field radio while the Germans were zeroing in on his position. At one point, the Fire Direction Center asked Murphy how close the Germans were to him. Audie responded, "Hold the phone and I'll let you talk to them."

Though taking enemy fire from three sides, Lieutenant Murphy leaped onto the burning tank destroyer, which was in danger of exploding, manned the .50 caliber machine gun, and spewed hell at the advancing enemy, killing a squad of Germans coming toward him in a ditch. Some of the enemy got within ten yards before Audie mowed them down. Murphy held off German foot soldiers and advancing tanks for an hour, mortally wounding or injuring fifty of the enemy. He was wounded in the leg but kept firing until he ran out of ammunition.

Rejoining his men and ignoring his leg wound, Murphy led his men in a counterattack that killed or wounded fifty more Germans. After the battle, Audie insisted on staying with his men while medics tended to his wound.

When Audie Murphy was later asked why he had grabbed a machine gun at Holtzwihr and single-handedly held off an entire company of Germans, he responded, "They were killing my friends." For his heroic action that day, Audie Murphy received the Congressional Medal of Honor.

On February 16, 1945, Audie Murphy was promoted to first lieutenant and was awarded the Legion of Merit for his service from January 1944 through February 1945.

After the battle at Holtzwihr, Lieutenant Murphy was removed from front-line duty, moved to regimental headquarters, and was assigned as a liaison officer. Audie Murphy had given far beyond his share for his country. He had served three years of active duty, fought in nine major campaigns across Europe, and killed 241 Germans.

But Lieutenant Audie Murphy wasn't finished yet. When a message arrived at headquarters that Company B's senior officers had been killed and the unit was now under the command of an inexperienced officer, Murphy, without authorization, commandeered a jeep and went to the company's rescue.

Audie Murphy was the poster child of tough dudes for World War II. The US Army awarded Audie Murphy every available military combat award for valor. When he received the Medal of Honor, he had already received the Distinguished Service Cross, two Silver Stars, and two Bronze Stars. "Murphy was ultimately awarded a total of thirty-seven medals, eleven of which were for valor."[1] The countries of Belgium and France also decorated Audie for valor. Audie Murphy was widely recognized as the most decorated American soldier in World War II. The young, tough dude accomplished all of this by the time he was twenty years old.

During his Army enlistment physical, his height was listed at 6'3" and his weight was 265 pounds. He could bench press 300 pounds. What an awesome physical specimen for such amazing heroics! Wrong—Audie Murphy was a mere 5'5" inches tall and weighed 112 pounds. His commander thought he was too small for the infantry, but Audie was determined to become a combat soldier. And what a combat soldier he was! Contemplate that reality.

Audie Murphy returned to the States as a war hero. In 1949, he published his national best-selling autobiography *To Hell and Back*. Audie's national celebrity status gained Hollywood's attention, and he was awarded a movie contract with Universal Pictures. Though Audie starred in twenty-seven films, his most famous role was when he played himself in the outrageously successful World War II film *To Hell and Back*. David Morrell, author of the action novel *First Blood*, used Audie Murphy as partial inspiration for John Rambo.

To Hell and Back was undoubtedly Audie Murphy's most difficult movie to do. Some scenes were too personal, causing actual combat experiences to come flooding back into his mind. Audie stated, "Your mind plays back something that you don't want to hear or see or feel again." Director Jesse Hibbs observed that in the combat scenes, Audie wasn't just acting, he was there. He reacted instinctively to every sound, every explosion. *To Hell and Back* became the biggest Universal Studios hit for twenty years until Steven Spielberg's *Jaws*.

Along with his acting success, Audie went on to have a successful songwriting career. Well-known artists like Dean Martin, Harry Nilsson, and Jerry Wallace recorded Audie Murphy songs. Two of his most popular songs were "Shutters and Boards" and "When the Wind Blows in Chicago." More privately, Audie found a creative stress outlet by writing poetry. One of his poems, "The Crosses Grow on Anzio," was included in his autobiography, though it was credited to a fictitious character named Kerrigan.

In all the whirlwind of Audie Murphy's success, he met and married twenty-one-year-old actress Wanda Hendrix in 1949. Unfortunately, their marriage lasted only a year. He married Pamela Archer in 1951, with whom he had two children.

But there was underlying darkness in Audie Murphy's life. Audie was haunted by insomnia, nightmares, and depression. He slept with a loaded M1911 .45 semi-automatic pistol under his pillow. Today, he would be diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In the horrors of war, Audie had witnessed the gruesome deaths of hundreds of comrades-in-arms and German soldiers. Along with insomnia Audie developed an acute addiction to sleeping pills. During the mid-1960s, Audie once locked himself in a hotel room for a week and successfully broke his addiction to Placidyl.

