

# METAL



# MILITIA



## Behind-the-scenes with powerlifting's brotherhood of Iron by *Steve Colescott*

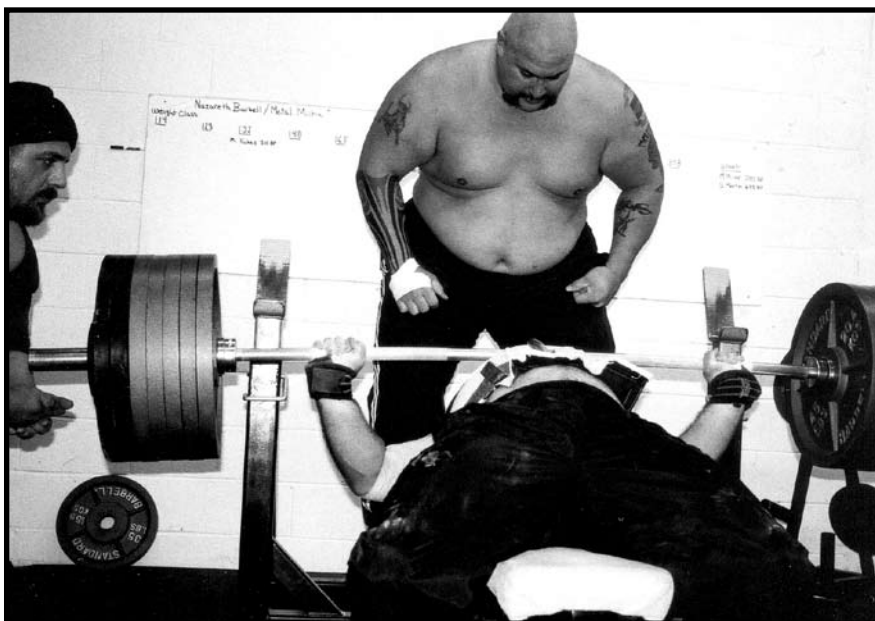
"What's the deal with these Metal Militia guys? Aren't the Westside Barbell guys the ones to beat?"

My friend Josh has been lifting since college but this was the first time he had ever been to a powerlifting meet. This was the first question he'd asked in awhile. In fact, I thought he would still be pissed at me. About an hour ago, I had blocked him from making a pass at a curvy 5'10" blonde with a nose-ring and a cheap blotchy-blue tattoo on her arm.

I explained that since powerlifters aren't known for having groupies, the odds were very good that this girl was dating one of the lifters. The last thing he needed was to have a 900-pound squatter drive his head through the wall.

His question was a good one though. We were sitting at the IPA Nationals and there were as many lifters wearing Metal Militia and Nazareth Barbell logos on their gear as there were those wearing the hometown Westside Barbell logo.

I had been hearing murmurs about the bench press prowess of the Metal Militia from the iron grapevine and on Internet powerlifting discussion boards over the past year. I was amazed to later find that the two teams were one and the same; Nazareth Barbell was a hardcore lifting gym in Eastern PA that was the Pennsylvania chapter of the Metal Militia.



A few phone calls later, I learned that the Metal Militia was more than just a lifting team; it was a dramatic shift in thinking, both in training methodology and the social mindset of powerlifting. Even more exciting, I learned that the team planned a hardcore weekend bench session just a few weeks away and that Militia leader Bill Crawford was coming out to Nazareth to go for a new PR. I was invited out to check out the action and didn't have to deliberate long before I ordered a cheap flight and packed up my camera and gymbag.

Those of you unfamiliar with Bill Crawford obviously are not regular followers of the PL scene. Crawford has been coverman and the feature story in multiple issues of Powerlifting USA. He didn't get on the cover because PLUSA editor Mike Lambert thinks he's cute. His dogged pursuit of the big 800-pound bench press was what earned him that honor.

