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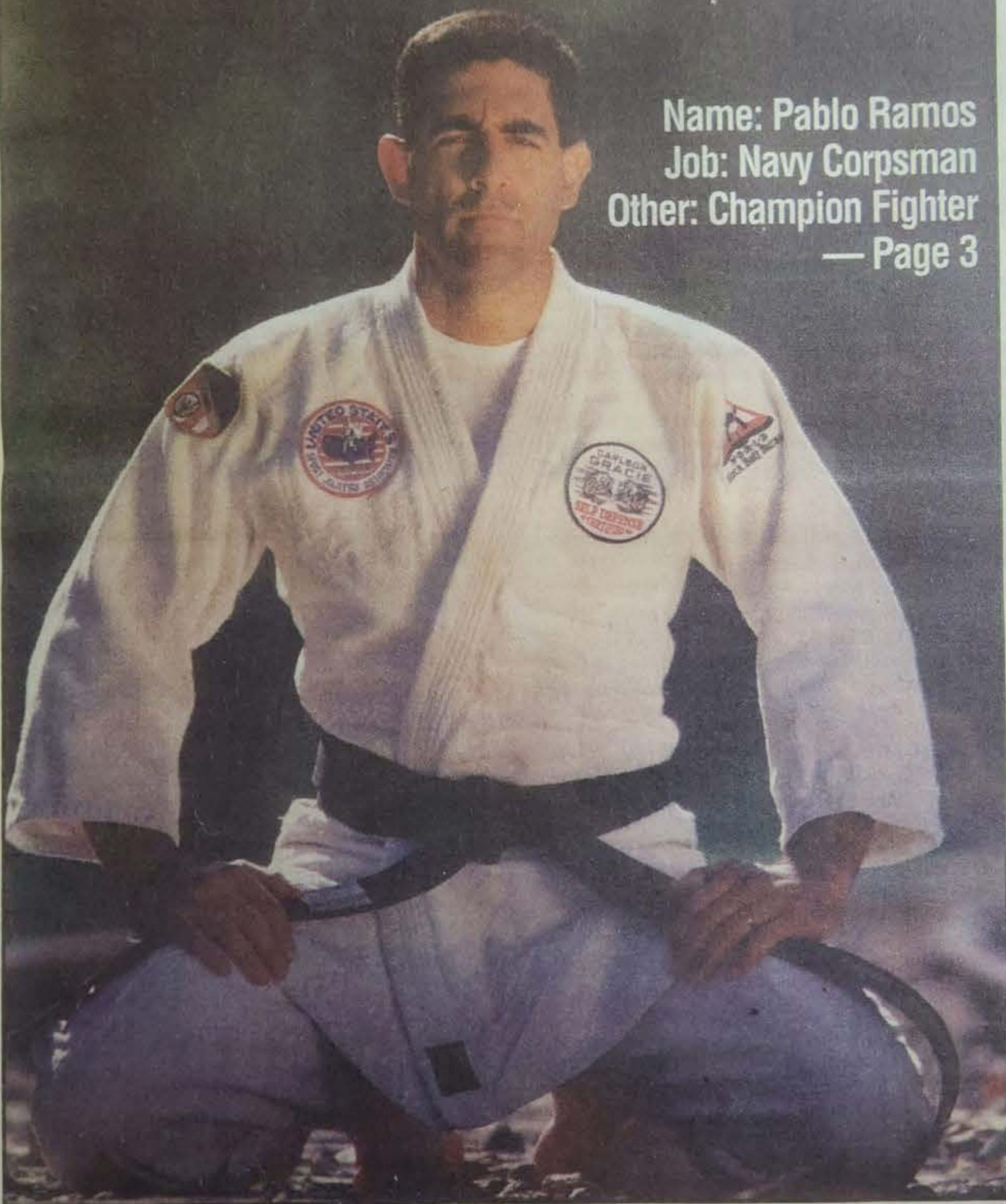
Our commitment to the future"

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PAGE 2

Martial Artistry



Name: Pablo Ramos
Job: Navy Corpsman
Other: Champion Fighter
— Page 3

Forward presence key to international influence for U.S.

