

1 **TRANSCRIBER NAME: Nico Sbrocco**

2 **Date: 20 April 2020**

3 **Participant #: 37**

4 **Interviewer: Dr. Deirdre Dixon**

5 Interviewer (Code in Blue)

6 Participant (Code in black)

7 Interviewer: Uhm, I was in the army for 22 years and then I went and got my PhD and I want to help people who are going into dangerous environments. So when the navy said they wanted to do this, this thing, I was like yeah I wanna help so that's where I'm coming from. So is it OK if I record this?

8 #37: Yes ma'am

9 Interviewer: What's your number?

10 #37: My number is 37.

11 37. Ok great. So i'm gonna ask you some easy questions. Uhh we'll start out with how many siblings you have? Are they older, younger, boys, girls?

12 #37: I have an older brother. He's, uh, a little over a year older than me.

13 Interviewer: And that's it? So you're second. Ok perfect. Uh, and then if you think about your life experiences, what might you describe as your crucible, or your life shaping event? Was there one thing that happened to you that kind of shaped you to who you are today?

14 #37: So, uhh, honestly I can't think of any one thing. Uhh, I grew up on a family owned ranch back in Texas, and I was just always taught to work hard, and basically you're responsible for your own actions, so if things don't go your way, that's your fault, and, nobody else's but yours.

15 Interviewer: And how did those experiences factor into your experience at BUD/S?

16 #37: Uhh, I knew it was gonna be a lot of hard work. I also knew it was gonna be mostly mental. Uhm, before this I had gotten my masters degree. And, as you know academia is all mental, and I knew that I could conquer the mental side of BUD/S, I just had to face the physical. And, from what I remember researching, everyone said the physical part is the easy part, it's just the mental part is the difficult part. So it was just getting my body in shape to be able to get through BUD/S.

17 Interviewer: OK. And then what about your personality, what about your personality helped or contributed to your progression through BUD/S?

18 #37: I'm very stubborn.

19 Interviewer: OK.

20 #37: I'm extremely stubborn. Uhm, yeah I'm just, I don't know I think that's the best way to describe it, I'm just very stubborn. I like to sort of, uhh, I guess you could say conquer things, conquer challenges, really, really hard challenges that most people would just rather look away. I just try to take them head on.

21 Interviewer: Tell me about your background, like what led you to want to become a SEAL?

22 #37: Uh, well, it wasn't on the radar until maybe, like, two years ago. I really had no ambitions of becoming a SEAL at all most of my life. The last job I was doing, I was a Navy contractor. And, I started off going on a lot of exercises, and getting to do a lot of exercises and ops, and such, all for training, and I really, really liked that aspect of the job. I really liked my previous job. I started getting to the point where I was more senior, and it was more my job to train people to go do those things, rather than do it myself. And that's when I said "nah, I don't like that." I want to keep going and doing exercises, operating, and training and getting better, so this seemed like the best way to continue that.

23 Interviewer: So tell me a little bit about your childhood. If you screwed up when you were little, what did your parents do to discipline you?

24 #37: Oh, uhh, when I was younger, it was the belt. You know so that was very much a thing. I grew up in a very, very small town, uhm. They always said they loved me before they gave me the belt. Uhm, and they never, ever struck me in any type of anger, and nothing like that. Nothing like with other **undecipherable**.

25 Interviewer: Sure.

26 #37: And then when that proved not as effective as I got older, it turned into "you're grounded" and not having your car. Uhm, or doing some really, really terrible jobs on the ranch. Like, building a fence, or clearing a pasture that's been torn down, like picking up roots, it was just very miserable jobs.

27 Interviewer: OK, so what about your teenage years? Did you, uhm participate in any team sports? Or any activities that were really close knit?

28 #37: I did, football. Texas football in a small town is absolutely huge. Uh, we had a number of people at the time that played football at division one colleges like Texas A&M, Ole Miss, LSU, so it was a huge football town. And if you didn't play football, you were nothing in the town. Which was kinda disappointing because I had friends who won state in tennis, but the community just didn't recognize it, and um, he didn't have the team camaraderie with that. Tennis was a solo sport, you live and die by your own mistakes. With football, as you know, your mistakes translate to everyone on the team. So, football was a really big sport, and I think that had the most impact on learning to operate in a team, and putting the team above yourself. You know.

29 Interviewer: And then, uhm, so what have you done in the last five years of your life prior to BUD/S? So it doesn't sound like, you didn't go from high school to join the Nav. What was your progression?

30 #37: Uh, I went to high school, then I did four years undergrad at Texas A&M. And then I did two years..

31 Interviewer: Ah, my husband is an Aggie.

32 #37: He is. That's the best university ever.