To say that the Nazareth Barbell Club is in the middle of nowhere doesn't do "nowhere" justice. First you have to drive out to nowhere and then head another 45 minutes toward nothing. When I pulled up and saw a rather nondescript white building that looked like it may have been an old VFW hall, I knew this had the potential to be the perfect hardcore gym. Free of the high-rent strip mall neon and aerobic/anorexic clientele, this was a serious no-BS place to build muscle and power. The pounding anger of death metal reverberating through the cinderblock walls serving as a final notice, "Beware all ye who enters here."

Big Bill Crawford was warming up on the bench when I arrived. Inarguably one of, if not THE, greatest bench pressers to don a bench shirt, his warm-ups were more than most competitors' top squat weights. His goal today was to drive up a bar-bending 765-pounds.

While Crawford may have been the top dog here, this was definitely no one-hound kennelshow. Man-mountain Mike Miller, who was preparing for a charge at the 700-pound barrier, could never be confused with a Chihuahua. Female lifters Jenny Burkie, Janet Farrone and Deb Ames (co-owner of Nazareth Barbell with Mike Miller) were benching weight well in excess of 200 pounds. Numerous lighter lifters such as Steve Castone, Bobby Fields and Louie Einfeld, who I am ashamed to say are not well-known in the powerlifting world, were benching weights which will surely catapult them to power stardom in the near future. Not a poodle to be found in the house.

As in all hardcore gyms, there was an aggressive energy in the air. Lifters paced like caged panthers, mentally preparing themselves for their next set.

## METAL MILITIA NUMBERS

Walk into any real power gym and the members talk about what numbers they can put up. The Metal Militia is not different, except they hold the same pride in getting a novice up to their top lift as they do in having an elite member capture a world record. Here are some of the lifts back when I visited them.

**Steve "The Crusher" Castone** started with a 135 BP. Just did 550. **Deb Ames** broke women's world record bench press with 250, 405 squat and 400 deadlift. **Louie Einfeld** held IPA 181-pound junior record for squat DL and total. Benched 470 in a meet (has done 500 in the gym). **Bobby "The Freak" Fields** has squatted 900, deadlifted 700, benched 675 at 242-pound class. **Stan "Ox" Martin** has benched 655. One of the top 50 strongest heavyweight of all time. **Hal Wilson** is a masters lifter (competing for over 15 years) benches 470, squats 600 and deadlifts 575. **Mike "Tarzan" Walls** is a three-lift 220-pound masters lifter that benches 315, squats 505, deadlifts 475. He has only been powerlifting one year. **Chris Hicks** is a 145-pound junior (18 years old) that has benched 295 in a meet but has done 305 for a double in the gym. **Mike "Rage" Miller** has benched 705, squatted 1220, and deadlifted 655. He has had a pro wrestling career and a small role in the awarding-winning film *The Wrestler* opposite Mickey Rourke. **Ryan "Guinee or Bulldog" DeFalco** has only lifting been 18 months but has a 510 bench. **Brian "Lord Olrick" Olrick** started six months ago. Was benching 425 when he got here but now he has done 455 for a triple. **Mike Coons**: 132-pound Junior (17 years old) BP 350, SQ 505, DL 325. **Bob O'Bryan** is 57 yrs old and in the 308-class. He started less than a year ago and his bench went from 300 to 400. **John Graube** has a 640 bench in the over-fifty class. **Bobbie "Dragon Lady" Graube** has done a 260 bench (IPA Women's world Record). **Jennie Burkie** is an IPA World Record holder (118-pound class) with a 230 bench and 405 squat. **Jeff McVicar** has benched 665 BP in the 220-class. **Janet "Filthy Mouth" Farrone** has a 235 bench in the 105-pound class. **Sebastian ("Burn Dog" or "the Dark One") Burns** has a 725 BP (IPA World record), second highest bench in the 242 by formula. **Brian "House" Riley** has a 670 BP (IPA Amateur Sub-master World Record). **Glenn Chabot** has won the Arnold Classic BP Competition with a 722-pound bench. Has the third biggest raw bench (no bench shirt) in the world 665-pounds. **Paul Bower** has a 475 bench press, 815 squat and 600 deadlift. He is ranked 33rd in the 220-pound class, with an 1800 total.

