

# PUTTING THE WHITE IN RED, WHITE AND BLUE

“Fight for the Troops” is only one part of the UFC’s support for the military

BY KELLY CRIGGER

**D**ana White isn’t used to walking through a crowd and not being the center of attention, much less going nearly unrecognized. But even with Kenny Florian flanking him, he is relatively anonymous at the 2009 Armed Forces Foundation Gala, despite being one of the night’s honored guests. Unless you were living in a cave and awaiting the end of the world last December, you know that the UFC held an event of unparalleled philanthropy in MMA. “UFC Fights for the Troops” was a massive success that resulted in \$4.5 million in funds for the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund, which benefits severely wounded soldiers, especially those with Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI). It was the largest charitable event in MMA, and easily eclipsed 2006’s “Ultimate Fight Night at Miramar,” which was free for US Marines.

“I’ve always respected, admired, and been into the armed forces,” White says just before receiving the Patriot Award from the Armed Forces Foundation. “There’s nothing tougher, more manly, or more badass



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than being a soldier. It’s the most unselfish thing you can do. Let me tell you, I know some tough men. But the real men are out there defending the country.”

“UFC Fights for the Troops” provided a large donation to TBI research, which affects 10 to 20 percent of all wounded servicemen returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, but it’s just one piece of the company’s Operation Patriotism. The UFC has a long history of support for the military that ranges from free fight broadcasts on Armed Forces Network to meet-and-greets with disabled veterans to financial support for the Fisher House, which gives families of wounded soldiers a place to stay while their loved ones are in care.

The UFC regularly exports its highest-asset fighters to visit troops at bases, hospitals, and even in combat zones, despite the risks. Here’s a warning for you fighters who dream of being UFC champions: Get a comfy pair of desert boots, because as soon as you achieve name recognition, you’re heading overseas to visit the boys. Just ask Randy Couture, Rich Franklin, BJ Penn, Kenny Florian, and Brandon Vera, who are just a few of the many fighters who have made the long journey to Iraq or Afghanistan to visit US servicemen. You would think an organization that depends on human resources would shudder at sending its stars into harm’s way, but the opposite is true.

“Anything UFC fighters do to support the troops can’t compare to the risks and sacrifices men and women in the armed forces make for our country on a daily basis,” says UFC Public Relations Director Jennifer Wenk. “The fighters and UFC understand the risks, but it’s their way of showing their appreciation to the US military.”

The order to support the troops starts at the top of the UFC food chain. You can call Dana White cheap, disrespectful, or just about anything you like, and chances are he’s probably heard it. But call him unpatriotic and you’re liable to find him dusting off his soup bones and getting ready to scrap.

“I am the most patriotic fucking American you’ll ever meet,” he laughs. “Maybe Kid Rock’s more patriotic than me. Other than Kid Rock, I’m number two.” A statement like that begs the question: Why did he not answer the call to duty?

“I don’t know,” he shrugs in a rare moment that finds him lost for words. “I just had so many other things going on when I was growing up that I didn’t consider it. In another life I would in a heartbeat.”

In reality, not everyone needs to serve in the military, and there are those who join that should not have. Maybe it’s even for the better. If Dana White had become Sergeant White and not pursued a life in MMA, it’s doubtful that the \$4.5 million he raised to combat TBI would have ever happened. The Armed Forces Foundation’s President, Patricia Driscoll is one person who’s glad White followed the path in life that he did.

“Mr. White’s actions have not only raised money for our men and women in uniform, but also greatly raised awareness of Traumatic Brain Injury, which we at the Armed Forces Foundation are very focused upon,” she says. “We greatly appreciate the attention the UFC brought to this vital issue and thought it fitting that Mr. White be recognized for his efforts.”

The Armed Forces Foundation isn’t bush league, either. It’s a not-for-profit organization that directly supports US military personnel, and has been recognized by the President of the United States and the Department of Defense for its dedication to service members. One look around the audience at the gala revealed more stars than the Oscars, but not the acting type. These were generals, some active and some retired. It wasn’t the usual MMA crowd, but in typical Dana White fashion, they knew how to spell UFC before the night was over. 🍷