

UDT/SEAL TRAINING THE REAL STORY

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Navy Frogmen, SEALs, Commandos,
Unconventional Warfare Specialists - That
and More!

The story is not about the bravado that is depicted in so many trendy movies, it is not about the explosions that send huge fireballs into the sky, or the firing of endless rounds of ammunition from automatic weapons by our celluloid heroes. The real story is about individuals, their self respect, their confidence and their pride in knowing they are the best. Once a man has gone through the UDT/SEAL training, and overcome, his fears, and gone the limit; he no longer has to prove himself to anyone else, for he has proven himself to his team mates, and above all he has proven himself, **to himself**.

The popularity of movies and TV shows based loosely upon the exploits of the U.S. Navy SEALs has prompted those that knew of my background to ask, what was it really like?

I had the privilege of serving with both Underwater Demolition Team 12, (UDT-12), and SEAL Team One, both home based in Coronado, California, and served with both organizations in Vietnam in 1966 and 1967. I volunteered for UDT training in early 1964, passed my acceptance tests, and began the rigorous training in August of that year. The training program for an officer lasts 21 weeks and covered physical conditioning, swimming, diving with various types of underwater breathing apparatus, reconnaissance operations, the use of explosives, and a myriad of other topics that were key to enabling you to accomplish future missions, while protecting your life along with that of your comrades. Follow-on training included 3 weeks of parachute jump training at Fort

Benning, Georgia, Survival school at Camp Pendelton in California, and an assortment of other programs to meet the needs of the teams. During UDT/SEAL training, the officers and enlisted personnel were treated as equals, no favoritism, no special privileges. If anything, the officers took the brunt of the abuse, for if they were to lead their men in the future, their men had to know they would lead by example, that the officer would and could do any task he assigned his men.

I will never forget that evening many years ago, when my comrades and I nervously awaited 2400 (12:00 Midnight), the designated hour for the beginning of "Hell Week". That term is too easily used by fraternities and clubs, there is only one true Hell Week, and that is in the training program for the Navy UDT/SEAL Teams. It was September 1964 and class 33 awaited the supreme ordeal that would take place at the Amphibious base in Coronado, California. "Motivation Week", the Navy's official designation, was the fourth week of training, and was designed to test every individual's **desire** to continue the remaining arduous weeks of the 21 week program. It did more than that, it tested each of us in those areas where we were uncertain. It built confidence in ourselves, in our minds and in our bodies. Would we gain the respect of those who had passed before, and more importantly would we gain our own self respect?

The following accurate description of "Hell Week" was written by Fred Kaiser 24 hours after completing the military's toughest challenge!

Motivation Week

"UDT Motivation week" is termed such because it is carefully designed to test the participant's motivation towards completion of the course." Hell Week as it is still called by all Tadpoles and instructors, not only tests the individuals motivation as stated in the above quotation, but it also proves to the individual that his body can withstand and function under conditions that he never dreamed possible.

I shall relate my experiences and feelings as I went through Hell Week as accurately as possible, although many things now seem very vague.

Sunday 6 September, I awoke at about 8:00 and I spent the day preparing for the week ahead. All the officers moved from the BOQ down to the enlisted barracks at the UDT training area.

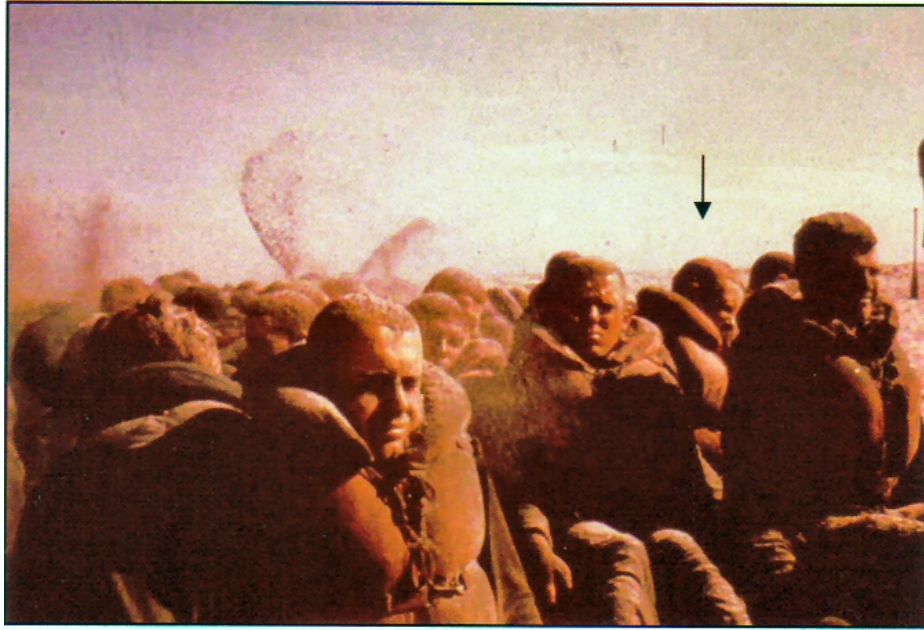


Although I tried, I was unable to sleep during the day for all of us were pretty keyed up and anxious for the big event to start.