## METAL MILITIA

### MUGSHOTS



"Luscious" Lew Einfeld



Bobby Fields  
"The Freak"



Dick Crane



Steve Castone  
"The Crusher"



John Graube

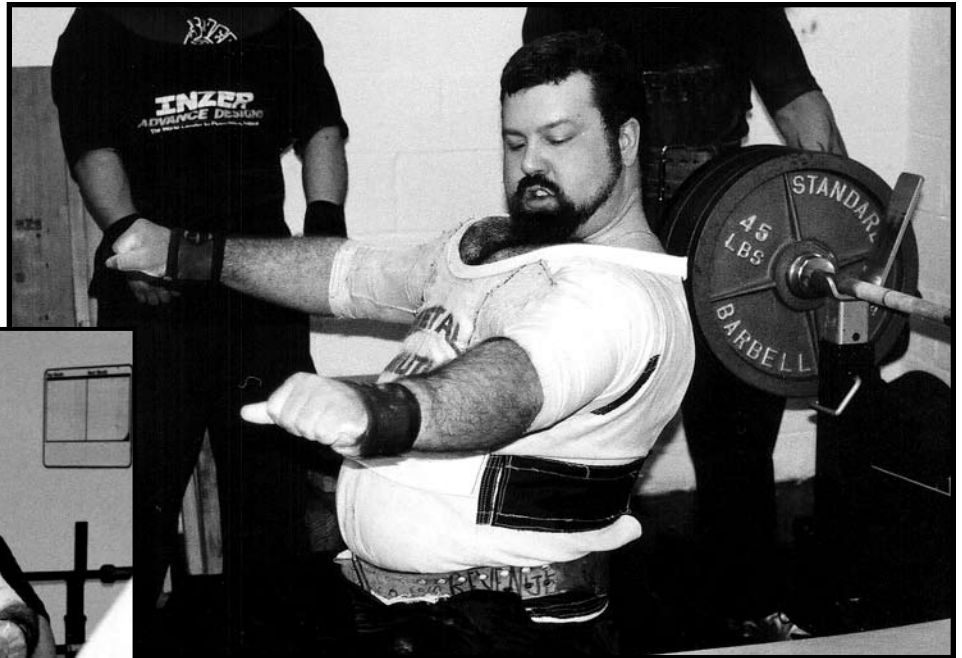
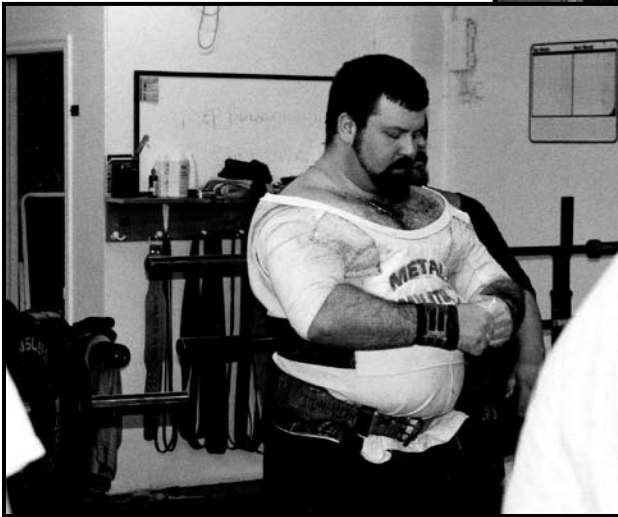


Bill Crawford



Mike Miller

**"I'D LIKE TO SEE A WHOLE LOT MORE PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE METAL MILITIA BECAUSE I THINK THE MILITIA CAN CHANGE THE SPORT OF POWERLIFTING."** — MIKE MILLER



**"IF YOU GO INTO BATTLE, DO YOU WANT TO GO IN ALONE OR WITH AN ARMY? THE ARMY I'VE GOT IS PRETTY DAMN COOL SO THERE ISN'T ANYTHING WE CAN'T ACCOMPLISH."  
—BILL CRAWFORD**

Good-natured ball busting existed side-by-side with a no-nonsense pragmatism and work ethic indigent to the largely blue-collar populace. The universal desire to see all the lifters meet their goals was the underlying theme.

