

UFC 360

FABRICIO WERDUM CAN HE BREAK HAPA?

CHRIS WEIDMAN
BRING ON THE NEXT LEGEND

BEASTS FROM THE EAST

THE RUSSIAN FIGHTERS OF THE OCTAGON

TIM KENNEDY
RISING CONTENDER, ARMY GREEN BERET, OPERA LOVER

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A man in a red t-shirt and blue jeans stands on a ledge covered in graffiti. The background is a cloudy sky. A large red shield with a white skull and a red 'X' is overlaid on the image. The text 'MAN OF THE (DANGEROUS) ARTS' is written in white, distressed font across the shield.

MAN OF THE (DANGEROUS) ARTS

UFC MIDDLEWEIGHT TIM KENNEDY IS A LOT OF THINGS AT ONCE,
AND HEADING INTO HIS FIGHT WITH MICHAEL BISPING,
"TITLE CONTENDER" IS JUST ONE OF THEM

BY CHUCK MINDENHALL ✦ PHOTOGRAPHY BY SANDY CARSON





hen Tim Kennedy fought last November at the UFC's Fight for the Troops 3 card in Fort

Campbell, Kentucky, his worlds collided. Here was a staff sergeant in the United States Army's 7th Special Forces Group, who'd seen tours in both Iraq and Afghanistan and who'd earned a Bronze Star Medal for valor under fire, triumphantly returning in his other form—that of a mixed martial artist. From all around him came the shouts and cheers from his sisters and brothers in arms. The thing couldn't have been more poetic.

But that night went beyond any kind of spiritual homecoming for Kennedy. As he walked down to confront Rafael Natal in the main event, there were flashbacks—he saw faces that he hadn't seen since he was in the throes of battle.

"There are two special forces units that are assigned there—the 5th Special Forces Group and the aviation unit that flies all special forces around is also collocated there," Kennedy says. "I ran into pilots that I hadn't seen since I left. I ran into medics

at Fort Campbell that I hadn't seen since I was lifting one of my friends, who had been shot in the side, onto a helicopter. I remember looking into the medic's eyes and being, like, 'Hey, bro, you got this?' And the guy says, 'This is what I do, you go back to what you do.' The next time I see him is when I'm freaking walking out to the Octagon. I was thinking, *The last time I saw you, I was handing you my shot best friend.*"

With the atmosphere as electric as it was, it took Kennedy a few moments to let the chants subside. To hear him describe it, he was ready to burst through his skin, which was a new feeling for a guy who usually has a shark's conscience on fight night.

"I was waiting for them to stop because I'm not an emotional fighter," he says. "I'm a complete void, I'm devoid of emotion during a fight. And they're sitting there chanting—'Ranger up! Ranger up! U-S-A! Ken-nah-dee!—for four minutes. And I was, like, they've got to stop. I was like a spring that had been wound and wound and wound and wound that's just

waiting for them to stop so I could explode. They finally did at four minutes into the first round."

And when they did, Kennedy did what Green Berets under duress do. He executed. He dropped Natal where he stood with a lunging left hook, and the roof came off the bunker. Moments later, Kennedy sat perched on the fence, clutching at his heart and gesturing thank-yous to the servicemen and women who stood in ovation. It was as cool a scene as you'll get in the fight game.

"I'm 100 percent overwhelmed. Your job is infinitely harder than anything I could ever do in here," he said to the troops in his post-fight interview with Joe Rogan afterward. "I don't deserve to be here. You guys are my heroes, you guys are my idols. I'm a Christian, I give the glory to God, but I worship you guys. I love every one of you."

And that is Tim Kennedy in a nutshell—Green Beret, Airborne, sniper, ranger, mixed martial artist, believer, patriot, real-life action star. Then again, he also loves opera and wouldn't mind being more like Ewan McGregor, if you really want to know the truth.



ennedy grew up in Northern California, the middle of three children. His older brother, Nick, now

works as an EOD SWAT narcotics officer for the Sheriff's office in California. "He's a rock star," Tim says. His younger sister, Katie, home-schools her three children in something like the Kennedy manner. What is the Kennedy manner? For Nick, Tim and Katie, their parents were at opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of cultural broadening.

