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² **Date: 5/10/2020**

³ **Participant #: 45**

⁴ Interviewer (Code in blue): CDR Andrew Ledford

⁵ Participant (Code in black): #45

⁶ CDR: Record. All right. So I'm here with uh student number 45. Time is three 05. On five December, This is Andrew Ledford. And basically, you're good with me recording this?

⁷ 45: Yes.

⁸ CDR: So what we're gonna do is were going to ask you some basic questions on your background, family history and everything. Just kind of get an idea, you know, that makes you tick. What got you here. So some easy ones to begin with uh, Siblings, how many siblings to you have, do you have any siblings?

⁹ 45: I have one younger brother, three and half years younger.

¹⁰ CDR: Brother, and he's three and a half years younger. Cool, awesome. Um and then parents still together?

¹¹ 45: Yes.

¹² CDR: So looking back at your life experiences growing up, everything that's happened to you. Is there some, like, major things that happened? Maybe like one major thing that was a pivotal moment that kind of made you uh different in some way, allowed you to get through BUD/S in some way?

¹³ 45: I think um, so my Dad and his Dad both went to the Academy and played Football, um so in general, that's what, that's one hundred percent what lead me to that route, to the Academy. And specially this route it was after I got cut from the football team my freshman year. Uh and I went to the Sprint Football team, that influence, that influence, is why I'm here. So I never, definitely, definitely never seriously thought about this really until after getting to the Academy. And I don't know if this would be someone looking for.

¹⁴ CDR: Yeah

¹⁵ 45: When I was when I was younger, the first and second grade, my Grandma, I, I was I was a little troublemaker and my grandma, I just remember this is talk, I did something stupid, and she kinda put me in my place so, whatever. I mean, that's always just kind of the thing that happened to me when I was younger, so after that.

¹⁶ CDR: So how did those how to do things getting cut from the Football team and talk you had with grandma, what did those things do to you?

¹⁷ 45: Getting cut, that was a goal that I had set for myself from as old as I, you know, could even understand what my Dad and grandpa did

¹⁸ CDR: Yeah.

¹⁹ 45: That was a very long way lifetime goal. And I was just completely lost, I don't feel like I have the right words for it, but just completely lost. Felt like no purpose, so I had uh a couple of guys that I played ball with the ball with at prep school that went straight to Sprint from there. Then I had a new purpose, and I started look at why did I actually come here? This goal didn't happen. How might I respond? And then, I guess, the theme with that talk with my grandma and whatnot, um the theme of like a restart, those two specific events, they happened, and then, a new, a new me when I was younger, and then when I was older, over plebe year.

²⁰ CDR: Great. What about your personality in particular? Like, what are the other aspects of your personality that you feel like contribute a lot towards getting through BUD/S?

²¹ 45: I think I'm pretty disciplined. Um and I, talked about those couple goals, just obviously. Goals set early on. Just discipline and working hard and figuring out what I need to do and then just continuing to do that. I think that's been in the best. You know, that I read the Jocko book, discipline equals freedom. There's a lot of stuff that I just connected to myself where motivation. There's a lot of times, obviously, for sure in this pipeline, where motivation was not there, but discipline to just keep with it.

²² CDR: Good, so going more to your background or talking about your childhood. How did your parents discipline you like spanking and save any time now they take away toys like whatever.

²³ 45: So my parents were very just non-discipline in the way they let me. They

gave me a lot of freedom to make my own decisions and really, my dad, who would be, few times growing up, my mom, she would get more upset and show her disappointment in me. And that would really hit me hard. And my dad, a lot of times just with my brother, like pulling him or whatever, and my dad would get really, my dad was pissed, really pissed. Really, those two things. Just looking back, I think them being, uh I guess what I'm thinking of my dad, went to the Academy and played Football, same with his Dad, think lie growing up he was the olest.

²⁴ CDR: Yep

45: His Dad was the oldest. I am the oldest brother. You'd think they just kind of feed into that, hey you're going to the Academy, but I had to pry to figure out what it was all about. I think that is the best idea of how it was. I didn't even play football. I started football late compared to my peers. I played soccer. Maybe a little different than what people would think.

²⁶ CDR: Played soccer. And then eventually you played football.