On this day, Bill Crawford's planned attempt at 765-pounds was hindered by his left hamstring, which began to twitch like an out of control jackhammer. (Militia-style training, as you'll see later, can be extremely depleting). More interesting to me than this near-miss was the fact that one of their less-experienced lifters, going for a PR less than half of Crawford's, was given the same thunderous support as the veteran lifter. (With world record holding spotters spurring him on, he was successful in forcing the weight to a smooth lockout.)

#### **BILL CRAWFORD: THE EARLY YEARS**

Since the Metal Militia began as the vision of Bill Crawford, his lifting history is fundamental to the telling of the story. "I was a bodybuilder and I got razed a lot by the guys from the gym, which was a predominantly hardcore powerlifting gym," Crawford relates. "Someone laid down a challenge to me, saying that they'd like to see if I could bench 405." Crawford took to the challenge, trained for the meet but fell short of the challenge on meet day. Although he lost the bet, he found his passion for powerlifting.

Crawford's newfound love of powerlifting was sullied by its one tragic flaw. "The sport of powerlifting had gotten so downright nasty," Crawford says. "I never

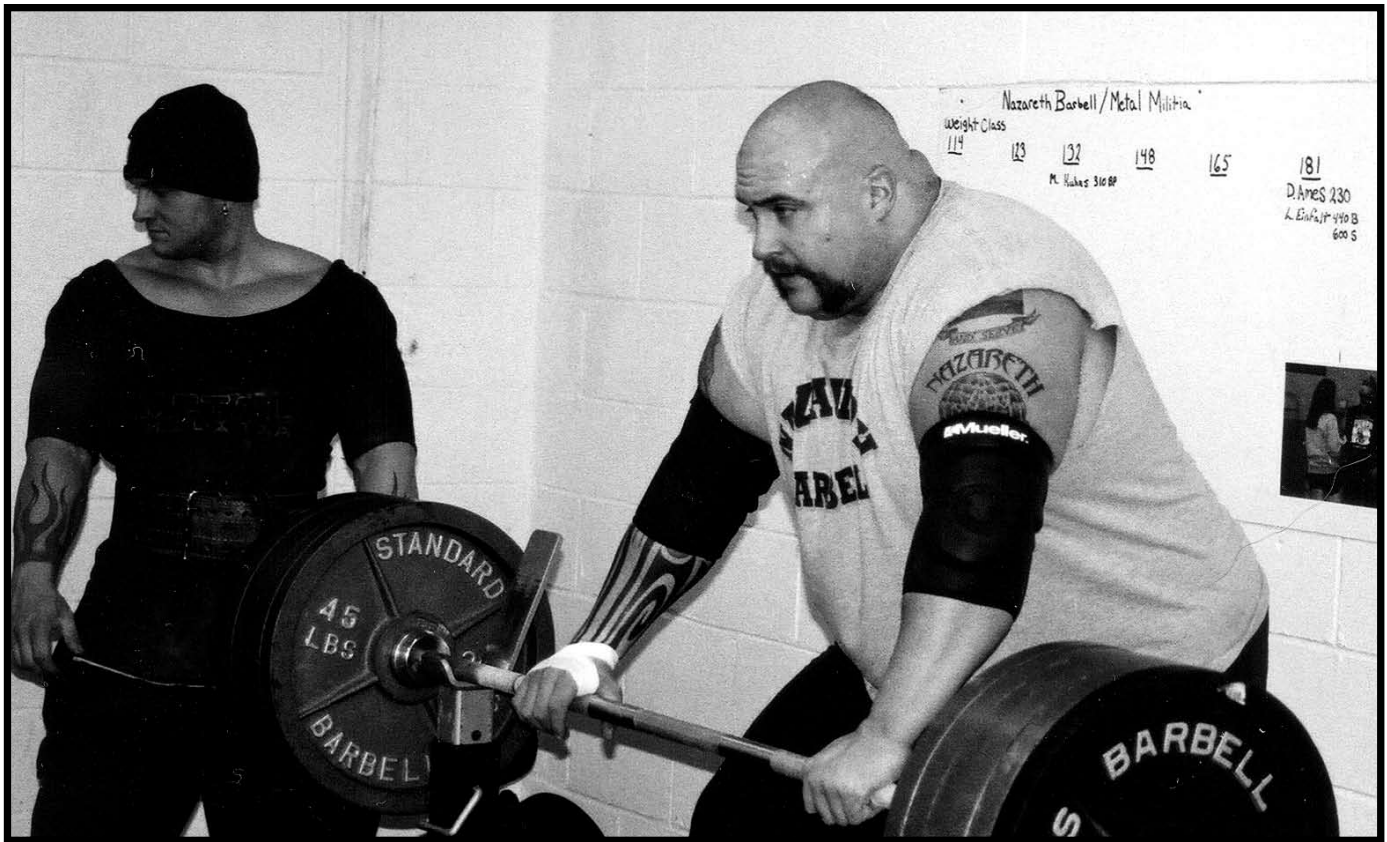
heard ANYONE say anything good about anyone." Having come from a background of high school and college football, Crawford remembered how the comradery had felt. "I remember how it felt to feel as if you belonged to something, like you were with a group of guys you could trust." Because he had begun to develop a name for himself as a bench press specialist, Crawford decided to use his growing acclaim to spread around something more positive.

