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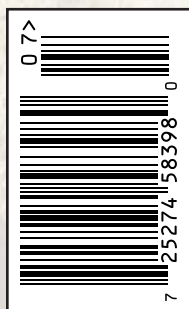
THE TOP 100
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TEAM RHINO

This **ALL-MILITARY**
MMA team is
looking for a few
bad@#\$ fighters.

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Kris McCray
UFC/MMA Fighter
Team Rhino
(U.S. Army Reserve, 2000-8)

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TEAM RHINO TAKES ON THE UFC

This **ALL-MILITARY** team is looking for a few bad@!\$ veterans to fight their way to the top of the UFC.

By Kelly Crigger

Some guys like to scrap. Scientists can map the human genome all they like, but there are some men whose DNA just defies logic. Maybe you're one of them. Did you join the military to be a modern-day Spartan warrior? Do you live for those surreal moments of sliding down a rope and kicking in doors? Will you always refer to yourself as a Barrel Chested Freedom Fighter whether you're in or out of uniform? Then maybe you're a real fighter. That's what Dana White, president of the Ultimate Fighting Championship, would call you. If so, Team Rhino will welcome you into its ranks.

BAND OF BROTHERS

While older veterans still scratch their heads at this whole mixed martial arts (MMA) thing, servicemen today are virtual ESPN analysts when it comes to the combative arts. Started in 1993 by the legendary Gracie family as a venue to prove their fighting style was dominant, the Ultimate Fighting Championship did more to revolutionize martial arts than any other event in history. The octagon quickly became a proving ground for every black belt, karateka, →

➔ judoka, boxer and Main Street badass to excel triumphantly or fail miserably. Now 17 years later, it's become the fastest-growing sport in the world and recently eclipsed hockey as the fourth biggest sport in the United States.

In this cauldron of combat a group of current and former military is steadily making its mark as Team Rhino, a band of brothers that has only one prerequisite for membership – military service. They range from bantamweights (135 pounds) to heavyweights (265 pounds), from active duty Army to Marine Reservists, and from the Pacific Northwest to south Florida. Team Rhino gets its name from the sponsor, Ranger Up: a military and patriotic apparel company founded and owned by Army veterans.

SUCK IT UP

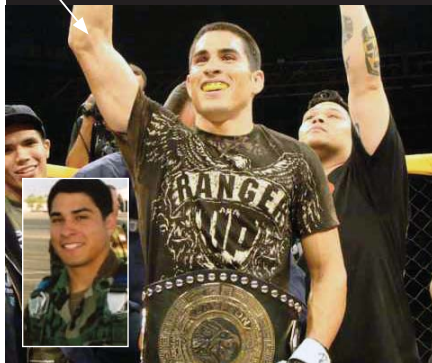
Former Army Captain Nick Palmisciano started a pro-military apparel company in 2006 and called it Ranger Up, an ode to his days in the Ranger Training Brigade where the motto was synonymous with “Suck it up and keep going.” As Palmisciano built a following he decided it was time to jump into mixed martial arts. But he needed a face man to spearhead the charge; a spokesman who reflected what Ranger Up stood for and who could both represent the military and win in the cage.

ALEX SOTO

SERVICE: Former Army LRSD

PRO RECORD: 5-0

FUN FACT: Most people go to Tijuana to engage in blackout drunken debauchery and end up with donkey stories and tongue burns. Alex Soto was born and raised there and couldn't wait to leave.



Enter **Tim Kennedy**, a middleweight fighter who serves in the National Guard. “I usually don't care what civilian companies have to say, but there was something about Nick and Ranger Up that made me take notice,” Kennedy said. He might not be the most recognizable name to the casual MMA fan, but the former Army Green Beret has been steadily climbing his way up the sport's middleweight ladder and recently headlined a Strikeforce event where he dominated the previously undefeated Zak Cummings. It was the brotherhood of military service that drew Kennedy to Ranger Up and was the trinity for Team Rhino.

Bringing Kennedy into Team Rhino

gave the company a known entity to throw its weight behind and provided a beacon of hope for fighters with military service to secure a major sponsor. Army Sergeants Damien Stelly and Andy Chapelle, instructors at Fort Benning's Modern Army Combatives Program, came on board. They were followed by former Army Ranger Matt Dunlap and former Airman Dan Barerra.