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His problems with PTSD exacerbated his lifelong moodiness. Friends and colleagues were disturbed by his episodes. His first wife, Wanda Hendrix, reported that one time, he held her at gunpoint. Audie also suffered from guilt. Wanda reported Audie breaking into tears when viewing newsreel footage of German war orphans.

To Audie Murphy's credit, he courageously went public with his struggles. In an effort to bring attention to the problems confronting returning Korean and Vietnam War veterans, Audie Murphy spoke openly regarding his own personal struggles with PTSD.

Even when dealing with his own problems, Audie was constantly thinking of others. To his credit, although he was in deep financial trouble because of gambling losses and bad investments, he refused to appear in alcohol or cigarette commercials because of the negative influence he knew it would have on the youth of America. "'War Hero Drinks Booze'? I couldn't do that to kids," he said.

Tragically, Audie Murphy's life was cut short in a plane crash near Roanoke, Virginia, in 1971 while on a business trip. Audie Murphy, military hero, was forty-six years old. Audie Murphy was buried with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery. He is one of 175 notable people buried in Arlington. His grave is the second-most-visited grave at Arlington, second only to President John F. Kennedy's.

Audie Murphy had been thrust into the limelight through his heroic actions in World War II, but he never liked being the center of attention. Audie simply saw what needed to be done to help others and he did it. I believe the following quote perfectly explains this unselfish mighty tough dude's motivation: "They were killing my friends."

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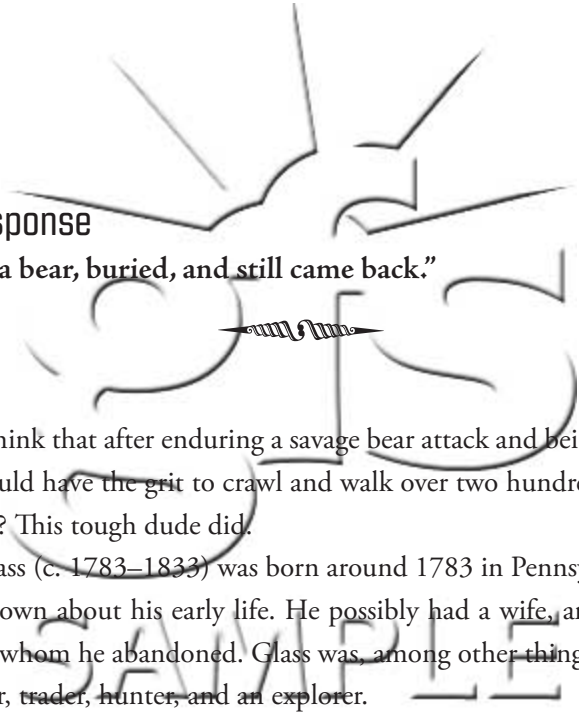
Chapter 4:

THE GUY WHO WOULDN'T DIE



Survey Response

"Mauled by a bear, buried, and still came back."

Do you think that after enduring a savage bear attack and being left for dead, you would have the grit to crawl and walk over two hundred miles to civilization? This tough dude did.

Hugh Glass (c. 1783–1833) was born around 1783 in Pennsylvania. Next to nothing is known about his early life. He possibly had a wife, and he may have had two sons whom he abandoned. Glass was, among other things, a sea captain, pirate, trapper, trader, hunter, and an explorer.

His biggest claim to notoriety was his deadly encounter with a she-bear with cubs, and his struggle for survival that followed.

Numerous accounts of Glass's saga have been put forth but no two are the same, and none of them are an accurate firsthand account.

Rather, Glass's tale of terror was based, in part, on a few written accounts, of which only one of the authors, a mountain man named George C. Yount, had actually spoken with Glass. Yount had also talked with two men who knew Glass:

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trapper Hiram Allen and a comrade of Glass's named Dutton. Some letters also contributed to the story, as well as trappers' memoirs and testimonies repeated from person-to-person, fueling the ferocity of his spellbinding scenario.

The most recent account of Glass's experiences was recounted in the movie *The Revenant*. Numerous parts of the movie are certainly inaccurate or untrue. Hugh Glass was not chased off a cliff on his horse. He did not seek warmth by cutting a dead horse open and crawling inside, and he didn't have a half-Pawnee son who was murdered by one of his own party.

