**TRANSCRIBER NAME: ENS Kalafut**

**Date: 1/27/2020**

**Participant #: 634**

Interviewer (Code in blue): Dr. Luning

Participant (Code in black): #634

Dr. Dixon:

Okay, what's your number?

634:

634.

Dr. Dixon:

And do you mind if I record?

634:

No, I don't mind at all.

Dr. Dixon:

Okay, great. So I'm gonna... What phase did you leave-

634:

Uh-

Dr. Dixon:

The training?

634:

First phase.

Dr. Dixon:

First phase? And how many weeks ago was that?

634:

Um, that was probably eight weeks ago now?

Dr. Dixon:

Eight weeks ago? Okay, great. So could you tell me a little bit about your childhood? Like, how many kids were in your family? Are your parents still together? Did you move around a lot? Just basic stuff like that.

634:

Uh, just grew up in Cypress, Texas. Um, we moved around like three times, but stayed in that area. Uh, parents have been together the whole time. And I have a younger sister, uh, four years younger than me. Um, pretty stable childhood. I was really fortunate with my parents.

Dr. Dixon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). And if you had to describe your personality in three traits, what would you... What would you say?

634:

Um, I'd say, uh, hard-working, uh, dedicated, and, um, passionate. Yeah.

Dr. Dixon:

Okay, awesome. Thank you. And then, what have you done in the last five years prior to this training? Like, senior year... Was it high school? Did you work? Did you go to college? Where'd you go? And-

634:

Um, so I went to, uh, Texas A&M. And I got my, uh, Construction Science degree there. And, uh, while I was there, I was a part of a, uh, preparatory group, um, for, uh, different military, um, backgrounds. Like, such as, um, NSW, like EOD... That kinda type thing. And, uh, so I was part of that group while I was there.

Dr. Dixon:

Were you in the Corps?

634:

I was.

Dr. Dixon:

Okay.

634:

Yes, ma'am. So, that's what I did for the last four years. Yeah.

Dr. Dixon:

And then a year of high school?

634:

A year of high school.

Dr. Dixon:

Or did you take a gap y-

634:

Yeah.

Dr. Dixon:

Okay. Great. And then, um, can you think of any experiences in your life that you would consider f- things that had a big impact to you, or life-changing, before BUD/S?

634:

Uh, I think one of the... So I played soccer growing up. And, uh, I was, had these like little injuries along the way that kinda play- like kinda played me for probably a year and a half, two years, that I had to kinda overcome through different like physical therapy and stuff like that. And, uh, having a, like... Not being able to play and stuff was pretty hard and everything, but just taking the time to put in the extra work I guess, um, off the field really helped me come back and, uh, stay committed to my club team and then high school team also. So that was a big one. Uh, and, um, yeah. What else?

634:

Yeah, really, really through sports is kinda where, uh, I think I got... One of the positions that I play that I think really kinda brought a lot of like grit through was, um, center defensive mid. So I played that in soccer. And I hadn't, I was more of a technical player when I was younger, but then as I got older I became more of a defensive player. Kinda made... You know, like, made me rough, like, rougher player, like, which, uh-

Dr. Dixon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

634:

Kinda benefited me, I'd say.

Dr. Dixon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

634:

And, uh... So those k- I think those last couple years of playing soccer really shaped like where I am today, and like kinda attracted me like to the military, uh, and stuff like that.

Dr. Dixon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

634:

So-

Dr. Dixon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). So, my son played center mid too. Did you play at Texas A&M? I know they don't have a varsity.

634:

They... Yeah-

Dr. Dixon:

They only have club.

634:

They have a club team there. So I didn't play there, but, um, I... Yeah, I have a friend that played for that... He played right back, um, with that club team. 'Cause I was... I kinda made the decision, I'd say my spring semester of freshman year, to pursue this and like prepare for this.

Dr. Dixon:

Yeah, sure.

634:

Uh-

Dr. Dixon:

And you can't really do both. It's-

634:

Yeah, it's kinda tough. Um, 'cause... Well, like, actually before that, I was, um... I was gonna go to the Marine Corps and be an officer. I was, I went to POC, uh-

Dr. Dixon:

Right.

