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³ **Participant #: 86**

⁴ Interviewer (Code in blue): CDR Andrew Ledford

⁵ Participant (Code in black): # 86

⁶ CDR: Record, hit record. All right. I've got it student number eighty six. The time is two thirty eight p.m. This is Andrew Ledford. Uh and I've got your consent to record.

⁷ 86: Good to go.

⁸ CDR: Okay, um so I'm going to ask you some questions about your background. Just get idea of where you came from. So first off, some easy ones. How many, do you have any siblings?

⁹ 86: I have an older sister, she's twenty seven, and a younger brother who's twenty three, twenty four.

¹⁰ CDR: Old sister, how many years older is she?

¹¹ 86: She's three years older. She's twenty seven. My brother he's twenty three. One and half years younger.

¹² CDR: She's twenty seven, and your younger brother?

¹³ 86: He's twenty three. Year and half younger.

¹⁴ CDR: Younger, he's twenty three. That makes you, twenty four.

¹⁵ 86: Yeah twenty four, middle child.

¹⁶ CDR: Middle child, all right. Now looking at your experiences, growing up your overall looking at your life. What experiences do you feel like shaped you? Like were there a couple ones in particular critical things that happened in your life that really made you who you are?

¹⁷ 86: Yes, um actually, you know, I think, like I thought about this a lot. My preschool I thought was really cool, like I, It was I don't know, at a young age I know like the younger you are the more critical like development is, and everything so at my preschool a place where I thought creatively and

imagination is really rewarded and encouraged and I think that kind of really shaped a lot of what, how I approached, like you know, education and pursuits and whatnot, and I give a lot of credit to that. Then sports were huge in my life, you know, Pop warren football, I was in eighth grade. That was the first time I felt that coaches expected responsibility and maturity from us.

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CDR: Mhhmm.

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86: And this idea of really navigating territory that I, and navigating adversity. One of the things they did there was they it, up to that point whenever I couldn't make it to practice my mom would call the coach and they said, 'hey, no more of that if you aren't going to be at practice call you us yourself. I don't want to be hearing from your parents.' To me that was something that clicked, I was like all right time to start taking responsibility for myself, accountability. I went to an all boys school, a private Catholic school that uhh was that was big for me to. Umm I ran track there. And I was another, that kind uhh of thing kind of continued that trend of taking responsibility being mature. Umm kind of lot was expected of you, and you were given a lot of rope to hang yourself, but a lot was expected of you and I ran track there. They kind of got the like of nature was brought in that because it was a good track school. I was given a chance to be really surround by guys who are willing to do the extra extra stuff, extra work to become champions, umm winners. That's I kind of where I got my competitive nature, my way, my willingness to win. And this I kind of the idea of brotherhood. I really didn't become a good friend in general until I was a junior and I remember it clicking one day, I got to be a better friend. And as soon as that happened, being a much better friend to people.

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CDR: Was there something that happened that triggered that this in your junior year of high school? I guess that's very specific.

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86: Yeah, I think I was just driving one day or something and I'm like, you know what I really, I was thinking like who my best friend was like, I got to be a better friend to him. I got a, it wasn't necessarily an event that happened it was the realization. Like, you know what I really, really want better friends in life and want my friends to have my back, and I realized I got to be that guy in order to have those friends, so that um clicked and then.

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CDR: So nothing really, you're just driving a long and this is?

²³ 86: Yes, yep. And then. So my high school was awesome like I really like it gave me this idea of a lot of things I experience in this pipeline I felt like it sort of echoed my experience in high school and on the track team just being surround by guys who, you know, complaining was not, you know, there not complaining, they just take whatever you have, just suffer on your plate and make the best of it and you don't make excuses. And yeah so track with as much more of a team sport in high school then I think it typically is just because you were about winning two events. And then I went to, oh yeah lifeguarding was huge too. Summer after my junior high school I became a lifeguard and that was like embracing the suck was big there. You're a rookie you're treated pretty poorly. People warned me it's going to be the best job, but your first summer it's gonna really suck, but it's going to worth it.