"They were supportive of everything, but my mom—and she even denies it a little bit—she put us in dancing lessons, cooking classes, piano lessons with Mrs. Hedlin, art classes, illustration," Kennedy says. "And then my dad was, like, 'We're going hunting, we're going shooting, we're building a car, you're going to be wrestling, you're going to be boxing.' To me, it's fairly black-and-white. These days my mom is, like, 'Who do you think drove you to your jiu-jitsu lessons?' And I'm, like, 'Well, you did obviously.' And she says, 'Then how was I not supportive of it?' See, she doesn't want to be the villain in

this. She's, like, 'I was just as supportive of you in this, I just wanted to make sure you had a solid base and foundation of diversity and understanding.'"

There's no denying that Kennedy has character diversity. Everybody by now knows about his decorated military background and his fighting foreground, but few know about his love of the symphony. Or that he embraces stage performance in general. Or that he can get down with Stravinsky as easy as he can Franklin Barbecue.

"We go to a lot of plays," he says. "We go to a lot of opera. Here in Austin—which is the culture mecca of Texas—it works out really well. And then every time we go back to California, we go to Davies Hall in San Francisco and the San Francisco Symphony."

Kennedy now lives in the liberal Texas capital, but he still spends a portion of his fight camps in Albuquerque, New Mexico, at Jackson-Winkeljohn's. He's doing the same for his upcoming bout with Michael Bisping, which will take place on April 16 at *The Ultimate Fighter Nations Finale* card in Quebec City. At 34 years old and closing in on a long-held title dream, Kennedy has to appreciate his arts on the fly, but, as a

relentless multitasker, he still manages.

"The problem for me is just time right now," he says. "I fought three times in 2013 and filmed three TV shows. And 2014 is not going to be any different. I'm already in a fight camp for a main event. I know I have a big TV show to film this year. I just don't have time to do the things I love, which is..." And here he smiles. "My dream come true would be to hop on my motorcycle and ride around the world going to different museums, trying different foods. That'd be it."

Sort of like Ewan McGregor and his buddy Charlie Boorman's *Long Way Around*? "That was the best documentary ever," Kennedy says.

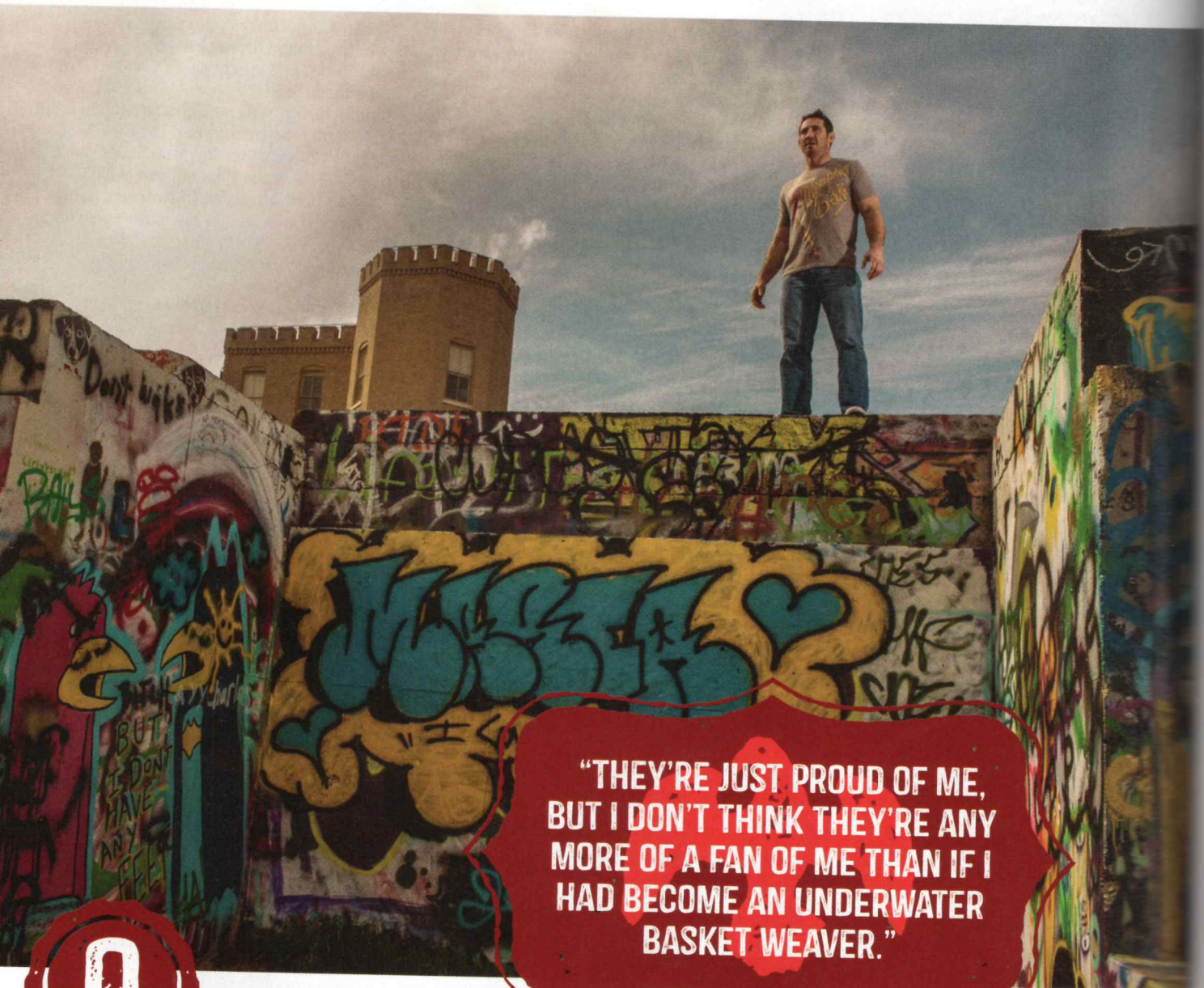
Maybe one day he and his brother Nick can navigate their own Road of Bones in filming a reality show, riding their motorcycles around the globe taking in adventure just as fast as they can find it.