By Stephen Joel Trachtenberg

WASHINGTON (NWSB) — "The United States must continue to remain engaged with the world, diplomatically, economically and militarily," said Secretary of Defense William Cohen in the Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review.

Why? Our nation has become increasingly interdependent with the rest of the world through foreign trade, investment and alliances. The U.S. must protect our vital overseas economic and security interests and maintain an international environment of peace and stability.

How do we do this? Forward presence by U.S. Navy aircraft carrier battle groups and amphibious ready groups. As Secretary Cohen stated in a press conference May 15, 1997, "If you don't have that forward deployed presence, you have less of a voice, less of an influence."

Just as international businesses cannot operate effectively without overseas offices, the Department of Defense cannot fulfill its mission without the physical presence offered by forward-deployed naval forces. Land and air forces based in the United States may be able to deploy overseas in the event of conflict but their use is limited to regions where we have sufficient military infrastructure to support them, and their operations will be subject to disapproval or restriction by the host nation.

The U.S. can no longer rely on our friends in strategic locations to agree to the deployment of U.S. forces to their bases. Even a NATO ally such as Italy drew the line in 1995 and indicated it did not want the U.S. to deploy Air Force F-117 stealth aircraft to Aviano Air base to participate in Operation Deny Flight in Bosnia. No such restrictions were imposed on Navy aircraft aboard the aircraft carrier George Washington operating free of political constraint in the Adriatic Sea. Aircraft carriers are sovereign U.S. territory that can be strategically placed wherever and whenever U.S. interests dictate, without straining relations or imposing on our allies.

When Saddam Hussein sent forces north into Kurdish territory in August 1996, alarming

see PRESENCE, page 6

Inside this issue

Yorktown News	Page 2	Living	Page 9
Chapel Schedule	Page 2	Concert Line	Page 11
Feature Story	Page 3	On the Town	Page 11
NFSC Calendar	Page 4	Classifieds	Page 14
Yorktown Honors	Page 8		



COSMIC BOWL

Page 2

NEW



OMBUDSMAN

Page 8

Faith drives champion martial artist

By Chris Newman

They came from around the world, by invitation only, to the Shaolin Temple in the Hunan Province of China. They were martial arts fighters competing in a "San Shou," or open fighting competition, in which competitors could use whatever fighting style they wanted. They were the world's toughest men. And among them was Pablo Ramos, a U.S. Navy corpsman.

"We (fought) three rounds of two minutes," said Ramos, recalling the 1997 Chinese National Wushu Championships, to which he traveled in August. "You're allowed to kick or punch, but no joint blows. We wear gloves and feet wraps, with optional chest protection and head gear.

"You are allowed to grab your opponent and pin them," continued Ramos, who's now stationed at Naval Weapons Station Yorktown. "The object is to control or dominate your opponent on the ground in order to gain points."

Fighters win matches by either points or by TKO (technical knockout).

"Most of my wins were TKOs," Ramos recalled. "Either they couldn't take it or were injured."

His opponents had one big advantage, said Ramos. Choke holds — a major emphasis of jujitsu — were not allowed. It didn't matter. After six fights, he had won the men's middleweight sparring division in the 35-39 age group.

Forget Van Damme, this guy's real

Ramos originally entered the services as a Marine, but switched to the Navy in 1985.

"I joined the Navy because I wanted to travel and study," he said. "As a matter of fact, I'm getting my M.B.A."

Originally, Ramos served as a dental technician but switched to opticals during Desert Storm in 1991. He is now a corpsman with the Naval Ophthalmic Support and Training Activity (NOSTRA), the Yorktown facility responsible for manufacturing half of the U.S. military's eyeglasses.

A busy Navy career hasn't stopped Ramos, 37, from his commitment to the martial arts. He is a Jujitsu black belt of the 6th degree, practicing the art since he was 13. He also serves as a teacher to a small group of students.

Many of the open-form competitions Ramos participates in are dominated by "grapplers," or wrestlers. Opponents specializing in disciplines that use body blows as their main tactic, such as Tae Kwon Do and karate, are easy prey for a grappler when taken down, because punching and kicking do little good when a wrestler is manipulating him or her into a pin.