45: I started playing football three years late, compared to my peers. And then you look at who played at the next level out of the guys I grew up with. I was one of the couple. I think about the way. [Cough] It goes to me making this.

²⁸ CDR: What about your teenage years? Like growing up did you move around a lot? You guys have the same house, tight neighborhood. Small neighborhood, good neighborhood.

45: Same house in Dayton, Ohio. Um my Dad was out of the military before we were born. Yeah, small neighborhood. Small town.

³⁰ CDR: So it's a pretty close community.

45: Yes. I'm still close with a few of my buddies from home.

³² CDR: So you're five years prior to going to BUD/S, you're at the Academy, High School, the Academy, BUD/S.

45: To prep school then the Academy

³⁴ CDR: Okay.

³⁵ 45: NAPS

³⁶ CDR: OK. So you went to NAPS, right, for one year this year, and then US Naval Academy, and then BUD/S. And then how would you, would you say that you consider yourself an impulsive person at all? Um like do you have tattoos? Do you?

³⁷ 45: No, yeah. So just like, I guess I would make decisions.

³⁸ CDR: Yeah.

³⁹ 45: No, I don't have any tattoos. Yeah, I would say for the most part, no. I guess it makes me think of making quick decisions.

⁴⁰ CDR: Yes.

⁴¹ 45: I think sometimes I do a good job, other times...

⁴² CDR: Sometimes good job, of what?

⁴³ 45: Of making quick decisions, but sometimes that's, that's a poor qualifier cause I do think a lot. I mean, like, let's say just purchasing things, like we just had bBack Friday or whatever. It would take a lot for me to actually pull the trigger. Not very impulsive. I think too much a lot of the time.

⁴⁴ CDR: So what do you think motivates you on a daily basis?

⁴⁵ 45: Umm, so my faith. Umm uhh I would say it's probably the number one thing. I try to always make that the number one thing. I always try to use the gifts God gave me and pull them. Like a follow on to that is just family and blood family. But also the family that I've made throughout my life. Whether its in high school and then the academy, Sprint Football family. Its always who and what I represented.

⁴⁶ CDR: Yep.

⁴⁷ 45: Not just myself. When things get tough that's usually what comes to my mind first. I think of like Jesus on the cross

⁴⁸ CDR: Yeah

⁴⁹ 45: Um just to try to put the pain in perspective.

⁵⁰ CDR: Yeah, so what you say looking at BUD/S, the whole experience. What was the part that you found the most challenging. What really tested you?

⁵¹ 45: I started in 36. And I have, had some medical issues in my back, and that caught up to me as I got rolled before Hell Week in week three. So the toughest, my toughest time was I was never gonna make a decision on my own to stop.

⁵² CDR: Yeah

⁵³ 45: And um, I just didn't do a good job managing it the first time.

⁵⁴ CDR: Managing what?

⁵⁵ 45: Managing my uh back issue. I have to stretch a lot. So I'm my performance dropped off. And it was, it was another one those experience I had getting cut from the

⁵⁶ CDR: Football?

⁵⁷ 45: Big boy Football team.

⁵⁸ CDR: Yeah

⁵⁹ 45: That happened and I was like, out of the class getting rolled, and I was just like. You know, I didn't, I didn't see this, it wasn't part of the plan

⁶⁰ CDR: It wasn't in the cards

⁶¹ 45: So I was just like lost. So that was definitely the toughest part, again I just one foot in front of the other. Start to collect myself. Medical didn't tell me very good stuff and whatnot. I guess I'm here now. And it really I was just, like I said, one foot in front of the other. I'm not going to make the decision. Either I'll be able to or I'll just...

⁶² CDR: Yep, so did you feel like you were supported by the group at all you felt like that was something you had to do yourself?

⁶³ 45: By tha, supported by who?

⁶⁴ CDR: Supported by your class, your boat crew.

⁶⁵ 45: Yeah, no, so I, I think the class did like me a lot. I had the respect from the instructors as well. Seemed like at least. Um which helped me uh at the end of the day I thought. Because my performance completely dropped off. So I definitely felt, a hundred percent welcomed by three six from a lot of these guys out here. And that, that whole family is just reminding me. Hey, I'm not going to make this decision. [Inaudible]

⁶⁶ CDR: What um practices do you feel like there are any practices that you get on a daily basis regularly um that helped you kind of get through, something that you did consistently?

