
“His striking appearance – a piercing eye amid strong features – and his capacity for quick and confident decision made him a natural leader, commanding loyalty and respect from subordinates. He loved action, and if it didn’t come to him, he sought it.”


On April 15, 1945, while attached to the 11th Armoured Division, Brigadier Hugh Llewellyn Glyn Hughes became the first Allied Medical Officer to enter the concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen. He immediately took control of the camp and set about controlling the two main issues that faced him, the control of a typhus outbreak, and the distribution of food. He also took control of the local hospital, removing the German patients to treat his new charges. The hospital was later renamed the Glyn Hughes Hospital in his honour.

Hugh (‘Hughie’) Llewellyn Glyn Hughes was born in Swansea, South Wales, the son of Dr H. G. Hughes, but spent the first two years of his life at Ventersburg, South Africa, after his father emigrated to take up a medical post. When Hugh was only two years old, he and his mother returned to England after his father died from septicaemia that followed pricking his finger during an operation. At the age of seven he was diagnosed with having curvature of the spine and for a period was confined to a spinal carriage, but having put medical problems behind him he entered Epsom College at the age of eleven. His career at Epsom was extraordinary. He was Head Prefect, Captain of the Rugby XV, the Shooting VIII, and the Gymnastics VIII. He was awarded the Harvey, Wakley, Brande Good Conduct, Elocution and Brande English Prizes, and apart from these honours he was awarded the Ann Hood and Carr Exhibitions, as well as an Entrance Scholarship to University College Hospital, where he won the Fellowes’ Medal for Clinical Medicine.

Hugh Glyn Hughes joined the British Army in 1915 and during the First World
War served as a medical officer with the 1st Battalion, the Wiltshire regiment, and later with the Grenadier Guards. He had a distinguished war record and, in 1916, was awarded the D.S.O., his citation reading: “For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty during operations. He went out in broad daylight, under heavy fire, and bandaged seven wounded men in the open, lying out in an exposed spot for one and a half hours. At nightfall he led a party through a heavy barrage and brought the seven men back.” Within four months he was awarded a Bar to his D.S.O., and later the Military Cross (M.C.), and the Croix de Guerre avec Palme. He was mentioned in dispatches on several occasions. His D.S.O. Bar citation read: “For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty during operations. On four separate days he showed utter contempt for danger when collecting and tending the wounded under heavy shell fire.”

At the commencement of the Second World War Glyn Hughes was sent to France with the Fifth Infantry Division, and after the retreat of the British army he devoted his time to training medical units for active service. In 1944 he was promoted to Brigadier and became Deputy Director Medical Services to the Eighth Corps and the Second Army, and Chief Medical Officer in the advance. One year later, while attached to the 11th Armoured Division, he took control of the German concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen. The distribution of food presented a considerable problem and on the first night of the liberation a riot broke out among the inmates over limited rations. This led the German guards to react by shooting and killing several of them. To prevent this happening again Brigadier Glyn Hughes threatened to execute one German soldier for each inmate killed. In 1945 Brigadier Glyn Hughes was one of the main witnesses for the prosecution in the Belsen Trial, and for his actions at Belsen he was awarded the Order of St John of Jerusalem and the Legion of Merit (USA). He also received a second Bar to his D.S.O., for action during the attempted relief of Arnhem, earlier in the campaign, where as the most senior surviving officer, he took command of the tanks. Later that year he was awarded the C.B.E. Returning home after the War Glyn Hughes was appointed Commandant of the RAMC Depot at
Brigadier Glyn Hughes left the Army in 1947, and was appointed the Senior Medical Officer of the South East Metropolitan Hospital Board. In this position he played an important role in the administration of the newly created National Health Service, and in 1952 he was instrumental in the formation of the Royal College of General Practitioners. He was then appointed Honorary Physician to HM the Queen, President of the Harveian Society, and Medical Officer to the Red Cross Society.

Outside of medicine and his military career, Glyn Hughes was an outstanding rugby player. After Epsom he played club rugby for Blackheath R.F.C., and in 1912 was selected to play for the Barbarians against Penarth, Cardiff and Swansea. He played for the Barbarians on no less than 20 times and captained the team for three matches in 1919 and 1920. He also captained the United Hospitals team, and played for Devon, Middlesex and London Counties. After retiring from playing rugby Glyn Hughes was chosen to act as referee in the Great Britain tour of Argentina and was appointed President of the Barbarians. In *The Official History of the Barbarian Football Club*, written by Nigel Starmer-Smith, a former English international and master at Epsom College (1967-1971), it was noted that ‘Hughie’ Glyn Hughes “remained an avuncular figure, not averse to the high jinks on a Saturday night that he himself had enjoyed in his playing days, but insistent on a certain discipline, imparted with a curt word or a piercing look, that made his feelings quite clear. One knew what was expected, and if as a player, one stepped beyond the bounds, one made sure that Hughie didn’t find out.” He died in Edinburgh on November 24, 1973, just three days after watching the international rugby game between Scotland and Argentina.