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...
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 competi-
tions 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 of-
fers little respite, save for the length
of time he’s in combat. A deploy-
ment 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 orga-
nization 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
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