The general story is reasonably accurate and most certainly spellbinding and bloody. And I believe no one would dispute that Hugh Glass, in reality, was one tough dude. He just wouldn't die!

In 1819, thirty-plus-year-old Hugh Glass was a sea captain. Pirates reportedly attacked his ship and captured it off the coast of Texas. He was given a choice: join the pirate crew, or die. Glass figured living was better than being dead, so he turned pirate.

After a year of pirating, when they were close enough to land, Glass and another escapee allegedly jumped overboard and swam for Campeche (the current city of Galveston).

They made their way toward St. Louis, being careful to avoid cannibalistic Indians who roamed the surrounding area. To the east lived the settler-eating Karankawa. To the west dwelled the Tonkawa who specialized in eating hands and feet, which they believed would give them extra strength and speed.

Unfortunately, Glass and his traveling companion were captured by Pawnee Indians about a thousand miles from where they'd started their journey. The Pawnee stripped Glass's sidekick, tied him to a post, and stuck resinous pine slivers into his body. They then set the slivers ablaze.

Next, it was Glass's turn to become a human torch. It is reported that Glass, through quick thinking and luck, pulled a container of cinnabar from his pocket, bowed to the chief, and offered it to his captor. Cinnabar was a flaky red mineral used for makeup, pottery, and war paint. The offering struck a positive note with the chief, and Glass quickly was promoted from a potential torchlight to an honorary Pawnee.

While living with the Pawnee, Glass learned numerous skills, such as how to use a tomahawk and lance. He learned how to break buffalo bones and suck

out the marrow, which later would prove to be a lifesaving skill. It was probably during this period that Glass acquired his beloved .54 caliber Hawken muzzle-loader rifle.

After two years of living with the Pawnee, Glass accompanied the chief to St. Louis for a meeting with the U.S. Superintendent of Indian Affairs.

From there Glass eventually linked up with General William Ashley on a beaver trapping expedition. Ashley and his men headed down the Missouri River.

At one point they stopped to negotiate with the Arikara (Ree) Indians for some horses. The two groups struck a deal and the crew set up camp, intending to continue downriver the next morning.

But the Ree attacked in the morning, wounding Glass in the leg and killing fifteen others. The surviving men beat feet to the boat and headed downriver to safety.

Later, Glass was in a group led by Andrew Henry that set out overland to the Yellowstone River. It was on this trip that Glass had his death-defying encounter with the mother grizzly.

One day, Glass was some distance in front of the rest of the party hunting for game when he surprised a she-bear, and she had cubs. Anyone who knows anything about bears knows that is a very bad situation. The bear charged and Glass got off a kill shot, but she kept coming. Glass tried to climb a tree, but the bear got to him. She tore a chunk out of his rump and flung it to her cubs. The enraged animal tore his back with her long claws, bit his head, and lacerated his throat.

Glass repeatedly stabbed and slashed the infuriated beast with his knife, but she continued her attack, shaking him about like a bundle of straw. Glass's companions heard the shot and commotion and came running. They pumped lead into the bear as well. Finally, the grizzly fell dead.

Tough dudes can endure incalculable pain and suffering. His fellow trappers bandaged and sewed up Glass the best they could, but it was easily evident that Glass's wounds were mortal. However, in spite of his grievous injuries, they made a litter and carried Glass for several days.

The situation presented two major problems: it greatly slowed the group's rate of travel, and there were hostile Indians in the area.

Eventually they reached the forks of the Grand River, located in present-day South Dakota. There, they found a grove of trees with a spring-fed stream.

Henry made a difficult decision. He asked for a couple of volunteers to stay back with Glass until he died, while the rest of the group continued on. Henry offered the volunteers somewhere between $80 and $400 to stay with Glass. Upon his death, they were to bury him and then meet back up with the others at Fort Henry.

Two men stepped forward, John Fitzgerald and a teenager named Bridger (possibly a young Jim Bridger). The two men set about digging a grave, making Glass as comfortable as possible, and waited for him to die. But Glass was one extraordinarily tough, tough dude. He kept clinging to life. He just wouldn't die!

His caretakers were becoming more fearful each day that they would be discovered by unfriendly Indians. They concluded that Glass was going to die anytime, and they had risked their hides long enough.

The pair lay Glass near a shallow grave, grabbed up Glass's equipment, including his beloved rifle, knife, tomahawk, and flint, and took off.

When they eventually caught up with the rest of their party, they claimed they'd been interrupted by attacking Arikara and that Glass had expired.