BRANCHING OUT

In 2009, Team Rhino picked up eight fighters from around the country with wildly diverse backgrounds, such as former Army Rangers Lee Gibson, Gert Kocani, and Sam Rauch; Navy diver Adam Castaneda; Army infantrymen Todd Vance, **Alex Soto** and Brandon Sayles; Air Force survival instructor Eddie Fore; Army National Guardsmen Kenny Jackson and Micah Goss; and former Marine Brian Vanhoven. Blanketing the country from sea to shining sea, these fighters displayed their skills in small MMA shows and racked up win after win for Ranger Up and the Armed Forces.

None of those guys is a Randy Couture or Georges St. Pierre with an entourage or high-powered agents, but with the wild growth of MMA it may just be a matter of time before they're household names. **Jorge Rivera**, **Brian Stann** and **Tim Credeur**, all former servicemen, have established them- ➔

JORGE RIVERA

SERVICE: Former Army Cavalryman (1990-1993)

PRO RECORD: 18-7

FUN FACT: Jorge goes full Taliban while he's training, refusing to shave until weigh-in day when he tapers worse than Michael Phelps.

TIM KENNEDY

SERVICE: Former National Guardsman (2003-2009)

PRO RECORD: 11-2

FUN FACT: Tim is a really good shot. At an Army Sniper tournament he shot Oprah's mustache off of her when she wandered onto the range.

BRIAN STANN

SERVICE: Former Marine (2003-2008)

PRO RECORD: 8-3

FUN FACT: Brian left the Marine Corps and took a position with Hire Heroes USA – a non-profit organization who helps servicemen and women find jobs.

TIM CREDEUR

SERVICE: Former Navy (1995-2000)

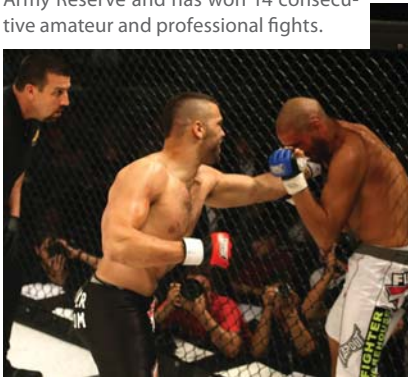
PRO RECORD: 12-3

FUN FACT: Tim was the first Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu black belt in the state of Louisiana. His standing as a voodoo high priest had nothing to do with it.





Brian Stann (above) served five years in the U.S. Marine Corps and has won eight professional MMA fights. Kris McCray (below, left) served eight years in the Army Reserve and has won 14 consecutive amateur and professional fights.



→ selves in the UFC and another one may be poised to be the talk of MMA fans.

MCCRAY GETS TUF

“I feel good knowing I can represent the Army,” said Kris McCray, an Army Reservist who is now a contestant on “The Ultimate Fighter” reality show. “I don’t go out there and fight for myself. I fight for my family and the Army and I’m proud to have a sponsor that understands what that means.”

McCray is exactly who Team Rhino represents. The son of an Army first sergeant, he grew up in Germany and various other Army posts until it was his time to enlist. Serving eight years in the Army Reserve, McCray until January was a butcher by day (no really...he slaughtered beef) and a grappling instructor by night. He now trains full time. Over the last three years, McCray has been on a crusade, winning all 14 of his amateur and professional fights. But he’s also learning that success in MMA is demanding and there’s only one person in the cage at the end of the day.

“Fighting is a very selfish thing because it’s all about you and your schedule,” he

said. “Your sleep, your diet, your training all come first. I’ve always thought that it takes a village to raise a fighter, so you have to surround yourself with a good team or it’s just not worth it. With Team Rhino, it’s nice to have that camaraderie of fellow military people in your corner.”

THE NEXT UFC CHAMPION

It would be easy to assume the superior backbone of the American Soldier is the reason for Team Rhino’s success. Servicemen have a long and comfortable relationship with hard work and the outstanding win-loss ratio of Team Rhino is a sure sign it’s not averse to sacrificing during training so the real fight is easy. “Our guys won 90 percent of their fights last year and we’ve won every fight in 2010 so far,” Palmisciano said. “It won’t be long before you see a UFC champion who came from the Armed Forces. You can bet on it.”

Who knows, it could be you.

KRIS MCCRAY

SERVICE: Army Reservist (2000-2008)

PRO RECORD: 5-0

FUN FACT: Kris is a real life butcher when he’s not fighting, yet his nickname is “Savage.” Kris is on the current season of The Ultimate Fighter on Spike TV.

