

The Only Easy Day Was Yesterday

An Inside Look at the Training of the Navy SEALs

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Two swim buddies decked out in neoprene dive suits cross the grinder, or blacktop training area. Throughout BUD/S, movement between exercises always occurs at a running pace—even trips to the bathroom and mess hall.

Photographs by Richard D. Schoenberg



“Excellence in life – requires excellent coffee breaks!”

Operators Coffee Club (OCC) blev grundlagt i 2017 af to tidligere Jægersoldater for at imødekomme behovet for gode kaffepauser, som kaffeelskende Operators oplevede, når de var “ude af kontoret” på eventyr eller på farten.

Kaffe smager allerbedst, når du indeni dig selv ved, at du virkelig har fortjent det varme flydende guld, der er i den kop, du holder i dine hænder. Situationer er også kendt som et “OCC Øjeblik”.

Vores mission er “Unplugged Coffee” hvor som helst og når som helst ved at levere original italiensk espresso kaffe og godt grej, der gør det muligt for dig at brygge frisklavet kaffe og skabe dine egne OCC Øjeblikke.

Vi har stiftet “World Outdoor Barista Championship” (WOBC), der er det officielle verdensmesterskab for håndholdt espressobrygning. Ved det årlige WOBC, der afholdes under Outdoorfestivalen i Ry, mødes veteraner og andre kaffeelskere fra hele verden og konkurrerer om at brygge de bedste espresso kaffe drikke. Efter konkurrencerne hygger de sig med en god kop kaffe og soldaterhistorier.

Vi støtter initiativer, idéer og programmer, der beriger danske veteraners liv. Handler du hos Operators Coffee Club, støtter du også vores veteraner!

“The Only Easy Day Was Yesterday, An Inside Look at the Training of the Navy SEALs”, af Richard D.

Schoenberg, er det mest komplette fotografiske essay der nogensinde er lavet om den sagnomspundne Navy SEAL Basic Training.

Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL eller bare BUD/S, som det også kaldes til daglig, er et langvarigt aspirantforløb bestående af hårdere og hårdere fysiske og mentale udfordringer, der kræver det yderste i viljestyrke fra hver aspirant. Denne fotobog udtrykker dette commitment i billeder og er baseret på aspirantuddannelsen for Klasse 246. Den giver læseren en ægte insider viden om hvad der kræves for at blive en Navy SEAL frømand.

Rigtig god læselyst!

To be a U.S. Navy SEAL, you must...

Run **806** miles

Swim **77** miles

Paddle a boat more than **19** hours

Run the obstacle course **29** times

Spend **35** hours diving underwater

Do **126** hours of physical training

Shoot **3,000** rounds of live ammunition

Tread water for **5** minutes (with all your diving gear)

Hold your breath while swimming **50** meters underwater

...and that doesn't include Hell Week: 120 hours of physical training and stress, with four total hours of sleep, arguably the single most demanding training week in the United States military.

Preface

The young men you will see in these pages sought out the hardest training, and then proved they deserved to be here

Warriorship is not for everyone. At one time in history it was a birthright, now it is a calling. Today at the Naval Special Warfare Center, we seek young men who choose to set themselves apart from the rest of society by patterning their lives around the pursuit of perfection as maritime commandos. The young men you will see in these pages heard that calling, sought out the hardest training, and then proved they deserved to be here.

Only 50 officers, out of over 350 who apply, are able to come here each year. The competition is, as you would expect, extremely keen, and only the best make it in here—or out of here—as graduates.

To run a course of instruction this unique takes uniquely qualified men. Each BUD/S instructor has to have at least five years of experience as a SEAL, made at least two platoon deployments overseas, be qualified as a Navy instructor and Navy high risk training instructor, and be completing his work for certification as a Navy master training specialist. While they may sometimes seem heartless, instructors guide students through BUD/S with the utmost care, making sure each trainee moves through each evolution safely.

Instructors lead the physical evolutions, and never ask a student to do something they haven't done or won't do. They are there through it all, every step of the way.

They've witnessed the emotional highs and deep lows of every trainee at BUD/S. They are always asking, how can we do it better, safer, and harder?

Instructors live the motto that excellence is expected. They demonstrate the highest levels of commitment to the students every day, and mentor them

to be not only stronger and faster, but better men who do the right things at the right time for the right reasons.

The predecessors to today's Navy maritime commandos were the Amphibious Scouts and Raiders of 1942, followed by the Naval Combat Demolition Units and Underwater Demolition Teams (UDT) of 1943, and later the SEAL teams of 1962. Each new command changed some of the training in response to current global and domestic threats. But importantly, each new version of training contained the same basic elements as the initial Scouts, Raiders, and UDT.