Meanwhile, back at the unused grave site, a conscious Glass found himself alone and in hopelessly dire straits. He had no weapons or equipment. What he did have were ghastly festering wounds, a ripped scalp, a lacerated throat, and a broken leg. There were deep tears in his back that exposed his ribs. He was over two hundred miles from Fort Kiowa, on the Missouri River.

One reference said he set his own broken leg, wrapped himself in a bear hide, and using Thunder Butte as a navigational marker, he started crawling toward Fort Kiowa.

Those treacherous, lying, cowards had taken all his physical possessions, but they couldn't take away the two most important things from this ultra-tough dude—his will to survive and a burning determination to exact revenge.

Glass knew that at Fort Kiowa he could get the supplies needed to recover from his wounds, as well as the necessary arms and equipment needed to dole out retribution on those deceitful devils.

He started the long, painful, death-defying journey toward Fort Kiowa. Of course, the tale of his torturous journey has taken on legendary proportions,

making it difficult to sort out what was fact, what was embellished, and what was outright fabrication. You, the reader, will have to use your best judgment.

The story goes that to ward off gangrene, he allowed maggots to eat the dead, rotting flesh in his wounds.

He gained strength from anything he could find to eat: insects, berries, birds' eggs, and roots. When he discovered a buffalo carcass, he was able to crack some of the bones open and suck out the marrow as he had learned from the Pawnee. One account noted that he killed a large rattlesnake with a sharp rock and ate it.

At one point he came across a dead buffalo calf killed by a wolf pack. He waited until the wolves had eaten their fill and then moved in and started feasting on what was left. Glass remained encamped there until the buffalo carcass had been pretty much consumed.

With time, his wounds scabbed over and began to heal. From the meat he ate came strength, and with strength came the ability to walk. Each step he took brought him closer to Fort Kiowa.

Stories vary as to how Glass finally arrived at the fort. One account stated that when Glass reached the Missouri River, he met some friendly Indians who provided him with a hide boat and Glass floated downriver to the fort.

Another variation suggests that Glass met up with a party of Sioux who had compassion on him, cleaned his wounds, and helped him downriver to Fort Kiowa.

A third version stated that Glass crawled and walked south to the Cheyenne River, where he built a crudely constructed raft and floated it downstream to Fort Kiowa. In any case, the exhausting and perilous journey took Glass over six weeks. He finally arrived at Fort Kiowa looking like a dead man with a heartbeat.

After regaining his strength, Glass joined six French trappers who were heading up the Missouri toward Fort Tilton. During their journey, Glass once again cheated death when the party was attacked by Ree Indians. The Rees were chasing a crippled Glass down, when a Mandan warrior on horseback swept in, pulled Glass onto his horse, and deposited him at Fort Tilton.

When Glass had healed sufficiently, he pushed on toward Fort Henry at the mouth of the Yellowstone River, a distance of 250 miles. At the fort he anticipated a confrontation with his two enemies.

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It was now the latter part of November 1823, and he faced devastatingly cold weather conditions and brutally freezing winds. Glass was forced to use all of his survival skills to find enough food to keep from succumbing to the elements.

After nearly a month of travel, he located Fort Henry on the opposite side of the river. He crafted a crude raft from two logs tied together with bark and ferried across to the fort. I have no idea how he kept from freezing to death. But after all the perils of travel, natural and human, Glass found the fort deserted. A note indicated that Henry and his men were setting up a new camp at the mouth of the Bighorn River. For Glass, there was only one thing to do: travel to the new Fort Henry, which was probably another two hundred miles away. One would have to have a burning passion for revenge and an unlimited capacity for suffering to persist in such a brutal journey.

Glass eventually did find Bridger at the new Fort Henry. This is where one would expect Glass, after his one-thousand-mile ordeal, to exact revenge with a brutal unleashing of pent-up rage. But not so.

Again, different accounts tell varying stories. But any way you tell it, Bridger had to be rocked with shock and terror when this ghost appeared before him. Whether because of Bridger's youth or his look of shame, or a combination, Glass did not wreak vengeance upon the lad. Rather, after a lecture, Glass forgave him and told him to make better choices in the future.

John Fitzgerald was another story. Being older and more treacherous, he was vastly more culpable. He had convinced Bridger to abandon Glass. Plus, he had Glass's treasured Hawken!

Fitzgerald had been at the fort, but he was gone. By accounts, Fitzgerald was probably at Fort Atkinson.

