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Jo Anita Miley  
256-895-1585  
JoAnita.Miley@usace.army.mil

## **Corps employee engineer by day, brawler by night**

*By Jo Anita Miley*

By day, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Huntsville Center's Molly Richardson is a mild-mannered structural engineer in the Center's Engineering Directorate.

By night she is Molly "Pretty Girl Swag" Richardson, the tenacious brawler. A mixed-martial arts fighter.

For the past eight months, the 5-foot, 3-inch, 115-pound engineer has trained to compete as an amateur mixed-martial arts fighter.

MMA is a full-contact, combat sport that allows the use of both striking and grappling techniques, both standing and on the ground, including boxing, wrestling, Brazilian jiu-jitsu, muay Thai, kickboxing, taekwondo, karate, judo and other styles. Fighters must be trained heavily in striking and grappling in order to succeed in the cage.

Richardson said she has played sports her entire life – soccer, softball, basketball, tennis and even football. She is also a wide-receiver and kicker for a semi-professional all women's football team called the Huntsville Tigers.

Participating in sports usually reserved for male athletes has always been an interest for her. However, she said it wasn't until June when she landed a permanent job at the Center that she realized she had found her ultimate sport.

"I played soccer all the way through college and wanted a good workout when I moved here," Richardson said.

"One of my friends was training in MMA, and told me it was a killer workout (which it definitely is) and it turned out that I really liked the combat side of the sport," she said.

There is also a huge mental aspect of the sport. Richardson said training as an MMA athlete is almost like chess.

"You have to try to read ahead on what your opponent's game plan is and what their next move might be," Richardson said. "Except you only have a split second to change your next move and plan to counteract theirs."

Richardson said she also loves the excitement that comes with combat sports like MMA. Because of this passion, she decided to begin competing in the sport and officially launched her fighting career March 24 in a face-off with another amateur MMA fighter, Anna Smith, at Huntsville's Von Braun Center's Propst Arena.

"It was a good fight, with some intense moments" Richardson said. "During the last part of the match, my opponent was able to pin my arm behind my back in a way that I couldn't get it loose, which gave her the win by arm submission," she said. "I learned a lot in the octagon that I will use as I train for my next competition.

Although Richardson didn't prevail, fighting in this match was the first step on the path to launching her career into the MMA world.

She said the fight was a testament to the effort she has put into the sport so far and gave her a glimpse of what she needs to do in order to succeed in future bouts.

Because athletes normally only plan one fight ahead, Richardson said she doesn't know when she will compete again, but she is very eager for this opportunity. She will work closely with her trainer, Jason Carley of Riviera Fitness, to train for her next fight.

"I love competing and I can't wait to get back into the cage again," Richardson said.

Preparing for a match is a huge effort that requires lots of preparation inside and outside of the ring.

Richardson said each fighter needs a great trainer and good sponsors to get some visibility within the MMA world.

"As a fighter, I focus on improving my fighting skills through strength and conditioning training. Outside of the gym, I am looking for sponsors willing to support my efforts and accomplishments," Richardson said.

"Several sponsors supported me in my first fight - Knuckleheads Sports Pub and Restaurant, Partners Bar and Grille, XtremeXile and the Huntsville Tigers," she said.

When asked how a person can begin MMA fighting, Richardson said finding a local gym or training facility that offers MMA classes is the first step.

In addition to training, participating in local amateur MMA fights is extremely important for visibility and experience. Huntsville was a great place for her to do both.

Richardson said her initial goals with MMA were to learn self defense and to keep in shape.

However, she has gained a lot more than she bargained for, and anticipates a great future competing in the sport.

Now she would really like to continue to compete and maybe even go into higher levels of competition within MMA.

Richardson said she'd like to explore other combat sports. But for now, MMA is her passion.