Over the years, we've landed on a training formula that challenges students in ways they won't believe. What they are asked to do in the future is important for our country's defense. One of the most important lessons we teach at Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training, and the lesson that you'll likely see illustrated in these pages, is that a SEAL warrior won't ever quit. Ever.

Our BUD/S course reflects the idea that combat is dangerous, special operations are hard, and the sea can be cruel. We seek out a certain kind of candidate—men of courage, with dedication to a cause, a willingness to sacrifice, physical skills, and intelligence. Team and mission must always come first.

BUD/S, at times, will seem an almost unbearably grueling test. The course itself is 30 weeks of physical hardship, mental toughness, and gritty self-discipline. Many leave BUD/S with a new sense of their physical and mental potential—and limitations.

How strong does a man's character need to be to be a SEAL?

One day these men may possibly be inserted deep into enemy territory with a radio as a lifeline and no other immediate means of support, to accomplish a mission most standard units are incapable of completing. If a man does not have a strong belief in his own capabilities, and the mental nerve and moral courage to complete the task, then he would compromise his own and his team's safety.

We really don't know at the beginning who will make it and who will not. A recent study undertaken by an MBA statistics class at Stanford University found that physical skill, strength, prior education level, and race had no bearing on who would make it through and who would not. More specifically,

younger age, larger stature, higher education level, or faster pre-BUD/S swim or run times did not increase a student's chances of graduation.

The Stanford team concluded that only mental toughness and emotional commitment separated the graduates from their fallen classmates. Knowing this allows us to tailor our training to select for this trait, or for the ability to devote oneself exclusively to passing the course. As the trainees progress, the course always continues to get harder, the times faster, the distances farther.

There is a point to all this. BUD/S is not adventure racing camp, as Hollywood might have you believe. BUD/S produces warriors who make no apologies for being warriors. We feel it would be both ridiculous and cruel to shelter future warriors from these sometimes painful rites of passage, when we have no intention of protecting them from much greater physical and emotional distress in their careers or in combat.

We believe the ancient Greek historian Thucydides, who wrote, "Each man is much the same as another, and he is best who is trained in the severest school." We've adapted his notion into our motto—the only easy day was yesterday. And we mean it. During this training, the students will run 806 miles, swim 77 miles, do the obstacle course 29 times, complete 126 hours of organized physical training (and some unscheduled "remediation" training), lift and roll with logs for 8 hours, paddle their boats for 19 hours, spend 35 hours underwater diving, and shoot 3,000 rounds of live ammunition for qualification scoring.

Those numbers don't include Hell Week—the single most demanding training week in the United States military. Hell week is the most dreaded, yet revered, period of the entire course—120 hours of non-stop work, with a total of four hours sleep. That's when we look each other in the eye and say, "there are only warriors and non-warriors."

Every warrior society in history has done this hardening of the body and spirit through severe training or some extreme physical test. The ritual takes different forms in different cultures but they all have a common element: The warrior drives himself to a level of endurance beyond what he previously believed possible.



In the process he begins to understand the unspoken rule—that he must never ask "how far?" or "for how long?" He just knows he will go as far and as long as it takes. After all these trials, he emerges to join the privileged group whose self-assigned role is protecting their country.

This book is the most exhaustive photo effort ever undertaken at BUD/S. My initial fear was that the book might be too "artsy" and miss why we do what we do. By the conclusion of his work months later, I was so impressed with Richard Schoenberg's approach I asked the Admiral in charge of all Naval Special Warfare to make him an Honorary Frogman, the only such request I made in three years of command. Richard was given total freedom to photograph any evolution every single day of the seven-month course. He was allowed to talk to any instructor or student, and to record his view of this unique world by photographing any subject he wanted.

He has captured the drama, intensity, and (this will be surprising to some) the comedy of the day to day life at BUD/S. He also captured the hopes, aspirations, incredible efforts, and yes the humor, of each BUD/S student. Richard's photos reflect his personal involvement with both the process of BUD/S and the people of BUD/S. He brought an artist's eye to a stern and harsh military world and has recorded it for all who want to know why the only easy day was yesterday.

CAPTAIN Rick Smethers, USN(Ret.)

Commanding Officer

Naval Special Warfare Center, 2001-2004



Led by the fastest instructor at BUD/S, new students get a taste of what lies ahead for the next 30 weeks—806 miles of running. The fastest trainees often escape the ire and verbal abuse of instructors, but running ability doesn't necessarily translate into an overall advantage—only three of the trainees at the front of this pack made it through to graduation.