²⁴ CDR: Why did it suck? Like what hard about it?

²⁵ 86: As a rookie, you did everything. Umm I remember after my first day working just being exhausted after my first day working thinking wow this is what the summers going to be like huh. Um yeah, you did everything, you're thrown into, drinking from a firehose. Same thing a lot of echoed there that I experienced in this pipeline. Um you're always uncomfortable, you know, you're always, you get cold a lot. As a rookie I never put sweats on because I knew I was going to be there first one to go on rescue. So I'd never wear sweats because I didn't want to take too long to go on the rescue.

²⁶ CDR: Yeah

²⁷ 86: You get hazed a lot. They had, my lifeguard stand had the three o'clock block from three to four, they would just mess with me for an hour. That was like an established thing every day. Um they, and again it's a responsibility, I remember going through these workouts, like track workouts that's the one thing, if you lose a workout, if you don't do your best, you're going to lose the race, and whatever and then kind of having this feeling, this weight, if I don't do my best on this lifeguard workout, it could me losing a rescue, it could be me causing someone to die. So I felt a lot of magnitude there, I felt a lot importance in what I was doing. Umm and yeah, that was basically the main takeaways that idea of responsibility was even furthered beside of that job. And that idea of embracing the suck and dealing with it rather than finding ways to deal with it internally rather than just trying to get out of the situation.

²⁸ CDR: Ah, what about your personality, like what things are a part of your

personality that you think are really important that you think helped get you through, BUD/S?

²⁹ 86: I think gratitude, I think gratitude is the biggest one learning just to be grateful.

³⁰ CDR: How so?

³¹ 86: I mean, whatever is going on, your going through the worst evo ever. You feel like you always have some to be grateful for, so if you're grateful for something if makes you feel make you feel better a bit about being in whatever situation you're in and if you're grateful for something you want to protect it.

³² CDR: Hmm

³³ 86: So, I think gratitude is huge for here, and just doing BUD/S in San Diego you have a lot to be grateful for, and just owning whatever your mistakes are not refusing to, it is just like a nice, easy way to get out of it. And it's like, it's like an like opium rush, an dopamine rush getting out of something getting out of maybe not blaming yourself, I realize it's much better, healthier to take responsibility for your mistakes. Empathy is this big. I always, always want, I've been described to people as empathetic. And I think that is huge here because you got to be thinking about the people next to you. Gets you through it, doing something for someone else rather than for yourself is always, I think, I can motivate myself to do that more, uh more easily.

³⁴ CDR: Yep.

³⁵ 86: And humor. I think humor.

³⁶ CDR: How so?

³⁷ 86: Just being able to laugh at a situation, being able to laugh at yourself. That's actually one of my favorite qualities in other people being able to laugh at yourself. And I don't quite know, why that works, but I see the guys I'm surrounded by and what's helped me get through is I think the ability to laugh at myself.

³⁸ CDR: Good.

³⁹ 86: Um I'm not, I've never, all I know is it's the people I'm most drawn to in the community are that are able to laugh at themselves. I don't know how that necessary translates to this.

⁴⁰ CDR: So talking a little bit more about your childhood and growing up with your parents. Uhmm what is their discipline style, for parents, did they spank you, was it time out, was it withholding toys?

⁴¹ 86: When I was young, it was spankings and timeouts. And then as I got older. You wanna hear about adolescence as well?

⁴² CDR: Yep.

⁴³ 86: As I got older it was weird they kind of treated the three of us differently based on, like for me, it was I didn't get ground much I didn't have a curfew. My older sister had a curfew. Umm but, yeah for me it was, it wasn't, they kind of gave me a lot of rope to hang myself, and I didn't get in much trouble for that, because I kind of valued that, uh I remember one time I was kinda just making the wrong decisions for a couple weeks straight, and my dad came in and he's like, kinda gave me a talk, And he's like, I kind of got defensive, but didn't you this when your my age? He goes 'yeah, that's why I'm not expecting you to not to do all this stuff, I just want you be more responsible.' That was kind of his approach to me, just be responsible. They never had to really bring the hammer down. Um, yeah.