#### **BAND OF BROTHERS**

"At first there was just me, by myself, fighting this," Crawford says. Crawford's refusal to take part in the ego-driven negativity slowly was noted by others. Because this small core of lifters began working together and supporting each others' goals, many of them began to rise in the powerlifting ranks. As Bill recalls, "The shit-talkers were left stagnant and the people that worked together, got stronger together."

Among the first of this new group was Crawford's training partner, Sebastian Burns. Burns, a 5'8," 270-pound personal trainer has a current top bench of 725 pounds. Like Crawford, Burns came into powerlifting from a bodybuilding background, winning the 1992 Teenage Can-Am championship. Feeling that the amount of drugs necessary for him to do well in bodybuilding was just not worth it, he switched first to three-lift powerlifting meets, then to bench press specialization. (Along the way, he also tried his hand at strongman competitions.)

Burns and Crawford met four years ago at the Os-



wego State bench press competition, where Crawford was doing an exhibition lift. Despite the fact that they lived three hours apart, their common beliefs about training made them fast friends. After finding themselves travelling to train together on most weekends, Crawford eventually persuaded his friend to move nearby so that they could assist one another in achieving their bench pressing goals.

From there, Burns and Crawford continued to expand their circle by taking their weekend training sessions on the road. "We were the original road dogs of powerlifting," Bill says. "We traveled all over the country. I recall once working out once in a gym in Virginia, south of Richmond, in the middle of nowhere. Its just a group of good ole' boys that just liked lifting weights and they were tickled ass pink to have us come down there."

Enter Mike Miller. Miller, an imposing 6'4" 410-pound behemoth, is credited with a 705 bench and 900 pound squat. He fully intends to get an 800-pound bench and thousand pounds squat before he hangs up his lifting belt. Miller received a phone call in June of 2000 from Crawford when one of Bill's lifters entered a power meet that he was running. "When Bill came down, I asked him for some pointers and we hit it

off," Miller says. Since Miller was preparing to open Nazareth Barbell at that time, regular back and forth commutes between Eastern PA and upstate New York became a weekend ritual.

