



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on December 1, 2010

Don Alejo Garza Tamez: True Grit

Many still remember the movie True Grit, with John Wayne playing Rooster Cogburn, the irascible drunk who reluctantly agrees to help Mattie track down Tom Chaney who murdered Mattie's father. The phrase "true grit" defines one who knows right from wrong and then does something about it.

When a Mexican drug cartel delivered an ultimatum to Don Alejo to give up his ranch or suffer the consequences, it was expected that within 24 hours the place would be vacant, and it would be just another asset captured by the cartel. But [they didn't know](#) they were dealing with someone with true grit.



On Saturday, November 13, a group of toughs arrived at Don Alejo's ranch about 10 miles outside of Ciudad Victoria, the capital city of the Mexican state of Tamaulipas. Victoria, as it is now called, is about 100 miles due south of Laredo, Texas, and about 80 miles southwest of Brownsville. The ranch sits on a pretty lake where Don Alejo had lived most of his life. He was informed that he had 24 hours to vacate the premises. He responded simply that he would be waiting for them.

The first thing Don Alejo did was to let his ranch hands leave and take the next day off. Next, he secured his home, spending most of the evening preparing for the coming assault. He placed weapons and ammunition at every door and window, thought through how he would defend the place, and went to bed.

At 4 a.m. Sunday morning, several motor vehicles pulled up in front of Don Alejo's home, with the thugs announcing their arrival by firing rounds from their weapons into the air. What happened next caught them totally by surprise. The criminals had taken over other properties without resistance, often with the occupants running from the house, screaming for mercy.

Instead, Don Alejo began picking off one after another of the attackers. When they discovered that their return fire was proving ineffective, the thugs began throwing grenades into the house. The firefight, it is estimated, lasted no more than about 5 minutes. In the end, 4 attackers lay dead, two more mortally wounded, and Don Alejo himself lying dead in a pool of blood.

As the Mexican Marines later pieced together the story, Don Alejo, age 77, decided simply that he wasn't going to be run off his property by outlaws. He had made many hard decisions in his life, taking over his father's sawmill when he was a young man, travelling regularly to see his suppliers, opening several timber supply stores in the area, and dealing with difficulties that only a small business owner can appreciate. His final decision, however, was an easy one. He had all that was needed: he owned the property, he knew he would defend it even with his life if necessary, and *he had the means*.

As a hunter Don Alejo was intimately familiar with firearms, both long guns and small arms. He had collected guns from his childhood, and had developed a keen eye and a steady finger. He hunted deer,



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geese, and pigeons regularly with his friends. He co-founded the Dr. Maria Manuel Silva Hunting, Shooting and Fishing Club in Allende, Nuevo Leon.

When the Marines arrived at the scene shortly after the firefight, the smell of gun powder was still in the air. Weapons, spent brass, and empty magazines littered the house. Walls were peppered with bullet holes, and grenades had blown gaping holes in the front of the building. As [Borderlandbeat.com reported](#),

In the last hunt of his life, Don Alejo surprised the group of assassins who wanted to impose the same law on his ranch that they had [elsewhere] in the State: the law of the jungle.

The marines who were present will never forget the scene: a 77-year old man, who before death, took out four gunmen, fighting them as the best of soldiers: with dignity, courage, and honor.

In a microcosm, Don Alejo was fighting the same fight that men of honor throughout the ages and in different lands have fought: freedom from aggression, defense against tyranny, light versus darkness.

In America, the freedom fight, at least on the surface, seems heavily to favor the armed citizen. At last count, more than 90 million Americans are armed with several hundred million weapons. They have lived in a land of freedom unknown in history, and are enjoying the fruits gained by fighters against totalitarianism since the founding of the Republic. But there are some who call the American people "sheeple," too soft and ignorant of their own freedom and history even to know what it cost others. There are some who doubt that many will stand, in that final moment, if necessary, to defend their own lives, liberties, and property. Others look at the legacy of freedom left behind and wonder how Don Alejo came to decide that it was "this far and no farther."

In this time of increasing uncertainty, chaos, and confusion, how many Don Alejos are there, really? There just might be a time when that question will be answered. As James Russell Lowell wrote:

Once to every man and nation, comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of truth with falsehood, for the good or evil side;
Some great cause, some great decision, offering each the bloom or blight,
And the choice goes by forever, 'twixt that darkness and that light.



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