⁴⁴ CDR: Awesome, so teenage years, umm did you guys move around a lot? Were you always in the same sport? Small town, big town, type or not?

⁴⁵ 86: Yeah, it was a small town, New Jersey, uh Central Jersey small suburb about an hour from New York. And uh it was I stayed in the same house my whole life up until I was twenty one, we moved, summer after my junior year of college, we moved two towns over.

⁴⁶ CDR: So that small town was pretty tight?

⁴⁷ 86: I'd say so, you know, everyone. It was six thousand people, but it was as small as two square miles, 6000 people. And you didn't know everyone, but you knew a lot of people when you worked out around.

⁴⁸ CDR: What town was it in Central Jersey?

⁴⁹ 86: Uh Little Silver.

⁵⁰ CDR: Oh sorry, okay, I was in Princeton, you say Mercer? That's not Mercer County.

⁵¹ 86: It's called Little Silver, it's a small county.

⁵² CDR: Oh okay.

⁵³ 86: Yeah I remember a friend of mine say you were his mentor.

⁵⁴ CDR: Yeah, Greg.

⁵⁵ 86: Kieffor.

⁵⁶ CDR: Kieffor, yeah. So um your five year going to BUD/S, five years prior to BUD/S, what was your, what would you do? Like what were those five years, where you at?

⁵⁷ 86: I was going through college not really knowing I wanted to do this until my senior year. So.

⁵⁸ CDR: So was your college, like big college, small college?

⁵⁹ 86: I went to, uh the University of Pennsylvania, so it ten thousand people, medium sized college.

⁶⁰ CDR: Yep, and so you're going through college. How many years?

⁶¹ 86: All four years.

⁶² CDR: Oh you did there.

⁶³ 86: My senior year spring, um so I joined twenty three, right before I turned twenty four. So senior year of college I decided I wanted to do this, finished up college, Immediately, get a lifeguarded again because it gave me time to train and everything. And uh I put together an Officer package, went through that whole process when to SOAS, uh 2018, summer of 2018, uh was notified 20 September 2018 I didn't get the contract. I already had dual processed for an enlisted contract. So as soon as I got that, I was like, Officer, it was, it was rejected, I had my enlisted contract ready to go. And

uh I took on jobs. In the school I was working in the development office, in my high school, before I went to SOAS, and then after SOAS I took on a job. I went back to lifeguarding. And then once that end I took on a job as a waiter at a restaurant. And uh then I shipped to Boot Camp on February, of 2019.

⁶⁴ CDR: So how many, how long did you from when you left Penn to getting to BUD/S, how many years was that, were working as lifeguard basically?

⁶⁵ 86: So it was two years of working as a lifeguard for both summers after that. And then first, first school year was a development office at my school, uh advancement sergeant, advancement office, like fundraising. And then the second school year, like not in summer was waiting, being a waiter.

⁶⁶ CDR: Okay, okay, and then then you got to BUD/S at that point?

⁶⁷ 86: Yes.

⁶⁸ CDR: Okay, how would you, would you describe yourself as like impulsive person, like do you have tattoos?

⁶⁹ 86: No tattoos.

⁷⁰ CDR: Uh and would you describe yourself as kind of an impulsive person? Um.

⁷¹ 86: I don't think so. No.

⁷² CDR: No, how about with money? Like are you, uh would you say you're frugal with money, or if you've got money, you're going to spend it.

⁷³ 86: I try to be frugal, I think when it comes to spending on others I'll, I kinda have this policy where I'm pretty cheap when I'm by myself, just because I know I'm going to be spending more with other people. Yeah, so is definitely try, that's exactly as I described it.

⁷⁴ CDR: What do you say motivates you like on a daily basis, like, kinda of gets you through the day

⁷⁵ 86: Just knowing that you have to do it to be who you want to be.

⁷⁶ CDR: What about um your most challenging time at BUD/S? Like, was there a time that, time, or thing overall, what did you have the hardest time?

