



## **U. S. National Tournament Runner Up (2010 Select), Semifinalist (2011 U15)**

NDP / Dick's Sporting Goods Atlantic Cup Champions (2010 Select), Runner Up (2010 U15, 2009 Select, 2009 U15)

NDP / Dick's Sporting Goods Midwest Cup Champion (2008 Elite, 2008 Select), Runner Up (2008 U15)

Presidents Cup Champion (2010 U15, 2008 U15)

## **Cleveland Plain Dealer Article Front Page Forum Section Memorial Day 2009**

**By Major Zolton Krompecher**

Every day I read the list of KIAs from Iraq and Afghanistan, scanning names for someone I might know. Last month, one particular name held my attention. The fallen, Corporal Brad Davis, was a Soldier from Ohio. He was 21. Living on a military post, these announcements hit home, but I contemplate how deeply they are felt in cities and towns insulated from military communities.

In April, a speaker spoke to talk to roughly 1,000 Army majors at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: over 80% of us in the audience had deployed to the Middle East. What struck me was how he ended his speech. He thanked us for our service and then announced that "America was not at war," meaning that the majority of Americans were not directly affected by the war because only a small percentage traveled to the sound of the guns. Two days later I flew to Ohio to gauge the truth of his statement.

My trip originated when Pete Paras of Lakewood telephoned to ask if I would be interested in speaking at the Burning River Lacrosse Tournament to raise money for Fisher House, a private organization that annually provides free lodging to families of service members undergoing treatment at nearby hospitals. The majority of families I've witnessed in recent years are those whose loved ones have been wounded in combat. While speaking with Pete, I thought of how the war has impacted my own family.

My first encounter with the war occurred at Ft. Bragg when I was preparing to deploy. A supply sergeant came around a corner holding a towel to his face. At first I thought he had a bloody lip, but when he pulled it away, I noticed he was missing his lower jaw. Two years later, my family and I watched a 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade in Fort Lewis, Wa. when my children inquired of two young Soldiers nearby: they were each missing legs. Then there is my friend Scott B who left his leg in the dust of Afghanistan, came home, and showed me his new prosthetic. I watched the children of Bill Hecker cling to their mother while we laid him to rest. Finally, I remember escorting home my friend, Dave, where a businessman eyed my dress uniform and went back to reading his paper; evidently, I did not factor into that day's bottom line. I resisted the urge to tell him that while he sat in first class, my friend lay in the cargo section: Dave was killed in Tal Afar. Pulling back the curtain on the lives of those serving reveals similar experiences. So many stories, yet not many people seem to know of them. Most service members return to families gathered at venues full of hugs, kisses and flashing cameras, but underneath the sighs of relief, the war has stamped them all. Others come home earlier than expected, to less fanfare. They are the ones in flag-draped caskets or those recovering from wounds at Walter Reed. These are the ones who rarely make a footnote in the papers. Today, America seems fixated on bail outs and American Idol, yet the war continues for many families.

Here at Ft. Leavenworth, in a place where Purple Hearts and campaign ribbons adorn uniforms like pins on a letterman's jacket, the war is real. Ten years ago my wife, Tina, left her secure life in Ohio to marry a soldier.

And since 9/11 she, like so many other military wives, has attended countless Memorial services, made meals for families of casualties, and grieved with me at the graves of good friends: she is my hero. It's easy to understand why travelling home to the fields of our youth serves as a respite for us. And I can't help but eavesdrop when she and other wives sprinkle conversations with words like "deployment" and "separation" or understand how the announcement "Class, we have a new student today" has become part of our childrens' lexicon. They are not immune to the war, and that is why we visit The Fallen every Memorial Day. For these reasons, I did not hesitate in accepting the offer to help raise money for Fisher House. Sometimes, the greatest casualty is being forgotten.

At the tournament, I was amazed by the flurry of people working concession stands, bidding on donated auction items, and sponsors from countless businesses lending their time. There was the mother, a West Point graduate, who no longer wore the uniform but had arrived to volunteer, and a young lady who sang the national anthem so well that my knees buckled. Everybody present that day supported a cause which transcended political and socio-economic background, spread itself over the playing fields, and planted itself firmly in our hearts.

Looking at the faces in the audience, I quietly placed my speech in my pocket and spoke from the heart. I explained how most Soldiers do not wake in a war zone thinking "today is the day that I'm going to be wounded." But the reality is that over 4,924 Americans have died in the wars, and that is but part of the story. Reports vary, but estimates reveal over 31,000 American service members have been wounded since 9/11. I introduced the audience to two friends who were not present but who had witnessed the care that Fisher House provides: Major Kyle and MSG Scott Ford. I spoke of Major Kyle's concern for the families of the wounded in his unit undergoing treatment at hospitals across America specializing in burns and prosthetics. I mentioned MSG Scott Ford, a fellow Green Beret and Ohioan, who made national news from his efforts in Afghanistan and who told me that if it weren't for Fisher House, many families of the wounded would have no place to stay while their loved ones recovered. Sometimes we forget about the wounded, but not Fisher House. Fisher House understands that supporting troops means more than a magnet on a vehicle.

I finished my speech and took a seat to watch my first lacrosse game. While watching, I noticed an ingredient of elegance in it: a pageant or play, if you will, where characters' reveal grace and determination that holds the attention of bystanders, almost analogous to Soldiers hugging their loved ones for the first time since being wounded. In the end, the event raised over \$42,000.

So perhaps there exists some truth in the guest's words that day at Fort Leavenworth when he announced that "America is not at war." But at a gathering benefitting those affected by the darkest side of combat, strangers came together to help families trying to cobble together a sense of normalcy while loved ones take the first painful steps towards recovery. In an event staged by both young and old, amid sponsors, volunteers, ROTC Cadets from John Carroll who proudly raised the colors, and the airline ticket agent who contributed a crisp ten dollar bill, the war was real. On the fields of friendly strife, on April 25, 2009, in this little corner of Ohio and, most importantly in the home of Corporal Brad Davis, the lines between civilian and military were blurred, and the war was on the forefront of everyone's mind. That's people helping people. That's America.

*Major Zoltan Krompecher is a native of Ohio and combat veteran who has served for 24. He met the former Miss Tina Gallo of Westlake in an English class in Ellis Hall. They married seven years later. These words are his own and do not reflect the views of the United States Army.*