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ON THE COVER

Tim Kennedy



Be Hard To Kill



**Life lessons from
the battle-hardened
warrior philosopher**

BY ROBERT JORDAN • ALEX LANDEEN PHOTOS



Tim Kennedy

got tossed out of kindergarten for defending a young lady's haircut to a loudmouth bully. Granted, Tim did pop the kid in the mouth and toss him off the top of the jungle gym, but the cause was just, and the die was cast. Tim's total time in public school was measured in weeks, and his poor mother spent the next 10 years homeschooling him and trying to cultivate this hellion by immersing him in culture. The piano, dance and cooking classes turned out to be great places to meet chicks. Tim's dad, a narcotics cop, recognized the boy's talents and enrolled him in boxing and jiu jitsu. Thus the yin and the yang were balanced, and Tim rocketed into a world that he chose to shape as much as it shaped him.

Tim's parents pushed higher education, but a cop's salary doesn't go far in a family of five. A strong work ethic and an unbreakable spirit had him working everything from fast food to being a barback. Excelling at academics, he passed his high school exams at 16 and was off to junior college, then a four-year university. When money got tight, he found out he could lie about his age and enter bare-knuckle fighting contests on the Indian reservations and south of California in Tijuana. A lot of people will pay good money and make big bets when a white boy shows up someplace he doesn't belong. He figured out how he could make thousands of dollars by doing multiple fights per weekend and still pick up shifts at the bar. He was a raw force of nature, untamed and undaunted. But raising hell doesn't necessarily cultivate character. Tim Kennedy only cared about Tim Kennedy. He still had a long road ahead.

"He rolled into a valley an arrogant and impetuous boy and walked out of the same valley a humble and appreciative man."



Go Army Rangers

When 9/11 happened, Tim had just turned 23. He finished work that day and drove to the Army recruiter's station and got in line with 1,000 other angry Americans. He was already ranked in the top 10 in the world in professional mixed martial arts, but that didn't matter compared to his base need to find the evil behind the attacks and exterminate it. Tim already had a four-year degree but chose to go enlisted because, "Officers don't do shit."

One year and three months later, he was headed to basic. A smart kid, he schmoozed, cajoled, wormed and manipulated his way from one training to the next. Whether it

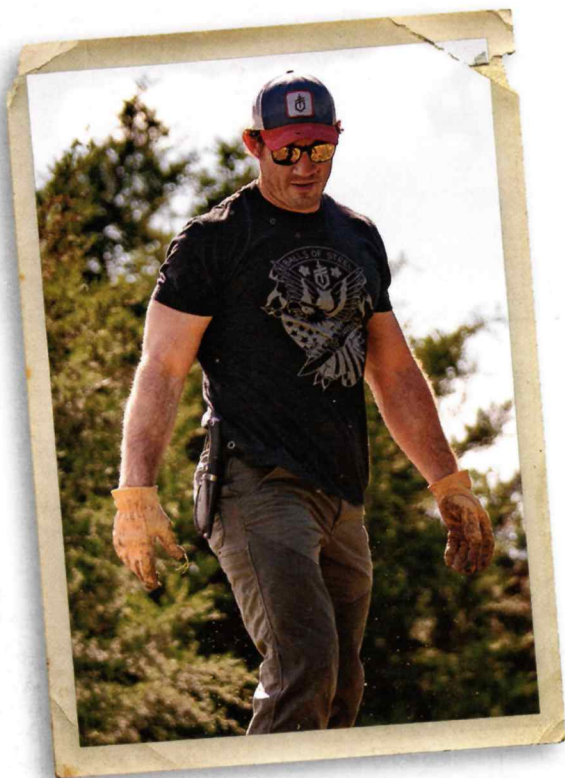
was timing, luck or sheer force of will, he managed to survive the crazy attrition rate of Ranger school and then the 7th Special Forces Group, the Green Berets. There he was designated an 18 Bravo (weapons specialist) and assigned to the CIF (Commander's In-extremis Force) despite the fact that he was new to the unit, and typically only seasoned, experienced soldiers get assigned to such an elite group. Two months after this assignment, Tim was rolling into Iraq on his first deployment. The CIF was assigned to the Special Operations Task Force charged with finding the al-Qaeda leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

Most men would be proud to have achieved

so much in such a short period of time, but Tim isn't most men. Talking to him, you get the feeling that this wasn't the high point of his life, but one of the lowest. He describes his arrogance and out-of-control ego. He talks about the leaders that tried to teach him the importance of putting the team before self. He laments the fact that it took him so long to learn the lessons and wishes he could go back and apologize to those unsung heroes for his shortcomings. Smart, strong, talented and unstoppable, he was a poster child for what he thought Special Forces should be. But his priorities were still those of a boy. His self-worth trumped the mission and the men around him.