⁷⁷ 86: I, there, was a moment where, so when I was first phase, post Hell Week, I got to class beat or something, and it was like, a partially miscommunication, partially a mindset flaw on my part. And so I felt, I kind of lost sleep over that being like, oh I hurt my reputation with the instructor, and I think I really just lost a lot of sleep, on being like 'aw man' I worked so hard on building my reputation, I just, I threw it all the way on that.

⁷⁸ CDR: So you did something and it got the whole class got beat? What was it? Like what did you do?

⁷⁹ 86: So I was, I was, I was sick and I go to medical to go SIQ, but FTX for first phase was that night, and I go, I'm trying figure out well, if I go SIQ, and I'm [inaudible] am I going to get rolled like it's the last week of the first phase. And so, I'm like, I go up to my instructor as I'm checking into medical, and I'm like

⁸⁰ Hey uh, I gonna, if I miss the FTX tonight am I going to get rolled if I do?' And he said, 'what about the swim, it's mandatory.' And the swims not mandatory I knew I wouldn't get rolled if I missed it. And he's like, well, its a flawed mindset. I should have sucked it up out and done the whole day, you know, even though I had the fever. But so that was that, but they kind of thought I was really trying to duck under the swim, but I wanted to do the FTX. I'm like really, so that whole thing was really probably my lowest point of BUD/S. Was think, getting my class beat, but even more so hurting my reputation with everyone.

⁸¹ CDR: Mhhmm.

⁸² 86: Um, yeah so that was that, and OC8 I went to third attempt. And that was, I think, the weird anxiety I had afterwards, it was like, wow, I came so close to losing to getting dropped. Or like, it made me realize how fragile this whole pipeline is, my spot in the pipeline.

⁸³ CDR: Yeah.

⁸⁴ 86: That was a weird moment, I had some weird post facto anxiety.

⁸⁵ CDR: Great, um so what were the things that got you through all right? So you realize, like holy shit, I'm graduating?

⁸⁶ 86: For that, it was just realizing that you got to deal with it, that that's life, and that's going to your career.

⁸⁷ CDR: Mhhmm.

⁸⁸ 86: Yeah, you just kind of have to adapt to whatever, I had this realization before I got to BUD/S where you can really just become whatever you think you must become to do whatever it is you want to do. And that's my approach now.

⁸⁹ CDR: Were there things that you did on a consistent basis, daily that practices, like spiritual, mental, and physical that you do consistently, that kind of helped you get through everything?

⁹⁰ 86: I don't think so.

⁹¹ CDR: Okay

⁹² 86: Nothing tangible, just like reminders.

⁹³ CDR: Yep, was there any point in BUD/S where you had to make a really difficult decision that you really, really struggled with?

⁹⁴ 86: Yeah, I was, this is embarrassing, but um, I like got, it was Third Phase and we had like an impromptu beating, which which was like we had to do a swimmer inspections.

⁹⁵ CDR: Mhhmm

⁹⁶ 86: And I couldn't find my booties, I was, and I found someone else, I was certain this other guy had my booties, that I was certain where I read my name in stencil, I thought it was my name. And I.

⁹⁷ CDR: You couldn't find your booties?

⁹⁸ 86: I thought he had taken 'em. Afterwards after the fact, I just went without booties, but after that fact I went and I like was certain after I saw him with his stuff on, so a couple days later, I wanna make sure I was like, I realized they said his name. And for some reason I let myself, just deluded myself, looking at his stencil, so like I told him, 'you like stole my booties.' And he

was like ‘oh sorry about that, I didn’t mean to.’ He was, he apologized, and everyone else, like word got out that, that he stole my booties. So it became a joke that he stole my booties. So I, um I really, the decision, when I realized they were his, all right I could actually just sneak them, throw them in his stuff and no one would know.

⁹⁹ CDR: Ohhh.