⁶⁷ 45: So physically, at least second time through, I just stretched everyday. And whatnot.

⁶⁸ CDR: Yep

⁶⁹ 45: But mentally, you know, it's not natural for me, but I tried to journal. I wouldn't say, I haven't done it on a regular basis, but regardless, at the end of every day usually while stretching I try to mediate a little bit. Try to reflect, look back at the day. Pray a little bit and try to set myself outside of the a moment.

⁷⁰ CDR: Was there a point when um had to make some kind of a really hard decision that you really struggled with at BUD/S?

⁷¹ 45: So one that comes to mind during Hell Week, maybe more of a more rational decision. I don't know if this is really what you're looking for, but we had just flipped around boat crews.

⁷² CDR: Yep

⁷³ 45: We lost some guys, so I was with a bunch of guys that I had never been with, at all yet.

⁷⁴ CDR: Yep

⁷⁵ 45: And one of the guys was struggling. One of the Petty Officers was

struggling pretty seriously, its a chow run. And one of the other Petty Officers, he was stepping out of the boat. Um and instructors were yelling at him put him in the two whatever and one of the other Petty Officers, his buddy was yelling right back at them, let him stay were he is, and as the Officer I got chewed out for it afterward. So it was maybe more of a lack of decisions, but the decisions to not do anything.

⁷⁶ CDR: Froze as far as...

⁷⁷ 45: That was happening, and I should be doing something right now, didn't really know what to do. So I gave him a stern talking to, and my instructor was just upset about stepping up. Being a leader. I mean the thing that, to that question, the thing that comes to mind is like if I. I'm not going to try to do this because of my back, but it was the decision to try.

⁷⁸ CDR: Now when you are grappling with that, that's different. Well. You didn't really make a decision. And that was the issue. Right. What do you think? Um why are you sitting here? And there's a whole bunch of guys who didn't make it through that aren't here anymore. What do you think makes you, made you successful?

⁷⁹ 45: I would say is that what've I kept saying? I didn't make the decision. I wasn't consciously like I'm going to stops. I was going to go. Until I'm told I'm done. But I was not going to make that decision that I was doing. I'm by no means the fastest, the strongest, whatever. I think that's kind of a big deal during Hell Week, turing off any cognitive decisions making during the time. You just keep going. Definitely during like so long paddles and stuff.

⁸⁰ CDR: Yeah.

⁸¹ 45: And I also think that God. All the glory to God. I think it's kind of a miracle that I'm here.

⁸² CDR: Everyone feels that way. To some degree. What do you think that the guys who aren't here, like you guys again make it? Is there something that you notice you feel about them why they're not here?

⁸³ 45: Biggest is whether it's getting in their head and say they say a lot of young guys, go faster, maybe more athletic, or physically capable or younger than me.

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CDR: Yeah

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45: So maybe going back to that impulse. I evaluate things very heavily, especially on big decisions. Besides this, I couldn't even imagine living with myself at least, coming to that

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CDR: Yeah.

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45: Just setting a goal. The only other time in my life where things didn't work out was getting cut from the Football team.

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CDR: Yeah.

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45: Then I never really knew what it was like other than that to fail at that level.

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CDR: How do you feel like you are different now than when you started this process. And you know, with BO. Like you started with uhh, you started with what class, you three three six. That's right. Yeah.

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45: So how I'm different now?

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CDR: How are you different? No, from when you even started with three three six, like from the very beginning? What's changed about you?

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45: Realizing how much mind, your mind can overcome. There's no question like I didn't do a good job stretching and managing my back stuff. But I think part of it was defiantly mental too. I didn't want to go through the rest of my life saying I can't do this because of my back. Um because there's not things or life.

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CDR: Yeah

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45: [Inaudible] So really, I mean, I learned a lot about myself through Hell Week. Um just always, uh keep my mindset just going to keep me moving forward. And see how much more I can accomplish. I, I'm really thankful, I think a lot of other guys speak negatively, or just decided this suck or whatever. But after first phase guys think that we're not going to be beat or whatever. And I think that's another thing. I really enjoyed it, I think because, One I feel really lucky to be here.

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CDR: Yeah

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45: Two, really just glad to be through BUD/S.

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CDR: Awesome, all right number forty. I appreciate it, thank you. That was good.