"If you ever get the chance to listen to him, get out your pen and take some notes."





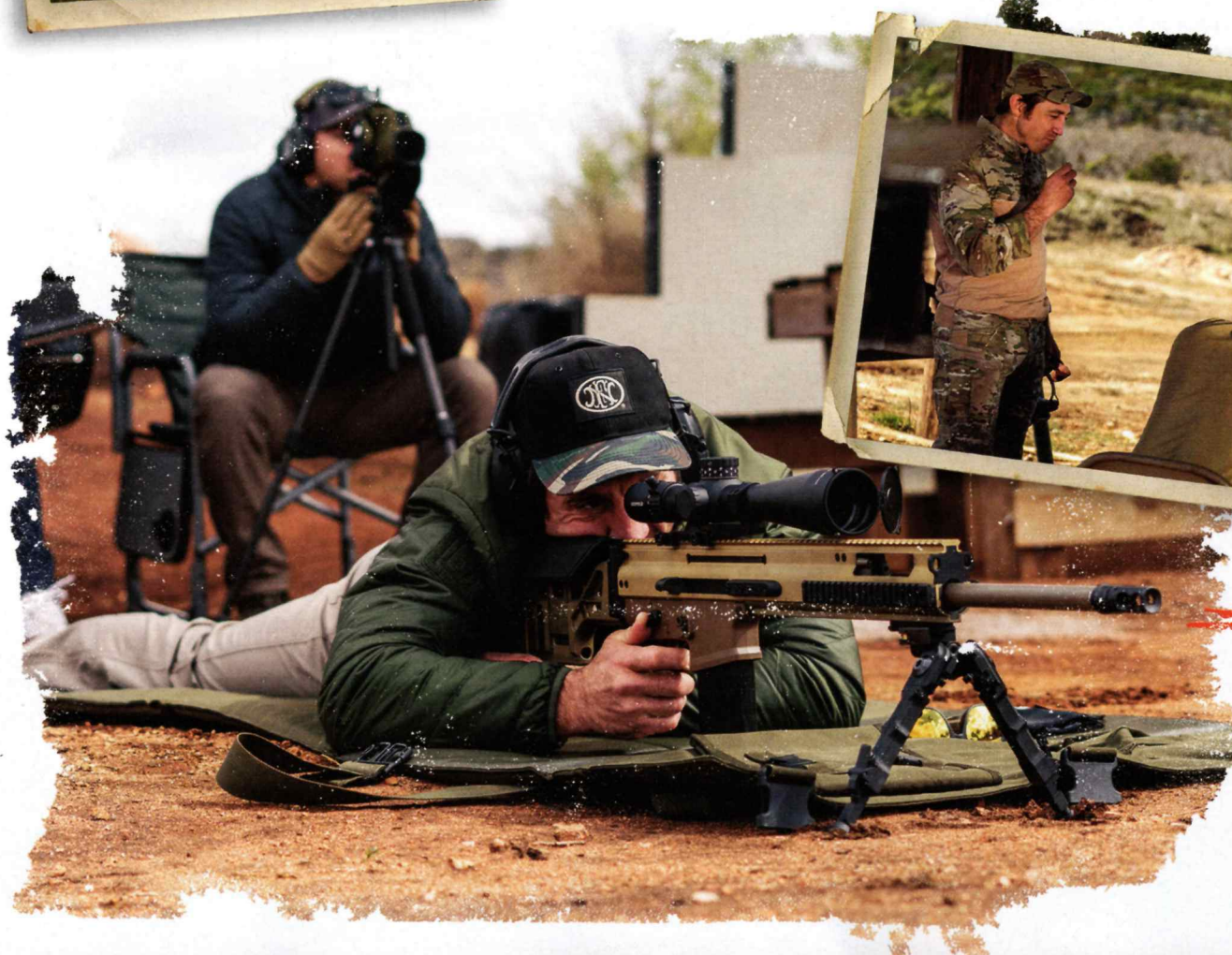
Character Building

But Tim's story didn't end here. Fate is a harsh and unforgiving mistress and she had more lessons in store. Some time later, Tim was in Afghanistan assigned to an ISAF force that was rolling through a valley on patrol when it was attacked by hundreds of Taliban guerrilla fighters that had planted IEDs to take out the vehicles, and they held the high ground. The vehicle in front of him exploded, the one behind had an RPG skip off the hood while it was riddled with PKM fire. In a matter of seconds they were being overrun. Tim pulled out a gunner pinned in his overturned turret and came up with a torso cut in half. He tried fruitlessly to engage a wave of men with his sniper rifle. A man who had always controlled the world found himself nearly helpless and facing certain death. At the last moment a machine gunner saved his life by mowing down a line of Al Qaeda as they nearly overran

his position. The fighting went on for three days. They held the location an additional week before reinforcements brought him out to safety.