"Nick's the same way—speaks a couple of languages, still takes his kids to the symphony," Kennedy says. "He does crazy things on his Ducati and still he tries to take in the sunset off his back porch."

The Kennedys are as unnerveingly poignant as they are badass, and sometimes they're both at the same time. ➔



"MY DREAM COME TRUE WOULD BE TO HOP ON MY MOTORCYCLE AND RIDE AROUND THE WORLD GOING TO DIFFERENT MUSEUMS, TRYING DIFFERENT FOODS. THAT'D BE IT."



"THEY'RE JUST PROUD OF ME, BUT I DON'T THINK THEY'RE ANY MORE OF A FAN OF ME THAN IF I HAD BECOME AN UNDERWATER BASKET WEAVER."

O

h yes, Michael Bisping—the man everybody in the

UFC's middleweight division wants to fight. When Kennedy beat Natal in November, he began his campaign to fight the perennial British contender next. Kennedy called out Bisping on Twitter, in interviews and through any other platform he was given. More pointedly, he said he wanted to “stab Bisping in the heart with a unicorn’s horn,” which remains one of the better attention grabbers ever issued in a callout.

UFC matchmaker Joe Silva finally made the fight after Bisping was cleared to compete again after having surgery for a detached retina. Now Kennedy can boil down his thoughts on the fight to just a single word.

“Excited,” he says. From there he runs off a military-like list of the reasons why.

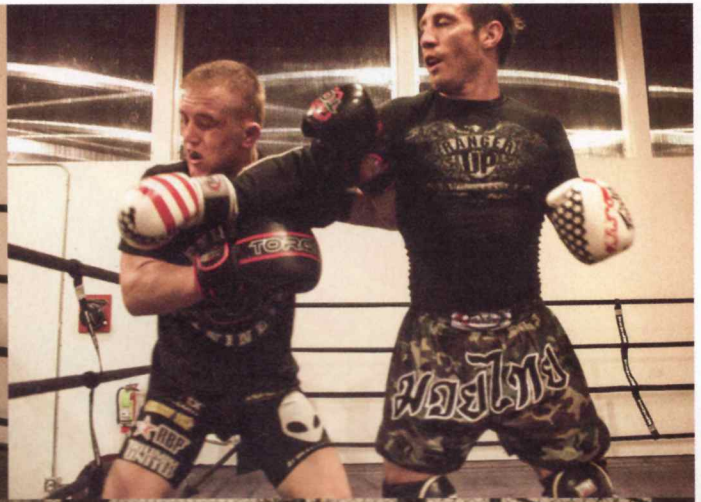
“Michael’s a really good fighter, first of all. He’s tough. He’s got a lot of great wins. He’s a UFC staple. He’s a marquee guy. He’s been in that title-contention-eliminator type of fight a few times. I’ve got a lot of respect for him as an athlete.