33 Interviewer: Yeah.

34 #37: Then I did a masters degree at the University of Miami. And then from there I spent four years as a contractor for the Navy. I was working with the Mark 7 marine mammal program, which uses bottlenose dolphins to find mines in the water. I did that for four years, and went straight from there to here. I think I forgot your original question.

35 Interviewer: No, you answered it, so I just wanted to see what was your progression that

led you to come to BUD/S. And you said, high school, to college, to masters, to contracting. Yeah, that's perfect. So, what motivates you on a daily basis?

#37: I'm sorry?

Interviewer: What motivates you on a daily basis?

#37: A daily basis?

Interviewer: Yes, what keeps you going?

#37: I think the motivation changes over time. Right now I'm really excited to be learning in SQT, and actually you know the instructors are taking time to teach us things that we are going to use eventually in the teams. Uhm, so that's a big motivation for me right now, I'm glad to be learning.

Interviewer: But what motivated you to get through BUD/S?

#37: Initially, I knew I could do it all along, there was never a doubt in my mind that I would be able to do it. It was just, you know, sorta facing the music and then so, uhm, yeah motivation was hey you've already done, you know you can do it, it's just getting through it and there's going to be much much better times ahead. Uhm, I knew a little more about life beyond BUD/S and if you can put that into perspective and know that this isn't the end, like there is a life after BUD/S, it's a life worth making these sacrifices for right now. And, that really kept me going on some bad days. It's gonna get better.

Interviewer: So if you had to give your worst day at BUD/S, what was that?

#37: The worst day of BUD/S was, it was Tuesday of hellweek. Uhm, I didn't, I'm not a sprinter, I'm more of a stamina guy and the initial intensity of hellweek was really more than I could handle, uh, you know Monday and Tuesday. But, unfortunately it caused me to lean on my boat crew maybe a little more than I should have. Which was a huge regret for me. Luckily, as everyone else's bodies started breaking down by Wednesday, it was easier for me to not only contribute, but start pulling other people's weight. But that initial, Monday and Tuesday, Tuesday was definitely the low point where they were telling me that "this wasn't for me," that you know "you're not gonna make it through, maybe you should quit," and kinda things like "you're bringing people down around you," and that was, that was definitely the lowest part of BUD/S for me.

Interviewer: OK. And did you, what motivated you in that moment to keep going? And, did you feel like the people around you supported you?

#37: So, I knew that I could be an asset to the class. I knew that beyond any doubt. Second phase was diving. While working as a contractor, I logged over 4,000 dives. I also was a dive supervisor as a military contractor. Uhm, third phase is weapons, demo, land navigation. I grew up with a very deep respect for firearms and weapons, uhm, my family were hunters, uh I knew that I was trained. I didn't know how to do land warfare, or anything like that, but I knew that I could be trained to do those things, and that I was adaptable to pick it up. Because obviously, in grad school, I knew I could pick those things up fast enough and become proficient enough to become an asset to the class in second phase and third phase. So even though I leaned on them during those times in hellweek, I really hated that I did that, you know I wish I could have been as strong or a fast as the next guy, but I knew for a fact that once I got past that, that I would be able to give back to my team and give back to the guys who also made it beyond that. And, 2020 now, I was able

47 to help a lot of people out in second phase and third phase.

Interviewer: So, what practices did you use to get through those challenges? Like, physical, mental, spiritual? Did you do anything on a daily basis that helped you get through?

48 #37: Uh, everything I did I felt like it was very practical. Stretching, rolling, nutrition. As for the spiritual stuff, I mean, I do believe in God, I am a practicing Christian, but at the same time, you've got to, take those things into control and you can say God has a plan for you and you just sit on the couch eating cheetos, obviously you're not going to get to where you want to go. So yeah, I really didn't have words of wisdom or motivational phrases. I just said, OK, this is a process, and I want to get through it I need to take care of my body and I need to foster relationships with the guys around me, uhm.

49 Interviewer: So, uhm, is there a time where, when you were at BUD/S and you had to make a difficult decision? And how did you think about going about that? Some people have said they didn't make any big decisions, but.

50 #37: I was about to say, I'm enlisted, pretty much the lowest of the low on the totem pole. It really wasn't my job to make decisions. Uhm, I'm trying to think of any difficult decisions.

51 Interviewer: That's OK.

52 #37: But, the hardest ones, I think, are when someone asks your opinion on another guy. Like how's this person, how'd they do? And you're friends with that person, but at the same person you owe to the class to tell people the negative things about a person who had problems or struggles with something. I had problems and struggles with things myself, but you still owe it to your class and to be as objective as possible, because if not, you know that those people aren't going to get better.

53 Interviewer: Why do you think you were successful in BUD/S?

54 #37: I really, I honestly believe just convincing yourself in some way that you are going to be an asset to the group, and not a liability. I saw that get to a lot of people. That was mostly people's excuses for quitting in first phase. They just didn't want to bring the team down or be a liability.