Kennedy realized he wasn't Superman. He wasn't able to control every situation and bend it to his will. He wasn't able to conquer all odds by himself. But he was a survivor, and a member of a team—a team that was only alive because they risked their lives to save each other. He rolled into a valley an arrogant and impetuous boy and walked out of the same valley a humble and appreciative man. Everything changed. The cost had been horrific, but he would never again look down at the world and those around him. This was a second chance and it would not be wasted.

How do we define character? Is it simply doing the right thing when no one is looking? It is more than that. It is the recognition that we, as an individual, are not the most important thing. Our importance is second to real things



Today, Tim works a lot of jobs but his passion truly shines on the range, where he is dedicated to giving students the very best life-saving instruction available to the public.



like our spouse and kids. We also come second to ideas like freedom and country. Putting your team, your God, your family, your ideals first every day isn't a burden, it is a blessing. It creates purpose and the happiness of being a part of something bigger. Tim finally learned that. He embraced it. And quietly, everything in his life shifted into the right place.

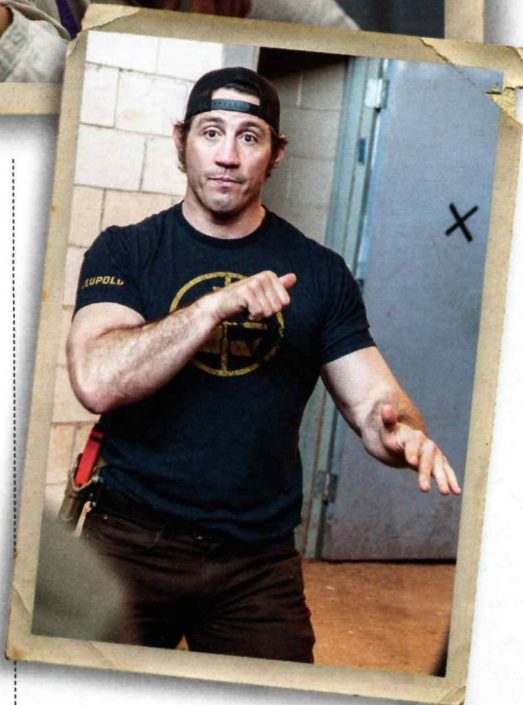
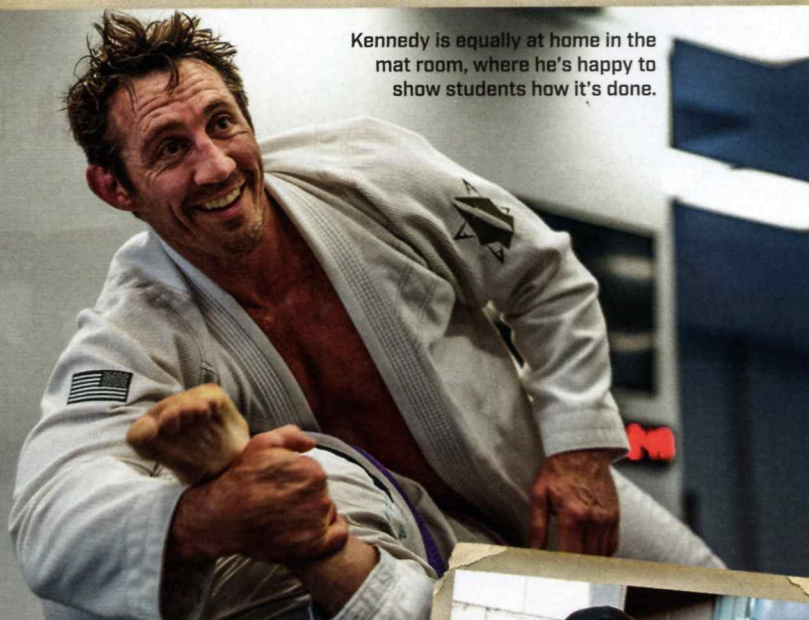
Shifting Gears

When Tim was back stateside he continued to fight professionally. In 2012 he took leave one weekend to fight in the Inter-Fight League, which was televised on Fox. This was his sixteenth fight while on active duty. He successfully fought Ryan McGiver on Saturday and was standing tall before the man on Monday. The man wasn't happy. The brass had seen the fight and figured out that one of their active-duty special forces soldiers was moonlighting as a cage fighter. They told him it didn't fit in with the motto of "Quiet Professionalism" and he would have to choose one career or the other. Tim offered to become a recruiting tool as a MMA fighter and soldier, but they declined. He had a tough choice to face.