“And then, on the flipside, I don’t really like him, which always makes it fantastic,” he says. “To have a little extra motivation in the gym—a little extra motivation everyday to get up and go to training—it just makes it easier.”

When at home in Austin, Kennedy, ever the itinerant, trains at three different places. He does his jiu-jitsu with Paulo Brandao at Gracie Humaita, his sparring and conditioning at MMA Eastside Elite with Justin Larkin, and drills at Pinnacle with his primary striking coach Jason Webster.

“I love Austin,” he says. “When we first got here, we were walking past a bunch of theaters, we’re hearing all kinds of crazy Austin music, a bunch of different live venues. At one place they had live crawfish that were cooking, at another place they had amazing, award-winning brisket—so, like, oh my goodness, this place is fantastic.”

But he still trains in Albuquerque too, with Mike Winkeljohn and that whole crop of fight-game glitterati at Greg Jackson’s. If one thing is certain about him as a training partner, it’s this: Tim Kennedy is almost diabolical in how hard he pushes his teammates. Retired UFC fighter Jorge Rivera came out from Boston to train with Kennedy for a camp and said, “Tim nearly killed me” when they did their sprints in the Sandia Mountains after the gym sessions.



"You're out in Albuquerque and it's really chaos and anarchy of training," Kennedy says with that unnerving smile. "It's very scientific in the approach, but the execution is chaos and pain. One day you might be running sprints up sand dunes, and that's *after* you sparred that morning. Greg has a vision of what the point of each exercise is and an overall big picture of how it fits into your development for a particular fight or for you as a fighter, but as an individual you don't necessarily always see that."

It has all paid off. In Kennedy's debut at UFC 162, he out-landed Roger Gracie 126-16 in strikes. He brings relentless pressure in the Octagon. In fact, his only losses in the last seven years were to Luke Rockhold and Ronaldo Souza, and to this day many people thought he beat "Jacare." He *did* beat Robbie Lawler, who's since reinvented himself as a top-flight welterweight in the UFC. Kennedy says he's not surprised that the Strikeforce fighters are doing so well after being pulled back on the bowstring for so long before merging with the UFC.

"The Strikeforce guys are kind of coming into their own," he says. "We've just been

sort of hampered and stuck for forever, and now the floodgates are open and we're able to do anything and everything."

Right now for Kennedy, *anything* is beating Michael Bisping, and *everything* is winning that middleweight belt. He's climbing the ranks just as methodically as he did in his military career. And he knows he has the support of all those he served with and that his journey is one he shares with his comrades-in-arms.

"When I left active duty and came into the National Guard, all of my friends from every unit I've ever been in, they respected me for what I've done overseas and for who I was as a person," he says. "So even if I became a dog groomer, they would have been fans."

"But now that I've had such success in fighting and there's such a warrior mentality, the warrior ethos of Special Forces, it's so prevalent. They're just proud of me, but I don't think they're any more of a fan of me than if I had become an underwater basket weaver. They're proud that I represent them."

And if Fort Campbell proved to us anything, it's that Tim Kennedy is representing well. ○

KENNEDY'S HOME MOVIES

Another of Tim Kennedy's pastimes is putting out his own home movies, which range from pop-culture spoofs with a lesson attached to gonzo military-themed vignettes. "I'm one of the owners of Ranger Up, and the culture of that company is kind of kooky," he says. "We have a lot of success and name recognition from those videos. It's a form of marketing and advertisement, and it also develops personalities of guys that we can follow." Here are a few of his favorite works. youtube.com/RangerUpVideos

THE KATY PERRY IMPERSONATION

"We were attacking Katy Perry because she made fun of veterans. She essentially was being, like, 'You joined the military because your boyfriend breaks up with you.' So we're, like, *what?* We need to strike back."

"THE MOST DANGEROUS MAN IN THE WORLD" SEGMENTS

"Those are the ones where I'm in a suit rappelling off the side of walls or cooking in my kitchen disguised as a shrub."

BLACK SWAN SPOOF

"Got to dance around in a tutu."