Jujitsu is, therefore, an effective technique.

"It's the Japanese style of wrestling where the main goal is to manipulate joints and cut off air or blood supply to the head in order to neutralize the opponent," he said.

Ramos stresses that awareness of body position controls the fight: "It's basically positioning yourself to offset their center of balance."

During demonstrations he likes to show groups that size doesn't matter, and is actually a weakness. Ramos gets the biggest man in the room and a small woman and has the man hold her from behind in any stance. Ramos shows how if the woman moves her feet just a few inches and re-positions herself, she can throw the man off balance using her lower center of gravity.

Enabling women to defend themselves is one of the benefits to learning martial arts. According to Ramos, the U.S. Sports Jujitsu Federation President Graciella Casillas-Boggs had to use her training once when she was involved in a car accident on the highway — a man rear-ended Casillas-Boggs and attacked her, so she fought him off.

Ramos, who is cool and calm in demeanor, has also had to resort to using jujitsu when he and his wife were attacked by three men in California. Just one of the assailants managed to get away.

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Balanced attack to life

Ramos' wife, Ada, is also a martial arts specialist. She was a regional Jujitsu champion in California and also won Tae Kwon Do regional and state championships in Virginia. They met while she was studying at the Naval Medical Center San Diego where he worked, and married in 1992. Their two boys, Paulino, 4; and Jose, 2, are certainly welcomed by Ramos to take up the sport, but, he says, he needs to balance their interests with his own.

"If my son says, 'I don't want to go,' he doesn't have to tell me twice," Ramos says. "(He) can go kick a soccer ball ... If they like (martial arts), then that's what they'll do."

That's because martial arts is not the major focus for Ramos and his family.

"The number one reason behind my success is the Lord," he said, adding that a strong education and religious background are the means by which he has achieved such success since immigrating to the U.S. from Puerto Rico. He credits his faith with raising him out of a poor background as well as with his success in the fighting arena.

During a fight, when he thinks he cannot continue, Ramos says his faith has given him the strength to win. His remarks are very similar to those often heard spoken by another champion — heavyweight boxer Evander Holyfield.



Photo by Harold J. Gerwien

Pablo Ramos is familiar with a couple of uniforms — the Navy dungarees he wears when he works at NOSTRA, and the gi he wears as a champion martial artist.

Olympic dreams

Running is the king of exercises, said Ramos. It builds muscle strength and endurance while working the cardiovascular system.

Ramos limits his weight training because it adds too much bulk and limits flexibility. An opponent of hulking proportions will tire quickly.

"You hit me with a hammer," he says. "But on the other hand, we look to build an iron chain with a little iron ball at the end. It's much more efficient."

Calisthenics are another important part of jujitsu training. Such exercises are good for localized muscle endurance, Ramos said, especially with important muscles like the biceps, which can decide extended struggles as opponents vie for position.

He trains three times a day to keep up his technique, and said his students train four to eight hours a week. His students, he notes, share his drive to win, and if they are preparing for the world or Olympic level competition, they will practice at least 18-20 hours a week.

In January 1998, Ramos will compete at the 1998 Goodwill Martial Arts Games as a member of Team USA in Cancun, Mexico. He hopes that a strong showing by the U.S. will help generate support within the U.S. Olympic committee.

And support will certainly help Ramos in his next challenge — coaching. Ramos is excited about what awaits his students, as he feels there is a chance jujitsu will be a demonstration sport at the 2004 Summer Olympic Games, following the lead of Tae Kwon Do — an event that was a demonstration sport in 1996.

Ramos will continue to compete, too. But he admits his plans don't include a certain popular event — the Ultimate Fighting Championships (UFC). The controversial event, which is often put on as a pay-per-view special, takes place in different areas of the country. Ramos entered and advanced to the semifinals in the fourth UFC before he was injured.

Unimpressed by the UFC's lack of regulation of fighters' training regimens, he decided to focus on other priorities. If the shelves of trophies he and his students continue to win are any indication, that focus has paid off.