From this constant networking, the concept of the Metal Militia was born. In addition to shared comradery, members of the Militia share training information, assist one another with the analysis of lifting form and support each other in competitions. It should come as no surprise that a great deal of eating is involved as well! Barbecues and Army-sized rations are a regular part of the post-training experience.

Militia members are welcome houseguests when visiting another chapter of the group. "Last night, I slept at Mike Miller's home," Crawford says. "This morning, I ate breakfast with his family. These friendships have enhanced my life beyond even powerlifting."

Nazareth Barbell is considered the Pennsylvania chapter of the Metal Militia. "We have guys out in Florida and as far out as Minnesota and all up and down the East Coast," Crawford says, his face lighting up with the mention of his friends. "We have a guy now coming out to pledge that's opening up a chapter of Metal Militia in Phoenix, Arizona." John Graube runs the Metal

Militia chapter in Virginia. Jeff McVicar runs the Maryland chapter.

#### A DIFFERENT WAY OF THINKING

To say that the Metal Militia mentality is unique is an understatement. A common theme I've heard in my conversations with Miller, Crawford, Burns and Ames is that they focus on the achievements of their team members over their own glory. "The greatest moment of my career in powerlifting," Crawford says, "was when my training partner Sebastian benched 700-pounds for the first time." This mode of thought seems to be shared by all Militia members.

While speaking on the phone with Mike Miller, I requested a complete listing of the PRs of the team. He spoke with the same level of pride about new team members that busted their asses to increased their bench 50-75 to reach a 315 pound PR as he did when listing the accomplishments of the team's 700 pounds plus lifters. Most revealing of all, after about twenty minutes of searching the listings on the wall to make sure no one was left out, I had to ask, "Well Mike... what about YOUR best lifts?"

"One thing Bill has taught me is that you help everyone, whether you get along with them or not," Miller says. "What could be better than teaching someone that you didn't get along with to do something very

**“JUST LIFT AND BE COOL WITH IT. IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT YOU'RE WEARING, WHETHER IT'S A ONE-PLY SHIRT, TWO-PLY SHIRT, THREE-PLY DENIM OR A SUIT OF ARMOR. IT SHOULDN'T MATTER HOW YOU BENCH OR IF YOU ARE DRUG-FREE OR JUICED. THERE ARE JUST NOT ENOUGH PEOPLE INVOLVED IN POWERLIFTING TO AFFORD ASSHOLES.”**

**—SEBASTIAN BURNS**

well? Then they have no reason not to get along with you.” As his bench press poundages have gone through the ceiling since making a conscious effort to help anyone that requested his assistance, Miller does not discount that the “good karma” plays a role in his own success. Little wonder that the ranks of the Metal Militia seem to be expanding geometrically.

As Sebastian Burns pointed out, “People’s lifts really don’t make them Metal Militia material — it’s their attitude. If they love powerlifting and have what it takes to be a good friend, that is all that really matters.”

### **MILITIA-STYLE TRAINING**

The Metal Militia style of training can best be described as extreme high intensity, tons of volume and lots of heavy, heavy weight. They do not do percent work. Each day is HEAVY and lifters back off slightly in volume only when they feel it is totally necessary. As Bill says, “It’s just kind of balls to the walls.”