55 Interviewer: Well, that's my next question. What was different between you and the people who decided to quit?

56 #37: A lot of them were younger, I guess it's harder for the younger person to see or value what they're going to do to contribute to the class overall. And, I knew that from the beginning, that I was a very strong diver, and I was able to grasp procedures. I knew I had a respect for things that we were gonna deal with eventually like firearms and demolition, and those kinds of things. Uh, I was just very confident in my ability to be able to make a contribution to the class. If you've never had life experiences that teach you things. And then I've also made significant mistakes in some previous jobs. And I knew my ability to operate in a team, as well. My last job we were kinda working in groups and I knew how important it was for people to specialize in certain things in a team. If you have a team that's good at all of the same things, then you can lose your diversity and your ability to adapt and overcome certain challenges. So I guess that's what separated me. I was very, very confident and I knew I could do and be an asset to the class.

57 Interviewer: You've only got two more questions.

58 #37: Oh, no worries, ma'am.

59 Interviewer: Uhm, how did this experience change you as a person? This whole BUD/S journey.

60 #37: Oh, well, my body is broken in a couple of places, I mean, but change me as a person, do you mean physically, mentally?

61 Interviewer: Yes.

62 #37: Either?

63 Interviewer: Either.

64 #37: Physically, I learned that I can go a really long time without having sleep. Before, I also thought if I missed an hour or two at night, I was destroyed for the next day. And that's not true at all, like your body is capable of doing just crazy things and uh if you're just not willing to quit. And mentally, uh, I'm trying to think of how it changed me mentally. Not really sure, about that one, I don't think it's really changed me that much.

65 Interviewer: OK.

66 #37: I was thirty years old, and I was pretty set in my ways, and uhm, not to say that there isn't room for improvement, and I'm always working to improve.

67 Interviewer: Sure.

68 #37: But, yeah, I haven't really felt any strong changes or influences like that. I feel pretty much like I'm the same person I am when I started.

69 Interviewer: Why didn't you, when you came in and joined the navy and made a contract, why didn't you want to be an officer? You know with all this education.

70 #37: Oh it's doable. Uhm, the only sent application is once a year in February for OCS and it's very, very, very competitive. I didn't really know how good I was on paper, and you needed letters of recommendation from people in the military. I didn't know a single person, really, other than a new guy in the teams. Uhm, yeah I was 29, and at the time I thought my odds of getting a contract and going to BUD/S enlisted was greater than as an officer. And becoming a SEAL was more important than becoming an officer.

71 Interviewer: OK, now one more thing. So, SOCOM asked us to do this to try to figure out what makes a good SEAL, and what makes people successful going through SEAL training. What should I have asked you, that I didn't ask, that you're just dying to tell me.

72 #37: In relation to what makes a good SEAL competitor?

73 Interviewer: Yes.

74 #37: I feel like you covered the bases pretty good.

75 Interviewer: OK.

76 #37: Uhm.

77 Interviewer: Or if you got the chance to talk to your brother, who's thinking of becoming a SEAL, what would you tell him? You know.

78 #37: I can maybe ask the mental logical side of things, but it's also like how much can you prepare ahead of time, what was your workout before you got in, uhm, obviously everybody is gonna be very different, but I think that says a lot of being able to plan ahead. I think that people who have who didn't even know where the SEAL teams were located and San Diego, uh, Virginia, and Hawaii. They thought they could be a SEAL and be

stationed to close to home. And that just shows a complete lack of planning ahead. And it goes, there were other people who ran you know five miles a week, kinda thing, coming into a program where you're gonna be running 50 a week so the actual workout regimen and what they did, I don't think would be as important. But, mainly it shows the ability to plan ahead and plan accordingly and recognize your weaknesses and recognize what you're getting yourself into. Some guys, don't do any of that and they end up making it, but they're the outliers. I think most of the people who are very successful in this program did a significant amount of research and planning ahead of time. And, I guess we can go into that, like "what books did you read before coming to BUD/S?" And there's so much information out there that you can get almost every single piece of the pipeline laid out in front of you. And nothing is unexpected, everything you come across, you're saying I've thought about this, trained for this, and I know I can do this. But if everything is just new and surprising to you, you've got some people who are just gonna get through all of it. But I think that's pretty rare. If you haven't mentally told yourself, like, hey I am actually planning for my community and eventually you're gonna go on a mission and you're gonna be planning all this out if you're not already in that mindset you need to get there. You need to be doing your research as much as you can before making this kind of commitment. A lot of the people who aren't here right now, I don't think they knew to do that.

79

Interviewer: That's great. Alright, we're finished up then.