



NEW UNIFORM, SAME CHALLENGE

Supporting a fighter is just as challenging as supporting a soldier

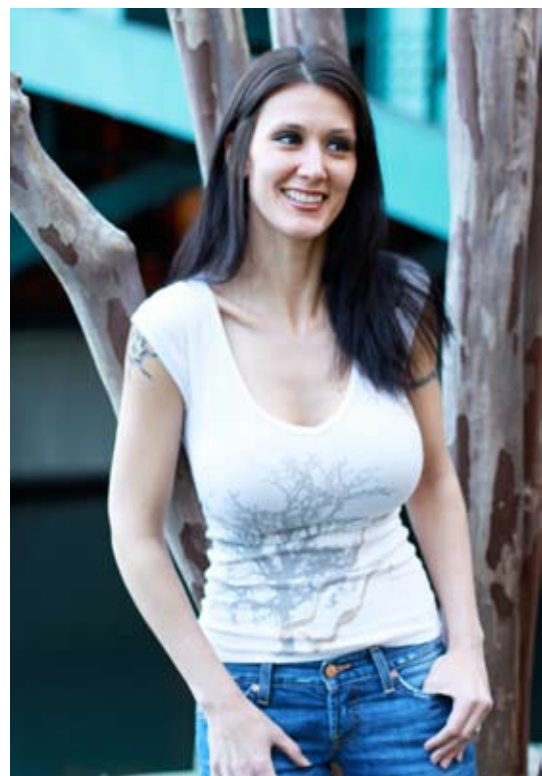
By: Kelly Crigger

Separation day is supposed to be like crossing a finish line. For many spouses, nerves calm and persistent shoulder tension eases as boots get hung up for the last time and combat uniforms are traded in for neckties. Unless, of course, your spouse takes on a challenge equally as daunting as being in the military...like fighting in a cage.

Special Forces Staff Sergeant Tim Kennedy left active duty last summer, but his decision to become a professional fighter merely transitioned him into a new high stress job. That meant for Kennedy's wife, Ginger, the environment changed, but the difficulties of being married to an elite warrior didn't.

Mixed Martial Arts, or Ultimate Fighting as some call it, is a rapidly growing sport that's especially popular among the troops because at their core, MMA and the military share major similarities. A member of the 7th Special Forces Group for nearly five years, Tim Kennedy deployed to combat three times and competed in various MMA venues while in garrison. So in mid-2009 the Kennedys stood at a crossroads. On the one hand they loved military life, but on the other, **Tim was in his physical prime and couldn't resist the call to the cage.**

Tim and Ginger left active duty and took up residence in Austin, Texas where Tim is now a National Guardsman and Ginger commutes to Fort Hood. But life outside of active duty isn't any easier, especially »



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relationships

for a professional fighter.

"I'm happy because I get more time with him," Ginger says. "But he also trains three times a day and competes in sniper competitions and I'm on the road sixty miles a day, so I still don't see him that often."

Dedicating yourself to a Special Forces Soldier is stressful. Ginger Kennedy is learning that being married to a professional fighter offers little respite, save for the length of time he's in combat. A deployment lasts several months, but a fight lasts just fifteen minutes—though the anticipation of a fight is almost as demanding.

"The weeks leading up to a fight are the most difficult," she says.

"He gets edgy and cranky. His mind is preparing for a significant and possibly traumatic event, and his body is changing because he's cutting weight. The tension in the house is pretty thick."

And there are precious few friends to turn to in their new community. If Ginger misses one aspect of military life, it's the support structure she had at Fort Bragg. The military is known for closing ranks and taking care of our own during times of trouble, so the absence of an FRG-type organization gives Ginger a newfound appreciation for the closeness of support groups. So is this a case of 'be careful what you wish for?'

"No," she says. "I'm still happy he's not getting deployed anymore. I know the phone isn't going to ring in the middle of the night and take him away. Now when we get those calls it's usually his manager asking if he wants to sign a fight."

The boots might be gathering dust in the closet, but when the gloves are well worn, the challenges of supporting a fighting man are the same. **MSM**

"THE BOOTS MIGHT BE GATHERING DUST IN THE CLOSET, BUT WHEN THE GLOVES ARE WELL WORN, THE CHALLENGES OF SUPPORTING A FIGHTING MAN ARE THE SAME."



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