At 2200 in the evening we mustered in full greens on the company street to insure that everyone was present. We were then sent back to bed, knowing that in just 2 hours all hell would break loose. Needless to say no one slept. We waited and waited and then at 0030 Monday morning the week began. The instructors stormed through the building throwing firecrackers and making as much noise as possible. We were told to be on the company street in full greens in three minutes. This little action was called a breakout, and the procedure would be the same every evening for the rest of

the week. We were on the street with plenty of energy and a lot of Hoo Yah! Our tremendous class spirit in full swing. The standard Hell Week uniform is full greens, Kapok life-jackets, and paddle, and never were you to forget any item. Soon we were doing push ups, sit-ups and many other exercises, and then we were marched into the bay to cool off for awhile. Believe me the bay water is not very warm especially in the early morning.

Soon though we were sent back to bed, our rest didn't last long, for in about 15 minutes there was another breakout and we were back



outside. After a few exercises we were told to be back in two minutes in our green helmets. It took a few seconds before we realized that, that was all that we were to have on. The next formation was the most unusual I've

ever been in, fortunately it took place at about 0200 in the morning. We marched over to the metal grating where we assumed a prone

position while the instructors sprayed us with cold water, then over on your back and another wash down. When this was finally over we took a quick hot shower, got dressed and tried to get to bed. It wasn't long though and another breakout. This time in full uniform and soon we were double timing over to the ocean, a mile away. Then we were lying in about 6 to 12" of surf, on your stomach, on your back, sit up, lie down. Then up onto the beach and sit down in a tight little group and throw sand up over your head until you're completely covered and it sticks to, and is down inside your wet



clothes. At last we double time back to the barracks. You take a warm shower and try to get the sand out of your clothes and hair. Before you can get back to bed again it is after 0500 and time to muster for

breakfast, the sun is coming up and the first goal has been reached. Everything is done by boat crews during the week with a seven men per crew. You carry your 150 pound boat on your heads wherever you go. After breakfast it's over to the ball field for PT. There is constant competition between crews during the week for precious points which will bring a reward at the end of the week. PT consisted of competition races of all sorts. It was

then over to the swimming pool for more competition. The uniform was lifejackets, swimsuits, and paddles. The races were of all types including carrying weights, swimming with towels in your hands, etc, etc. After swimming for a couple of hours, we dressed and marched over to the beach with our boats. We had 20 minutes for lunch which consisted of two sandwiches and an apple. The afternoon was

spent either having rubber boat races in the ocean or what they call nuisance races on the beach. This type of race is a relay race consisting of anything that will make you tired, dirty and sore.



You crawl on your stomach, roll, somersault, hop, and generally get completely covered with sand. Finally the afternoon is over and we march back to the mess hall for dinner. After dinner we march back to the barracks and usually have an hour to an hour and a half to shower, wash out your clothes, and put on dry clothes. Next came a 4 mile conditioning run on the beach, which also counted for competition



between boat crews.

Usually between 8:00 and 9:00 PM we had a briefing and prepared for the night problem. The night problem consists of paddling your rubber boat - somewhere.

Monday night we portaged to the ocean where the race was to begin. We launched the boats into the surf and about a mile down the beach came in and landed the boats on a rock jetty. It is more than just a little frightening to come in on the rocks at night even if the surf is only 3 or 4 feet high. Next we portaged across the strand and launched our boats into the San Diego bay. We paddled down the bay several miles then again portaged back across the strand to the ocean. Launching into the ocean, we paddled back to our original starting point. Then at about 0200 it's portage back to the mess hall for mid-rations. After chow it is time for a hot shower and to try to get to bed.

After 40 to 60 minutes of sleep, there is a breakout, this time it is in swimsuits. There was the usual yelling, exercises and dunking in the bay. After a few precious minutes in bed, the second breakout of the



morning began and it was probably the worst one of the week. Again in swim-suits we ran to the ocean. Into the shallow surf, get on your stomach, then on your back. The water was about 65 degrees, which felt like ice. The air was cool and the surf kept sliding your bare skin over the coarse sand. Finally, with slightly dampened spirits and teeth chattering, we ran back to the area. A few minutes in bed and we were up again, this time each member of the boat crew was tied to a long line, and each boat crew was dropped into the bay like fish on a stringer. We sat there for about 20 minutes. At last it was time for breakfast and another night was over.