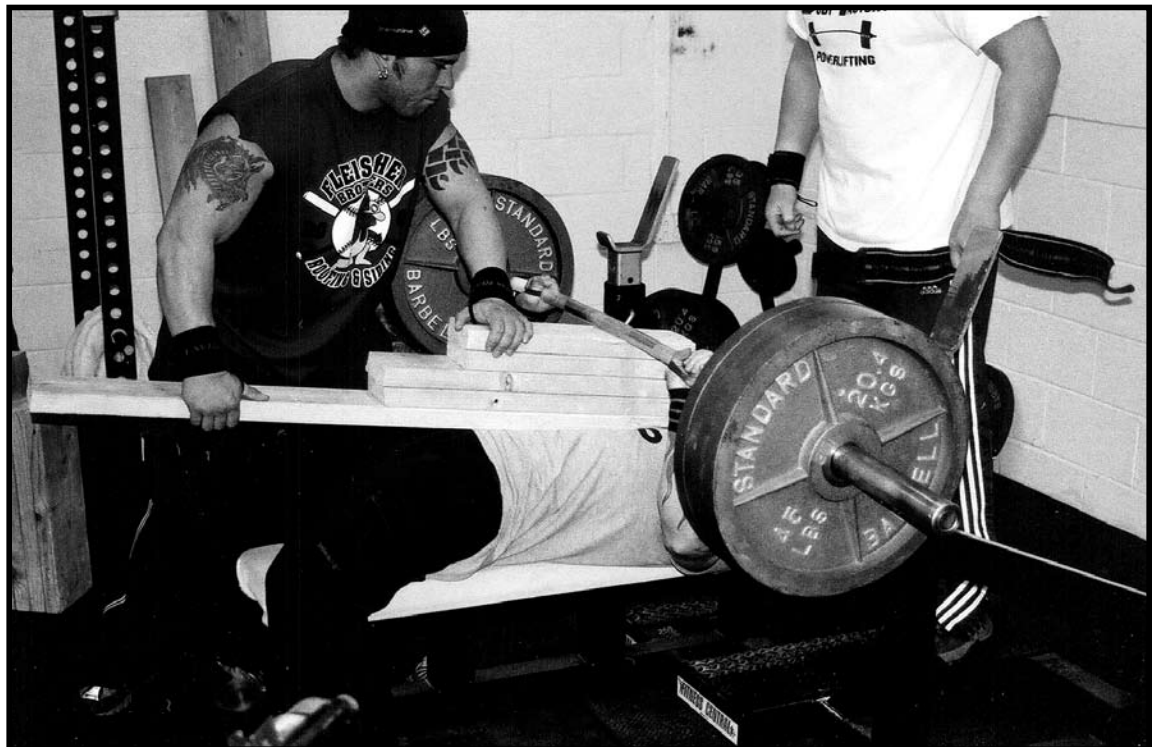
Unlike the training popularized by Westside Barbell advocates, developing maximal explosiveness with sub-maximal poundages (60-75% of 1RM) does not enter into the equation. Being bench press specialists, they feel that this makes for uncontrolled sloppy execution. Watching them train, it was obvious that their bench form was impeccable — deep tightly-coiled spine arches; exacting shoulder, glute,

foot and hand placement; superbly-controlled bar paths. In place of explosiveness, learning to control the groove and get the most out of their bench shirt takes precedence.

The workouts are long. Saturday sessions generally last between three to four hours. For those used to conventional training, adjusting to the Metal Militia system is not easy. “Eat your Wheaties,” Crawford says. “It’s incredibly easy to quit each time when you feel as though you’ve maxed out. With the Metal Militia we support each other and it’s not ‘me against you’ but there is definitely an attitude of ‘if you aren’t going to do the work, I’m going to do it for you.’ If someone is slacking a little bit, they might get a ration of shit on their end where someone says, ‘If you can’t do your rack presses, I’ll do your rack presses for you.’ It keeps everyone motivated and on a straight line.”

“When I first came here I couldn’t make it through the whole workout,” Burns says. “No one can when they first start. It kills them. Once they get used to it, their bench will begin to excel.”

Since most of the Metal Militia athletes are bench press specialists, their base training involves two bench days a week (falling on Tuesday and Saturday). Tuesday’s workout involves training for raw strength (without a supportive bench shirt). The Saturday workout involves benching with your bench shirt and assistance work.



