



(Top) Steve Forti on deployment with Special Forces in Wardak Province, Afghanistan, in 2009; (bottom) Forti with four-star general Mark Milley, Army chief of staff, at the Army's Best Ranger Competition at the FitFight challenge area this year.

FITFIGHT CLUB

Special Forces veteran **Steve Forti** creates the first global fitness competition app

No one knows the importance of maintaining superior fitness better than a U.S. soldier on deployment, where finely honed strength and agility literally can mean the difference between life and death. Retired Army Special Forces veteran Steve Forti is taking the idea of enhanced fitness to a whole new level with the development of FitFight, a mobile platform that allows every user to create and engage in fitness challenges around cash-, product- or pride-based incentives.

"The idea was inspired while being deployed with Army Special Forces to Romania," explains Forti, a former Green Beret with more than 23 years of military experience. "Many members of this circle were competing in fitness challenges and sharing results via email as a way to motivate each other. It just stuck with me that there are athletes with a gladiatorial spirit all around the world who want to compete, but because of distance or technology, they can't or don't do it."

Forti, with the assistance of several other veterans and active-duty servicemen, launched FitFight (fitfightme.com) in 2016, and the company has experienced explosive growth since then, with more than 5,000 active accounts in some 141 countries. The company's motto is "Train Locally, Dominate Globally," and the online- and mobile-based platform makes it convenient

for athletes from around the world to compete anytime, anywhere. Approximately 66 percent of FitFight competitors are men, and 33 percent are women, with ages ranging from 18 to more than 54.

"Our mission is to inspire competition across all members of the armed forces. I want everyone to be putting the pedal down and competing against their fellow service members across all the branches," notes Forti, who is CEO of the company. "For example, we are hoping to launch an Army versus Navy push-up challenge in time for the Army-Navy game this year. We would like the FitFight app to be in the hands of every possible recruit, soldier, sailor, airmen, Marine, Coast Guard, separated veteran, and their family members."

Other key members of the FitFight team include chief operating officer Brandon Kennedy, an active duty U.S. Army Ranger, and director of new business development Eamon Coyne, a retired Navy Signalman. "BK (Kennedy) consistently, in the Ranger tradition, leads the way by being the first in most competitions," Forti notes. "Eamon is a very competitive CrossFitter and has been instrumental in bringing more than 25 brands, many veteran-owned, to the Fitfight platform."

FitFight features three different types of competition categories. "Pride" competitions are free to enter and winners get bragging rights; "prize" competitions include an entry fee with a portion of the proceeds paid to the winner and to the organizer of the event, and "product" challenges award specialized gear or goods to winners. Registered users can create their own challenges in the "pride" and "prize" categories. FitFight competitions are generally less than 10 minutes and cover a variety of fitness activities, including CrossFit, power lifting and sports skills challenges; winning competitions means turning in either the minimum time or maximum reps, depending

on the activity. The app can be downloaded from either the App Store or from Google Play.



Steve Forti

Forti says participating in FitFight competitions can help veterans by giving them a sense of purpose and stability. "When veterans separate, there is a loss of continuity in their lives," he explains. "The positive effects of physical fitness for depression, PTSD, anxiety, etc., are undeniable. If we give veterans a reason to train, then we are doing a good thing for the community."

Although FitFight initially focused on attracting active-duty troops, veterans and their family members, the competitions have expanded to include people from all walks of life and all over the globe. "While our hearts are always in support of veterans, the entire country needs to get back to competing, and quite frankly, get back into shape," Forti remarks. "We have Fitfighters submitting videos from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. I think connecting people in places like that with people at home has extraordinary meaning."

Forti says he and the FitFight team are discussing participation with high-ranking members of the different service branches to get the platform formally endorsed by the military. "Our goal is to use it as a recruiting and retention tool across all members of the armed forces, as well as a much-needed connectivity piece for separating veterans," he says. "I hope the community continues to grow and foster positive competition. I want videos submitted from the decks of aircraft carriers, a FOB in Afghanistan, and a kid waiting to ship to boot camp. The idea of the 82nd Airborne competing against the 101st, or a fleet-to-fleet inspired competition, is what gets us up in the morning. We have built the app so it is scalable to handle all the men and women that want to compete... So let's go!"