Following chow was the usual PT, and then we were on our way over to the beach again for more boat paddling and nuisance

aces. About 1030 we moved down the beach to the demolition area. Here we were to crawl on our stomachs for about 30 feet under barbed wire while half pound charges of TNT exploded about 10 feet from us, both on the right and on the left. We also crawled through some tires and a few more charges went off nearby. It was then time for our box lunches. We sat on the side of a hill eating, while TNT charges went off nearby, showering sand and water over us and our food.



After chow we crossed over to the bay and then paddled south to what is called the mud flats. They consist merely of a small pond of stagnant water which when churned up makes about a foot of thin

mud on top of a foot and a half of thicker gooier mud. (Photo 10)

Naturally we had to have competitive races through the mud. The mud had a strange foul odor to it, plus it tended to sting your skin wherever it was sensitive. At first everyone tried to keep their face out of the water, but the instructors didn't let that last for long. Soon we were swimming in the mud, using all types of strokes. The instructors wound up the day by holding diving contests. We all became totally covered with mud and the only clean spot on a person was the inside of his mouth or the whites of his eyes.

At last it was time to go back, so we washed some of the mud off in the bay and then portaged several miles back to the training area and to the mess hall for dinner. After cleaning up we had a short run around the base



and then the briefing for our night problem. The problem was similar to the one the night before, only it was in the reverse direction, and had one longer portage. No matter what you do you can't keep from getting wet, for each time we went through the surf, we would get drenched by the breakers. You are wet, therefore, throughout the night and usually pretty cold.

Between 0100 and 0200 Wednesday morning we returned from the night problem and went to the mess hall for our Mid Rats (Midnight Rations). It was then time for a quick shower and to bed, but we were not to receive more than a few minutes sleep that night either. There were two breakouts, both of which consisted mainly of standing in the bay. The worst part of the entire day is the night, for you know you won't be getting much sleep, and you know that you'll be wet and cold. The fact that it is pitch black outside, just makes everything seem twice as miserable. You lie down in bed knowing that you may be up again in ten to fifteen minutes, but even a few minutes of rest seem like the most wonderful thing in the world. Your shoes are soaking wet, but you don't take them off, for it would take too long to force them back on again. If you're brave, you take off your wet fatigues and lay down in just wet underwear with a blanket thrown over your body. In a second you're asleep and it seems as if you sleep for hours, but it is only minutes, for then there are the shouts of the instructors and it's another breakout. That has to be the worst moment of the day, for you jump up and slip into your wet greens and lifejacket, knowing

that in a few minutes you will be in the cool water of the bay, or worse the cold water of the ocean. Eventually though, the breakouts are over and the sun is about to come up, so it's pick up the boats and off to the mess hall for breakfast.



Wednesday morning was much like the others; we had PT and then went over to the strand for nuisance races and log PT. Log PT consists of each boat crew working out with a log or telephone pole. Your team

must work together to lift the log over your heads, and do the various exercises that are required. It doesn't take long to get tired and after doing log PT on the beach we move down to the ocean and do it in the surf. When we were good and tired and covered with sand, we were sent back to the mess hall for lunch. The afternoon was spent at the swimming pool with more competitive relay races. At least in the pool we are clean, but the races quickly sap what energy we have left. By this time everyone is getting just a little tired. During the first two days of Hell Week the instructors try to get you fatigued and exhausted just as fast as possible. The rest of the week is spent trying to keep everyone awake.

Dinner was a welcome break for those who could stay awake long enough to eat something. In the evening there was a short run. For those of us who had trouble keeping up, we went right into the bay. It didn't make



much difference though, for after the run everyone was sent into the bay to cool off. The night problem for Wednesday night consisted of a mile portage down the beach, launching into the bay and then paddling halfway down the bay and back again. About this time everyone began seeing weird things on the water, things that didn't really exist. Some would doze off while their arms were still moving with the paddle.

We were back to the mess hall for mid rats about 0100 Thursday morning. The night was filled with the usual breakouts, but by this time everyone just accepted the fact that they weren't going to get any sleep, and that we were all going to stay wet. The night finally passed though, as they all do, and we were back to the mess hall for breakfast. Again after chow it was more PT, then over to the strand with our boats of course, for more nuisance races and log PT. The only difference this time was that everyone was moving just a little slower, and with a few more aches and pains. The fatigue was beginning to become quite noticeable. As long as we were active in some exercise or event, I felt great and fresh as a daisy. As soon as you stopped, however, whether it be pausing on your back during an exercise, or standing up straight, your eyes would close and sleep would come in seconds.



