

Airborne Approved

Broken Pride

By Chaplain (CPT) Tom Latham, USA.

My call sign was “White Sheppard” from June 2008 to December 2009. The year and a half spent with the 2-325 was my first assignment as a chaplain. I was a prior service 11B and airborne qualified so that had been my in to get assigned to such a prestigious unit. The Battalion had just come back from a deployment to Iraq. Counseling and crisis response were taking up much of my time. We led many retreats and I served on staff at the Crossroads Coffee house.

It came about that my chaplain assistant SGT Canfield alerted me to the upcoming banner day where we would host a number of inter battalion competitions. He had signed us both up for Combatives and we were to represent our Company, HHC in the one day tournament. I had some experience having wrestled in Elementary School and College, and having trained in Brazilian Ju-Jitsu. I held a black belt but had not trained for a long time and was out of shape. Never the less we both entered the competition with high hopes.



SGT Canfield and Chaplain Latham

On the day of the tournament unbeknownst to me SGT Canfield withdrew his name from the list of competitors but my name was still on it. I headed over to the field behind the 82nd gym where large crowds had gathered. My family came to watch and there were spectators divided between the football game and the Combatives competition. I talked to the competitors in my HHC and got assigned to take the next fight. I entered the ring to face off with a young man who looked anxious and eager.

The fight started out with me nearly gain-

ing control of his arm and enforcing what we call in Portuguese an Omoplata. It is where you have your leg wrapped around someone’s arm and shoulder from behind. My opponent wiggled free and reversed the position on me, now I had my arm in an ever increasing and tightening position.

Before the competition I had committed to not tapping out and not giving up. I have this habit of thinking something before a stressful event and once in the fight not being able to adjust or adapt to developing situations. In this case I chose not to tap out and to try to wriggle free.

My arm got tighter and then all of a sudden I felt tremendous pressure on my left elbow. Then the sound I never want to hear again came...riipp POP snap POP! My elbow had just been broken! I squealed...I wish I could say I didn’t but I think that is what came out of my mouth. I screamed and my opponent let go. End of match. There I was in the middle of the sawdust, my family watching, the battalion commander watching, my chaplain assistant and his family watching, and half of the 2-325 AIR watching.

I attempted to get up while cradling my arm but as soon as I stood I saw the matrix. You know the first scene in the movie “The Matrix” where there are all those green lines of computer code scrolling down like a waterfall? That is what I saw. Everything turned gray and I saw white lines scrolling down. I had a moment of clarity and thought to myself, “This is what it looks like right before you pass out.” So I dropped back down and got control of my breathing and senses. I looked for an exit. The crowd was breaking up. I saw the medics and FLA a few meters away at the edge of the field. I knew I had broken something and it was going to have to be checked out. With the help of some-



Tom and sons with broken arm

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one I got up and exited the ring. Passing my battalion commander he said, "Chaplain I was not impressed." With that noted I continued on to the FLA and by that night had a cast on my arm and was popping Percocet. That stuff is wicked. I never want to take that again.

To add insult to injure the next day was the battalion Christmas party and I had a role in it. So hyped up on Percocet there I was reading the Christmas story to a bunch of toddlers. They probably thought I had been dipping into some spiced Egg Nog.

I don't roll with the young folks anymore. People invite me to wrestle all the time and I just pass. My wife told me I can have an out by saying she won't let me. The truth is I was not prepared and I was trusting on long passed expertise. I had also set myself up for failure by determining in advance not to quit or tap out. What is wrong with tapping out. I teach my students to do it. It was not a life or death situation. It was a friendly competition. I could have tapped and made that guy's day and walked away with only a bruised ego. Instead I left with a broken elbow, six months of therapy, and was not able to jump for a while.

Pride can do that to us. Unbridled and unbroken pride can cost us things that are important to us and who are we fooling. I now tap when others get me in an arm lock. I am also careful about who I wrestle with leaving the young to wrestle the young.

Proverbs chapter 16:18 says, "Pride goes before destruction, and haughtiness before a fall."

Things that help us resist pride are self evaluation, self reflection, and spending time with God listening to his voice and living life with the good of others in the fore front. God bless you.

Airborne, ATW, Lets go! Chap

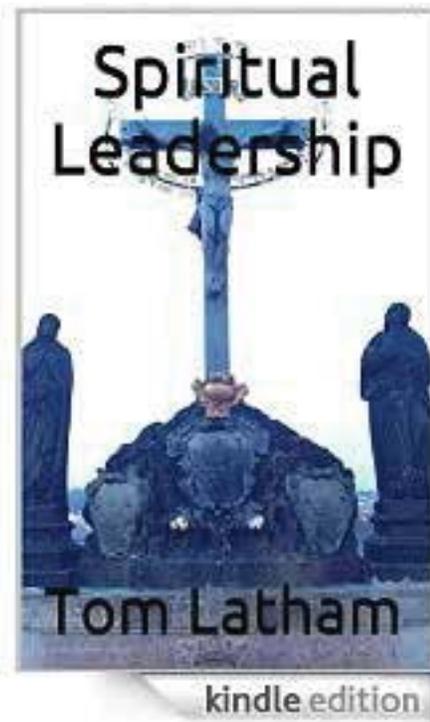


All American Week with family



Field service 2-325

Chaplain (CPT) Tom Latham served with the 82nd Airborne Division from 2008 to 2011 and is a member of the Association. He continues to serve on active duty to date. His dream is to publish his military memoirs. He currently writes for Leadership Journal, Army Magazine, 173rd Association Magazine and now the 82nd Airborne Division Association Paraglide. He is the author of *Spiritual Leadership* which shares experiences from his years as a IMB missionary in Brazil and his 17 years of military service.



You can find Chaplain Latham's book, *Spiritual Leadership*, on Amazon by clicking the image above.