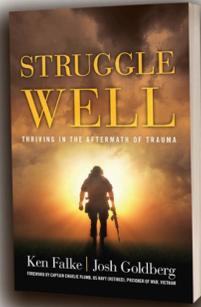


# STRUGGLE WELL



## FOREWORD

### STRUGGLE IS A TERRIBLE THING TO WASTE

It's not much fun being a prisoner of war for one hour, much less, 2,103 days. That's how long I spent as a POW during the Vietnam War, from 1967-1973, living in the ironically named "Hanoi Hilton." The torture, physical, and mental anguish, and feelings of loss and abandonment are experiences that no person should ever endure. And while I wouldn't wish six years as a POW on anyone, I have to say these were undoubtedly the years of my life when I grew the strongest and matured the most.

I learned that just because you're in a prison doesn't mean you are a prisoner. My cramped cell measured just eight feet wide by eight feet long – but the real prison was only eight inches wide: the space between my ears.

My challenge, above all, was a mental game.

Through a deep sense of connection with my fellow POWs; the remarkable leadership provided by James Stockdale and others; a renewed sense of faith, confidence, and mission; and a great deal of time in solitude and self-reflection, I was able to endure the experience. More importantly, I was able to use it as fuel to live a life of purpose, service, connection, and growth.

My story of resilience and endurance is not the exception; among the 591 men who returned home with me in the 1973, growth was the rule. While over 30 percent of all Vietnam veterans returned home from war dealing with PTSD, only 4 percent of POWs faced similar difficulties.

Perhaps even more remarkable than the 4 percent number is our collective experience since our repatriation; the men who returned home from nine months to ten years in captivity are living fulfilling, service-oriented, and successful lives.

Compared to non-POW naval aviators, we report greater satisfaction on every key measure of life.

In 1973, there was no official diagnosis for what we had experienced. This changed in 1995, when Dr. Richard Tedeschi and Dr. Lawrence Calhoun from the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, coined the term “Posttraumatic Growth,” or PTG.

Perhaps best explained by Nietzsche, PTG is the experience of allowing what didn’t kill you to make you stronger. This idea that times of deep struggle can cultivate a profound and abiding sense of strength and growth is a notion as old as humankind, and the foundational principle for nearly every organized religion. Those ancient stories teach us, in combination with more modern ones like my own, that when we struggle deeply, we are forced to engage in self-reflection and introspection, contemplating what truly matters in our lives. What often results is growth in five areas: increased personal strength, deeper, and more meaningful relationships, a greater appreciation for small things in life, a richer spiritual or religious life, and new possibilities for the future.

Our nation seems to have lost its way in how we look at times of great difficulty and struggle. We see it in a thirty-year high in the suicide; rampant opioid, drug, and alcohol abuse and overdoses; a profound sense of disconnection, isolation, and loneliness; and nearly unbelievable levels of anxiety and depression.

While it is unlikely that you will find yourself as a POW for six years, all of our lives inevitably feature ups and downs. The question is, how can we ensure that we enjoy the good times, and wring every ounce of value, strength, and growth out of the bad ones?

Two years ago, I met Ken Falke and Josh Goldberg. We spoke in depth about this very challenge, along with the work they were undertaking at Boulder Crest in Virginia. Through a comprehensive understanding of PTG, collaboration with Dr. Tedeschi, a deep regard for understanding the stories of PTG in action – such as the Hanoi Hilton – and training expertise, these two men had pioneered a profound breakthrough. They had figured out how to cultivate and facilitate PTG in combat veterans who had served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Ken, Josh, and their incredible team at Boulder Crest has enabled people to take what didn’t kill them and use that experience to make them far stronger and more fulfilled than they ever thought possible.

With the progress they have made, there way only one thing left to do: expand their reach to the millions of people in our nation – both veterans and civilians – who are struggling to make sense of their own challenges, seeking to find their way to a great and purposeful life.

This book, capturing all that Ken and Josh have learned along the way, represents a roadmap to ensure that anyone can harness the age-old power of struggle, and not simply survive but thrive.

Never forget: we only get so many struggles in life. It's a terrible thing to waste any of them.

### CAPTIAN CHARLIE PLUMB, (RET.) US NAVY



Captain Charlie Plumb has lived what he believes to be the American Dream. As a farm kid from Kansas, he fantasized about airplanes, although he felt certain he would never have the opportunity to pilot one. It would be the United States Navy that afforded Plumb the opportunity to live out that dream.

After graduating from the Naval Academy, Plumb completed Navy Flight Training and reported to Miramar Naval Air Station in San Diego, where he flew the first adversarial flights in the development of what would be called The Navy Fighter Weapons School, currently known as "TOP GUN." The next year, Plumb's squadron, The Aardvarks launched on the Aircraft Carrier USS Kitty Hawk with Fighter Squadron 114 to fly the Navy's hottest airplane, the F-4 Phantom Jet. Code named "Plumber," Charlie Plumb flew seventy-four successful combat missions over North Vietnam and made over one hundred carrier landings. On his seventy-fifth mission, just five days before the end of his tour, Plumb was shot down over Hanoi, taken prisoner, tortured, and spent the next 2,103 days as a Prisoner of War.

Following his repatriation, Plumb continued his Navy flying career in Reserve Squadrons where he flew A-4 Skyhawks, A-7 Corsairs, and FA-18 Hornets. His last two commands as a Naval Reservist were on the Aircraft Carrier Coral Sea and at a Fighter Air Wing in California. He retired from the United States Navy after thirty-one years of service.

To this day, Captain Plumb continues to fly left-seat at every opportunity. He had personally owned eight airplanes, the most treasured being a World War II PT-19 Open-Cockpit Antique. He currently flies the PT-19 and his Rutan-designed experimental single-engine Long-Ez. His autobiography, *I'm No Hero*, is in its thirty-second printing. For more information, go to: [www.CharliePlumb.com](http://www.CharliePlumb.com)