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At the end of February 1824, Glass set off for Fort Atkinson. He and four other men, Dutton, More, Marsh, and Chapman, traveled south toward the Platte River. At the mouth of the Laramie River, they came across a Pawnee encampment and stopped to barter for food. While talking with the Indians, Glass soon realized, by listening to words spoken with a strange inflection, that these were not Pawnees but, rather, unfriendly Rees. Glass sounded the alarm and the White men scattered, running and swimming for their lives.

Once again Glass's luck was golden. Glass hunkered down behind some rocks. He watched Chapman and Moore get sent to the happy hunting ground,

but he didn't know what happened to the others. Then he slipped away under the cover of darkness.

Now he was alone—again. But Glass was like a bloodhound on a scent. He wouldn't give up. After all, Fitzgerald had left him for dead, and worse, he had taken his beloved Hawken. So he headed east overland toward the Missouri River, and eventually to Fort Atkinson, four hundred miles away.

In *The Revenant* version, Fitzgerald is at Fort Atkinson. He runs away. Glass finally catches up to Fitzgerald in the wilderness and wounds him with a pistol. They go at each other in a bloody fight which Glass wins. Then he floats Fitzgerald downriver to the Pawnee, who dispatch the traitor. While that story may satisfy those who sympathize with Glass's lust for vengeance, that is not what really happened.

In May, Dutton and Marsh, who had survived the deadly Indian encounter, had arrived at Fort Atkinson and mistakenly announced that Rees had killed Chapman, Moore, and Glass. Imagine everyone's surprise and amazement when Glass showed up at the fort in early June.

Glass angrily recited his story, demanding Fitzgerald's head on a stick for his treachery and for stealing his rifle.

Fitzgerald was, in fact, at the fort, but Glass was totally frustrated when he learned that Fitzgerald had enlisted in the Army. Captain Riley informed Glass that if he killed Fitzgerald, the Army would be obligated to execute him for killing a soldier of the US Army. Captain Riley did convince Fitzgerald to return Glass's beloved rifle.

It is said that Glass warned Fitzgerald that if he ever left the Army, he would finish the job. So Glass had to be satisfied knowing that he had shamed his betrayer.

Another version has Glass forgiving Fitzgerald as he did Bridger. You can choose the version you like. In either case, Glass did not kill his enemy.

I, personally, find it mind-boggling to trace Glass's journey. In his pursuit of Bridger and Fitzgerald, Glass crawled, walked, and traveled by water between 1,600 and 2,000 miles, a good portion on foot. Talk about a tough dude with a laser-focused objective!

After confronting Fitzgerald and leaving Fort Atkinson, Glass eventually joined a trading party on its way to Santa Fe. For nine years he continued to trap.

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In 1833, Glass wintered at Fort Cass, which had been constructed at the junction of the Yellowstone and Bighorn rivers. Glass was employed by the American Fur Company, working as a hunter, supplying meat for the trappers.

One morning while he and two other hunters were making their way down the frozen Yellowstone River hunting bear, they were surrounded by thirty Rees.

So, here is this tough dude who had lived an action-charged, dangerous life and had cheated the Grim Reaper multiple times. Glass had been "fatally" mauled by a grizzly yet lived. He had escaped from at least three Indian attacks during which twenty-one men were killed and sixteen wounded. He had lived with a rabbit's foot in each pocket. Yet Glass's death was quite mundane.

The Rees took Glass's clothes and equipment, including his valuable Hawken rifle. Then they scalped and killed him.

Maybe it was fate. Maybe Glass's luck had finally run out and he had used the last of his nine lives. Maybe he had grown careless. Or maybe, just maybe, with age catching up to him and the fur trade dying, they had done this ultra-tough dude a favor.

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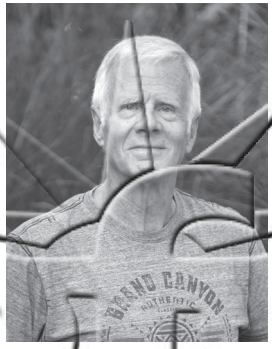
ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Gary Mohler is an eighty-year-old retired schoolteacher turned author, which is proof that you can teach an old dog new tricks. Although he has seen and experienced a lot of life, Gary is pretty much a common dude just like most of you. Even though he is no longer in a classroom, he still loves to help people learn. Gary's current passion project is tackling a subject that strongly resonates with most men: toughness. He has been inspired, encouraged, challenged, and changed by the life stories of the nineteen tough dudes profiled in his first book, *Who's the Toughest Dude That's Ever Lived?*, and he hopes other guys (from 16 to 116 years of age) are too.

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