## TUESDAY

**Bench Press (raw):** After warming-up, work up to a three-rep max (3RM). After each successful triple, make a small weight increase and attempt a heavier triple. Once a weight is reached that will not (on that day) allow for a triple, either stop at that point or perform a final five-rep max. 5-8 work sets of triples

**Decline Bench Press:** All sets are trained working up to a five-rep max. This exercise is particularly useful for those that bench with an emphasized arch. 5 sets of 5 reps

**Board Bench Press:** In order to improve lockout ability, Board Presses are performed exactly as traditional bench presses except the bar is lowered to a stack of two-by-fours (two to six boards nailed together) which are held on the lifter's sternum. Not only does this exercise focus on the top end (lock-out) of the bench press, it improves the lifter's ability to drive a weight off their chest. Some lifters start with a six-board thickness, others five and some four. It all depends on your body size, arm length and location of your "weak spot." Work up to a three-rep max with your thickest board (i.e., five-board thickness). After that, work up to a max single on a shorter stack (i.e., a four-board stack). To wrap things up, work up to a single on your shortest stack (i.e., a triple-thickness board). Total sets range from 8 to as many as 15.

**Shoulder and Triceps Work:** They commonly train shoulders with a tri-set of front raise, side raise and military press. Triceps work is done as needed.

## SATURDAY

**Close-Grip Bench:** This exercise is used as a warm up and we use the same progression as raw bench, with the exception that they do not go back down for a 5RM.

**Bench Press (with bench shirt):** We will put our shirt on here if the meet is within 4 weeks or so. If the meet is farther away we will do our shirt work at the end before Rack work. Everyone usually starts off with their shirt where they left off with the close grip bench. Starting with 3 to 5 reps in the first few sets to get into a groove of the shirt. Then onto a few doubles then



some singles. If the singles don't go well or if there is problems touching or with your groove then we will go right back to the beginning and work all the way back up again trying harder to get everything right. Sets here could range from 5 to 10 to even 20 or more depending on how everything goes. If you don't get it right you must work back through until you get it right.

**Board Press (with 6, 5 and 4 board thickness):** We will usually try to max on all of these boards and sometimes work through the same board twice if the groove does not feel right or we miss our goal weight on a certain board. Again sets could be very high if things don't go right or if more work is needed in a certain area. The 4 board is optional on this day depending if you did it on Tuesday or not.

**Bench Press Lockouts (in the rack):**

We work our way up to a 3RM using 3 reps for all sets. These are done at the end of the workout when you are tired and want to go home but if you stay and do them you will have great finishing power needed to lockout heavy weight. Total sets range from 6 to 10 sets of triples

Other exercises that can be done on this day:

Tricep Pushdowns: 3 Sets 10 Reps.

Rope Extensions: 2 Sets 20 to 40 reps.

Pulldowns: 4 Sets 10 Reps.

Shrugs: 4 Sets 10 Reps.

## OPTIONAL THIRD AND FOURTH DAY

On a third day, most Metal Militia lifters train back. This involves straight-leg deadlifts out of the rack (from knee height), heavy low cable rows, and lat pulldowns. Sets and reps vary by lifter as needed.

They also do a great deal of trap work. We alternate between the straight bar and the trap bar. With the trap bar they start out with 135 for 100 reps, then 225 for 75 reps, 315 pounds for 50 reps, 405 for 25 and then around 495 for 15 or so. On the day they shrug with a straight bar, they drop it down to five or six sets. They do 135 for 30, 225 for 30, 315 for 30, 405 for 30, 500 for 10-15 (concentrating on the squeezing on the contraction and letting the weights hang between reps), and 605 for 10-15 (squeezing and hanging again on these). Then we do 6-8 sets of 25-30 reps with the 135-pound dumbbells. They attribute their problem-free shoulders to the high-volume trap work.

Some Metal Militiamen come in on a fourth day to train legs, just to keep them in shape. This workout might incorporate some leg presses but no real squatting. Those that compete in full three-lift meets apply similar high volume work to their lower body training but have to be more conscious of overtraining.

**IT'S HARD TO START OUT WITH A 135-POUND BENCH AND TRY TO WORK YOUR WAY UP TO 500 POUNDS. TO KEEP COMING IN HERE AND PLUGGING AWAY AT IT AND SOMETIMES FAILING, WALKING OUT OF HERE BRUISED AND BATTERED, TAKES HEART."**

**—MIKE MILLER**