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When Dave Parker staggered up to Jeff Reaume's loading machine drenched in blood, the astonished logger could only think of one thing to do for the man: Get him to hospital.

Parker, whose face was partially ripped off, blurted out that he'd been attacked by a cougar.

Reaume knew the first aid needed was beyond him. It was a case of "don't panic and get him to hospital," Reaume recalled yesterday.

Bundling the 61-year-old retired mill worker into the company ambulance, Reaume sped for nearby Port Alice hospital. Less than a



kilometre into the trip, Reaume spotted a cougar's body, its throat slit, by the gravel road.

"I asked him, 'You killed it?' " Reaume remembers.

"He said 'Yeah, I killed it with my pocket knife.'

"I just said 'Whoa.' What do you say? It's aweing. It's unreal. He's a very tough man."

Meantime, Parker's life-and-death struggle with the mangy cougar -- which apparently pounced on him from a cliff while Parker was out for a stroll Thursday evening -- has B.C. abuzz.

Parker can't speak himself. He's in stable condition at Victoria's Royal Jubilee Hospital, recovering from reconstructive facial surgery.

Port Alice Mayor Larry Pepper, Parker's friend of 15 years, isn't surprised that his friend survived -- or that he beat off a cougar with a finger-length blade. He describes Parker as a thin, wiry, six-foot, two-inch tower of level-headedness.

"I think he's very lucky," says Pepper, who visited the still-bloody scene of the attack to try to determine how it happened.

"He was lucky he had the presence of mind to have a knife and he could maintain the wits to use it.

"I know the cougar would have lived for probably five minutes after he stabbed him -- and I'm sure the battle went on for that whole time.

"I think when you're laying there you have one choice: Either win the battle or don't. He obviously was determined to win."

Ken Archer, men's captain of Port Alice's golf club, echoes the sentiment.

"(Parker) can take care of himself. He's very easygoing and non-excitabile. He takes everything in stride and deals with every situation as it arises.

"He would look at it as, 'Well, I've got this cougar on my back. Where is the fulcrum that I can use his weight to my advantage to flip him over, and get the knife out of pocket to stab him? How can I do this?'

"Dave's a wonderful person, his wife is a wonderful person. They are a welcome addition to the community and have been actively involved in all aspects of the community since they have been here."

Parker is a former treasurer of the golf club who took early retirement some four years ago from his job as an engineer at the local pulp mill. He has lived in Port Alice for about 20 years with his wife Helen, a local nurse and is known as an avid sportsman who loves golf, curling and hockey.

His daughter, Jennifer, lives in Vancouver, his son in the U.S.

Meantime, Pepper anticipates a flood of visitors to the town to view the bloody site of the attack, which took place on a gravel road near the Western Forest Products log sort at Jeune Landing just north of the Vancouver Island town.

Pepper also says the village will reactivate its cougar education programs -- and try to have cougar sightings reported more quickly.

"Every time I see (a cougar) a little chill runs up my back," he says. "I always have my little knife in my pocket and usually I carry my bear spray when I walk my dog. Because you never know, and you only have one chance."