After eight years of active duty, Tim switched over to the National Guard, where he was required to have a job outside of the military. They were happy to let him pursue his fighting career. On top of that, he got to keep his Special Forces tab. Two years later, Army recruiting was in the toilet and Big Army came back and paid him a lot of money to paint his tour bus camouflage and start stumping for the cause. At the same time, he was making runs for titles and getting paid a fair amount to brawl in the octagon. Tim was a professional athlete, a hero, a household name and making more money than he needed to survive.

"Today Tim is retired from professional fighting but you would never know it from his physical training schedule."

Kennedy is equally at home in the mat room, where he's happy to show students how it's done.



Successful professional athletes hit that point where they have extra cash. What they do with it shows us a lot about their character. A young Tim Kennedy might have bought fast cars and lived a lavish lifestyle. He might have partied it all away living only for the moment. Even Jack London said he would rather be ashes than dust. But self-centered hedonism was no longer on his radar. He was now married to Ginger and he asked her to help him decide how they should invest this money for the long term. They weren't simply going to give it to an investment banker and watch it grow. They agreed they wanted their money to do something meaningful. Tim Kennedy, the entrepreneur and philanthropist, was born.

The Three-Ps Philosophy

The first company Tim and Ginger supported was Ranger Up, a six-month-old apparel company started by an Army veteran that made T-shirts with slogans that every enlisted guy and gal wished they could tell their CO at some time or another. Tim was still on active duty, so he was a quiet money man behind the scenes. The company boomed and after this initial success, Tim and Ginger decided they needed an investment plan. They

decided any venture they would throw in with must have three Ps: a plan, a purpose and the right people.

Lots of people want to make a better mousetrap. Some even have a good product. But most do not have a realistic plan of where they are, where they want to be and how they are going to get there. Secondly, not all products are equal. The Pet Rock might turn into a money maker, but is it helping make the world a better place or is the owner simply filling his pockets? Finally, you need the right people. They needed to

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get to know them and figure out what makes them tick. They wanted people who were passionate about what they were doing. They wanted people with character.

Non-Stop 24/7/365

Today Tim is retired from professional fighting but you would never know it from his physical training schedule. He is involved in dozens of projects and stays busy from morning until night. He is the face of California's 811 "Call before you dig," Nosler's Project 48 to educate first-time gun owners and tons of other good causes. But his main businesses are Woobie Shoes (woobieshoes.com); Live Relentless nutrition (liverelentless.com); Apogee Strong education (apogeestrong.com); Apogee Cedar Park, an Action Academy elementary school (apogeecedarpark.org); TKO Operations Consultants (timken-nedymma.com) and Sheepdog Response training (sheepdogresponse.com).

Sheepdog Response takes civilians and puts them through the rigors of firearms, hand-to-hand combat and emergency medical response in much the same way as a military basic training or law enforcement academy. The motto is "Be Hard to Kill." With a quiet nod to Lt. Col Dave Grossman who popularized the idea that each person is a sheep, a wolf or a sheepdog, Tim starts and helps people on the path to self-reliance, self-motivation and the mindset of a warrior. The other companies are important, but Sheepdog Response is where Tim teaches regularly and pushes students to pursue a life of reflection, self-improvement and cultivate character. The goal isn't faster split times. The goal is making the world a better place.

At the heart of every true warrior is the belief in something bigger than himself. That inspires Tim Kennedy to share his time and knowledge with others who can benefit from his varied experiences.

So who is Tim Kennedy? A sniper? A Green Beret? An MMA champion? A devoted husband and father? An entrepreneur? An internet sensation? Or maybe a guide for life values? I think he might be all of these things and quite a bit more.

The Complete Package

He certainly isn't perfect. He acknowledges his checkered past and frequently comments on his own daily mistakes. But he does it with a laugh and smile, and the recognition that no one grows by being perfect. They grow by getting back up each time they fall down. Tim has been knocked down plenty and he knows he will be knocked down again. But each time he gets up, he polishes off another rough edge, he grows a little more, and he pushes forward on his path of improving himself and everyone around him. If you ever get the chance to listen to him, get out your pen and take some notes. You will walk away a better person for the experience. ●

Of course you want more Tim Kennedy. When you're done with this kickass article, visit ballisticmag.com for exclusive video with Tim Kennedy and Athlon Outdoors content creator Alex Landeen. Catch them talking about the finer points of coffee, guns and tacos.