In the late morning we paddled down to mud flats again. This time there was a makeshift sign stuck in the mud which read, "Wardroom". All the officers slopped out into the mud and took a seat. We were then tossed our

box lunches, which we ate while the mud was up to our chests. They always say a little mud never hurt anyone; well we had our share that day. After lunch we had the usual Mud Flats races and diving contests. The only thing that I can say for the mud is that it was warmer in the mud than standing out in the cool breeze, but even that didn't make it bearable. Finally after 3 hours, it was time to get washed off in the bay and paddle back to the training area for dinner. After dinner it was great to take a shower and get rid of the mud and the aroma. The corpsman washed out everyone's ears to prevent infection.

The night problem for Thursday was a special treat, a Treasure Hunt. Each boat crew was given a different clue and then they were to proceed to the place they thought the clue described. If the crew was correct an instructor was waiting to give them another clue. There was only one little hitch, your boat must be carried wherever you go. Some of the clues were a mile, or miles apart. At 2400, after 4 clues, we went to the mess hall for mid rats. I kept falling asleep while trying to eat, but had a few cups of coffee and felt great for the next few hours. I guess it is a proven fact that food can take the place of sleep to some extent, for we proved it night after night. We continued on the Treasure Hunt getting a clue that would take us several miles down the beach to a fence by the Naval Air Station. As we walked down the beach 70 % of the time my eyes were closed. Once I almost began to lose contact with reality, everything seemed hazy; I felt that I was dreaming and that

nothing was real. We passed another boat crew that had one of their men actually start screaming for he thought a cargo net was falling on him out of the sky. When I heard that, it was just enough to snap me back to reality, and I was all right from then on. We finally arrived at the fence and there was another clue saying that we should

reverse our direction and go to a fence about 5 miles in the other direction. Our flickering spirit was completely extinguished, but we started out. About 1/2 mile down the beach we decided to go off to the side and



rest for awhile. One of the men said he had his car parked just down the road, and that although he didn't have his keys; maybe he could hot wire it. We could then deflate the rubber boat, put it on top of the car and take it down to the other fence. Two men set out after the car, and the rest of us hid the boat in the shadows and sacked out. We stopped at 0345; at 0500 an instructor kicked me and asked me where the rest of the crew was. I had to tell him, and after they were found, still by the car, they were sent back to us, and we were all sent off down the beach. At 0600 we were told to proceed to the mess hall.

After chow we mustered back at the training area. Our boat crew was promptly sent into the bay for our foul play. After cooling off we were told to carry the 7 boats over to the ball field. Shortly everyone joined us at the field. Two boats were tied together one on top of the other, for a total of 300 pounds, and our crew had to carry them over to the beach a mile away. When everyone was on the beach we again had log PT, nuisance races, and races on parts of the obstacle course. (Photo 11) When it was time for lunch we came back to the mess hall. The afternoon was spent in the

pool. There was little swimming though, just a lot of getting in and out of the pool, and resting in the water, BUT NO SLEEPING.

At dinner more people slept than ate, several falling forward into their food. After dinner a strange thing happened, we were told to muster in inspection greens with a blanket and a pillow. After doing so we marched to the ball field. We were then told to make ourselves comfortable on the grass with our blankets and listen to the music that was being played on a radio. Once again, there was a hitch, anyone falling asleep would have to go jump in the bay. Guys started dropping off like flies, and as the instructors awoke them, into the bay they went. Although my eyelids were as heavy as lead, I didn't want to go into the bay, so I fought with myself and was able to stay awake the hour that we were on the field. It was one of the most difficult things I've done. Staying awake didn't really do me too much good though, for we were all sent into the bay before beginning the night problem. (Photo 12)

The Friday Night Problem was to paddle to the south end of the bay and then return. By this time we were all dead on our feet, and paddling a boat at night is a very boring thing to do. No one was able to take more than a few strokes with the paddle before dozing off. We inched our way down the bay, often going in near circles. We saw all sorts of strange objects that night, none of them real, until we finally made it to the end of the bay and were told to return to the base. Coming back we were going against the current. Yelling, trying to keep each other awake, we fought against the current, and finally about 0300 we arrived back at the base. As we took a shower I couldn't believe we had really made it to the other end for none of the night seemed real. I didn't ponder the subject too long though; for we had 1 1/2 hours sleep, uninterrupted, before breakfast.

After breakfast on Saturday we had PT, but since the end was near it was conducted by members of the class. We had such things as finger exercise, eyelid exercise, etc. Soon even that was over and as we stood in ranks, glassy eyed, the senior instructor informed us the Hell Week was over and all that remained to be done was to clean up the weeks accumulation of dirt in the training area.

47 out of 49 men had made it, a highly unusual feat. By 1200 everything was clean; by 1330 I was back in the BOQ asleep.