BEFORE FIRST PHASE GETS UNDERWAY, ALL TRAINEES must pass through five weeks of rigorous conditioning, known as Indoctrination Course, or Indoc. As its name implies, this stage is devoted to breaking in the new class, teaching it the rules and customs of BUD/S—and convincing some students to get out early.

Each 12-hour workday begins at 5 a.m. and is packed with pool training, conditioning runs, obstacle course drills, inflatable boat exercises, and classroom lessons on ethics. In between each rotation, instructors dole out set after set of pushups. Indoc also includes lessons on SEAL culture, history, and philosophy.

The cornerstone of the team ethic is devotion to a swim buddy. At the outset of Indoc, each student is paired with a swim partner who becomes his wingman throughout BUD/S. As the training progresses, trainees develop close relationships with their swim buddies, in part, because straying more than a few feet from each other is a punishable offense. These lessons are among the most important taught in Indoc—strict adherence to safety protocol is absolutely necessary for First Phase, when training becomes both exceedingly difficult and, at times, dangerous.

Indoc trainees are not yet considered students—they are students in training. Nonetheless, to leave the program, they must still formally “DOR,” or drop on request, opting out of BUD/S altogether. Many don't make it: Thirty members of Class 246 left BUD/S during Indoc.

“Let's face it there are very few places where an individual could make a career of working out, sky diving, diving, shooting, and blowing things up.”

Chapter One

Indoc



Two by two, trainees file along Coronado Beach during the Indoctrination Course, or Indoc. Blisters and sore muscles take a toll as students acclimate to running in combat boots and fatigues on soft sand.



The first day of Indoc begins with a personnel and barracks inspection.



Just as soon as Indoc gets started, students discover they've already failed. A wrinkled collar or a few stray grains of sand are infractions that invariably result in a beat-down: sets of pushups, trips to the surf, and eight-count body builders.



During barracks inspection instructors seize the opportunity to snoop through students' belongings. Here, instructors chance upon some Barbie Doll-themed cookies in a trainee's closet. For the rest of the day the student will have to carry his Barbie snacks with him through training exercises (or evolutions as they're known in BUD/S), to the delight of his fellow enlistees.



During Indoc instructors spend over 45 hours working with students on aquatic skills. Some arrive better prepared than others: Previous BUD/S classes have included Olympic caliber swimmers, including gold medalist Mike Troy.



Drown-proofing can be a harrowing experience—made worse by instructors' constant rebukes piped into the pool through underwater speakers.



Students log miles on an Indoc conditioning run from the Naval Special Warfare Center to the Hotel Del Coronado and back. Along the way they pass idle sunbathers, tourists, and surfers enjoying a warm day of recreation at the beach.



Submerge in 60-degree ocean water, dowse with sand, don't rinse, and repeat: This cycle will continue every day until the end of First Phase, but for now, it's a novel experience.



Let the chafing begin! Sand manages to infiltrate every nook and cranny of students' bodies by First Phase. Several weeks into training, the sticky, wet granules will have rubbed the men raw in the most intimate, uncomfortable places.



All washed up: Slow finishers get "gooned" after a conditioning run. Gooning is designed to encourage the weakest students to quit. After 15 minutes of bear crawls, pushups, buddy carries and trips to the surf, the goon squad will likely finish behind their classmates in the next evolution as well, bringing on more physical punishment and wearing down their resolve to continue.



Once a student fails personnel inspection, he finds himself in an impossible Catch-22: As punishment, he'll be sent to the ocean to get wet and sandy and once he's thoroughly soaked and dirty, he'll soil his room and fail barracks inspection as well, meaning he'll be sent for another round of wet and sand just in time to fail his personnel inspection.

Sand finds its way into a student's mouth, ears, eyes, and nose. Even meals, especially the MREs (meals ready to eat), are a gritty, granular affair.



Just when class 246 thought it couldn't get any sandier, an instructor introduces a "mouth wash drill", which is fairly self-explanatory.



First Phase tadpoles manage a set of stomach crunches while simultaneously having their stomachs crunched.



A recalcitrant boat team learns to pick up the pace the hard way: with more log PT squats.



Whenever daily elephant runs take trainees into the streets of upscale Coronado Island, they are reminded that a parallel world exists outside of BUD/S, one in which people, like this woman, run for fun and probably shower afterwards too.



Thank you to the Naval Special Warfare Center

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