¹⁰⁰ 86: I kinda told myself, no one would know, I realized you could not let his his reputation marred by a falsity. And so I kind of made sure that everyone was in the classroom one day, I just want everyone to know that he didn’t really steal my booties, that it was actually my mistake. Really sorry about that, that was tough, because.

¹⁰¹ CDR: Yeah.

¹⁰² 86: It was so easy to get away with it, and then you realize, you know, you gotta hold yourself to that standard.

¹⁰³ CDR: Awesome, what do you think, made you successful? There are a whole bunch guys who aren’t here right now. What is it about you that made you a success, that got you here?

¹⁰⁴ 86: I don’t know, I’m like trying to think of everyone that dropped. I think a lot of guy who got dropped were just couldn’t assume responsibility for themselves. There was one huge responsibility. Um I kind of think that the whole idea is that you have to have a really good ‘why’ has been disproven. As far as the people I know what that’s like and the reasons why they what to do this, it’s like that’s a terrible ‘why.’ And they still made it through, and even when I was going through Hell Week it was the thing that got me through Hell Week, I think, I kept reminding myself was Friday is going to be the best of your life, you’re going to sleep in bed, you’re going to call your Dad. It wasn’t about like, it wasn’t about the long term career your life and was just thinking about Friday is going to be the best day of your life. It wasn’t my deep seated ‘why’ it was just telling myself, tricking myself into believing that Friday would be the best day in my life, which might be true. So I think do this short, it wasn’t a long term, it was a short term goal, short term like, I don’t want to say tricking yourself, but exaggerating the benefits of getting going through a short term is.

¹⁰⁵ CDR: Great, uhh in your experience, umm cause you just kind of answered,

I was also going to ask, the guys who didn't make it, what did you see about them that you're talking about, they couldn't so assume responsibility for themselves. They kind of played the victim.

106 86: Right.

107 CDR: And they didn't have a good enough 'why?' Right?

108 86: No, well, I think the 'why' thing doesn't matter as much as we say it should matter. Like I said, the guys who made it, and they tell me there 'why,' I'm thinking, 'that's a stupid why and you're here and.'

109 CDR: Hmm

110 86: And honestly, I think the whole 'why' thing, yeah...

111 CDR: Okay.

112 86: I just something, that's something I thought was almost an anomaly, you hear all the time that you have a good why.

113 CDR: Yeah.

114 86: I realized oh there are a lot stupid 'whys.' Maybe they aren't stupid, maybe they're important to them. One guy, like literally I asked him why he wanted to do this, and he said 'because it's hard.' [laughs] And he's here you know.

115 CDR: Yeah, so last question. How has this experience changed you? Like what do you think is different about you now than when you started with. You started with three three eight, right?

116 86: Yes.

117 CDR: Yeah

118 86: Uh just it's no longer whether or not it's what you're going to do is fun, ur ur, hurts or whatever. It's just whether or not you got to do it, and you're going to do what you gotta do to graduate.

119 CDR: You don't feel like you do that beforehand?

¹²⁰ 86: I, I, kinda you know it beforehand, but you really learn it when you're here. I think that's kind what you take away, all those clichés that, you know, you learn how true they are. That's, that was definitely drilled home. And that's what got me through, I read this book on Zen when I was in prep, and one of the things was, it's not, basically that, what I just described. It's not whether it's going to fun, or if it's going hurt, and whether it make you happy, or whatever, is this is something to do or is something not to do. And if it's something to do, then do it, if it's something not to do, then don't do it. And that was my key take away. My Dad sent me a quote when I was, right before Hell Week, and it was a Joseph Conrad quote and its, "Face it, always facing it, that's the only way through it, face it."

¹²¹ CDR: What's the quote?

¹²² 86: Face it, always facing it, that's the only way through it, facing it. That was a more exciting and elegant way of saying, do this. You know, do this.

¹²³ CDR: Always face it. That's the only way through it.

¹²⁴ 86: Yes

¹²⁵ CDR: And that was Conrad?

¹²⁶ 86: Yes, Joseph Conrad.

¹²⁷ CDR: Good, awesome. All right, number 86, I appreciate. Let me stop this.