

Crigger's Title Shot

Travelling across the United States of America and dropping by the major MMA gyms is something most MMA fans would dream of – US Army officer Kelly Crigger, he did just that. He even wrote a book about it afterwards. *Title Shot: Into the Shark Tank of Mixed Martial Arts* is an intriguing look into not just the sport's top academies and gyms, but also the hearts and minds of their fighters.

Be honest, was writing the book just an excuse to get some time off from the Army?

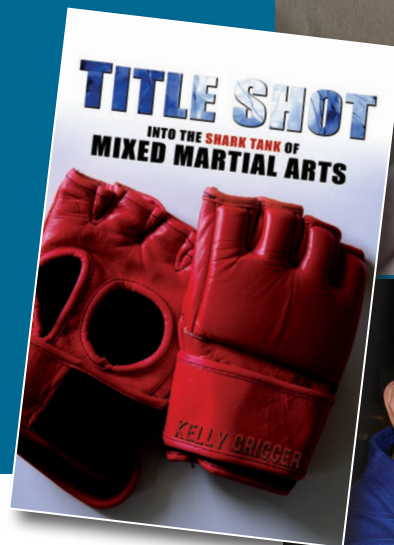
I love the Army, so I don't need time off, but it was nice to get away from it for a while. Fighting has always been an interesting thing to me and I wanted to know why guys do it voluntarily and without weapons. It always seemed like an alien thing to me because US Army doctrine is 'no fair fights.' We believe in something called 'combat overmatch', which says go into a fight on your own terms and overwhelm the enemy with more than he can handle. So taking part in a fair fight with another guy in a cage was something I wanted to understand more.

You entered some of the top gyms in the USA and were privileged enough to talk to and observe some of the top names in the business. Were there any 'pinch me' moments?

Yes there were, but I always try to stay grounded and remind myself that they're just ordinary guys like me. Team Quest was the first [place to visit], so I was nervous but they were very cool, so I quickly became comfortable with them. Jackson's MMA was bigger and had more names that I'd seen on TV so the nerves were certainly there. Rashad Evans in particular was someone I'd looked forward to spending time with, but he turned out to be very easy going and genuine. Of course Dana White was almost surreal. True story: he got a visit from Shannon Lee (Bruce Lee's daughter) while I was hanging with him. Moments later he grabbed my camera and took a picture of me and Shannon. Dana White took my picture with Bruce Lee's daughter! That was the biggest shock of the journey.

You don't seem to be the kind of guy who beats around the bush, and you have a very direct style of writing. Of the fighters and trainers you met, you come out with some very honest observations. Have you had anybody call or email and say, 'Hey!'

The only disgruntled comment I've heard from anyone about the book was Chris Wilson (Chapter 1). He felt I got my quotes mixed up and the things I attributed to him were really said by Matt Horwich. I disagree, of course, because I kept a detailed journal of the trip



and recorded many conversations (though not his). Other than that everyone in it has said good things about it.

You went from coast to coast, entered gyms, attended events, you even hung out with Dana White. Is there anything you missed out on and would have liked to have gone back to try and include?

If I would change anything I would have sparred at American Top Team. They invited me to do the 'Bloqueo' session with them one day and I didn't because of gear issues. I should have found a way to do it because it would have been a better way to convey the feeling of getting hit and putting all the grappling and striking training together for the reader. I got a great BJJ [Brazilian jiu-jitsu] class out of them, but I should have taken it a step further and fought.

You're back to life in the Army. Any plans for another book in the future, or are you done with MMA?

My next project is a collaboration with MMA guru Greg Jackson. We're putting out two instructional books of his fighting style. It doesn't require a lot of independent thought on my part, and is very tedious work, but it has a lot of other benefits for me, like being able to watch a fight better. Greg and I struck up a friendship while I was writing my book and keep in touch. He's a good dude.

If there is anything you'd like to say that wasn't in the book?

If I would add anything it would be that my book has something for everyone. Whether you're a hardcore MMA fan or just interested in it, you'll like it. Also thanks to my family for putting up with my writing hobby. They've always been behind me. ●

Title Shot: Into the Shark Tank of Mixed Martial Arts is out now, published by Victory Belt.