634:

Juniors.

Dr. Dixon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

634:

And, uh, and then, after I made it on this, uh, program, uh... The, uh, the group I was telling you about-

Dr. Dixon:

Right.

634:

I decided I wanted to pursue this, so I dropped that contract, and then just basically committed myself to this. So, um, yeah.

Dr. Dixon:

Okay. No, it's sounds like you've had great opportunities. So, um, describe your background that led you to join the Navy. So there's... You, you were talking about, you possibly were gonna do the Marine Corps and become an officer, but w- what... Anything that specifically made you change your mind? Or why... I'm Army, so I'm always-

634:

Yeah.

Dr. Dixon:

Pro Army. Why the Navy Special Opps versus Army Special Opps? Or what, what did you look at?

634:

Um, I'd say from the outside looking in, it seemed like, uh, NSW's like kinda the tip of the spears, what it seems like, uh, from a person on the outside looking in. Um, but I know that all of those, uh... I mean, Army has got an amazing program and everything too. So I guess from the outside looking in, that's kinda how I like portrayed it-

Dr. Dixon:

No, absolutely.

634:

So, uh-

Dr. Dixon:

I, I would agree with you.

634:

So I just went after it, and you know, fell a little short obviously. But, um... So now... Yeah, now I just gotta bounce back from that. But, uh, I think that's... From the outside looking in, it was that. And then, um, from the en- enlisted versus officer decision, I kinda... So my dad was in the Marines for six years. And, uh, he was a machine gunner. And, uh, I think hearing his stories growing up as enlisted, and then going through Officer Candid- just half of Officer Candidate's School for the Marine Corps. I was like, yeah, I don't wanna do that right away.

634:

So, I wanted to be able to specialize in something later on as an enlisted pers- uh, person. So, uh, that's kinda why I just decided to enlist and go after this.

Dr. Dixon:

No, it makes perfect sense. I actually enlisted before I went and got my commission too, so-

634:

Yeah.

Dr. Dixon:

Sometimes I think it makes stronger officers because you know what it feels like to be-

634:

Right.

Dr. Dixon:

On the other side. So, I can totally see that. Um, what would you say motivates you on a daily basis?

634:

Um, yeah, I mean, it's... So it's been pretty... It's been kinda weird, like, getting back into training and stuff, since... So I, I dropped like Monday night of Hell Week. Uh, and getting back... So I had... I guess I ended up having pneumonia and stuff. So getting back into it, I guess, just like... Sometimes what motivates me is just all the, uh, kinda like proving, you know, proving others wrong and stuff, and s- and things like that. But also just having a goal and staying committed to it. And, uh, and like, my fiancé motivates me.

634:

Um, family motivates me. 'Cause I really just wanna make them proud at the end of the day. And, um, now, more than ever, you know. And like, like that, that second, I don't know, like a second wind. It's like, you really wanna, like, every day is an opportunity to get better and get back into it. So-

Dr. Dixon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

634:

I'd say that's what kinda motivates me, especially now. It's like, all right, well... (laughs) Like, 'cause you kinda lose all your credibility when you don't make it through something you say you're gonna do. So now, no, like, no chance whatever I do next... Like, I need to accel at. And, uh-

Dr. Dixon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

634:

Make others proud. And I guess kinda make myself proud in a sense. (laughs) It's kinda funny.

Dr. Dixon:

Yeah. No, absolutely. Well, do you mind telling me about your experience at BUD/S? Like-

634:

Yeah.

Dr. Dixon:

What happened... What made you make the decision?

634:

Yeah. So, um, the first three weeks were pretty good. Um, I guess I was kinda... Everyone was sick, but I m- I- I was trying to get something cleared up. Like on the weekends, I was trying to get... I tried to get like a bronchitis prescription, and it didn't work out. So, I guess, I s- I thought I had that. So, um, and then I went into Hell Week, and, um, Sunday... Sunday was okay. And then Monday was like, I was starting to deteriorate, and I, I couldn't keep up with the boat and stuff.

634:

Like I was just getting ran out over and over again. So, I didn't wanna... Basically, I didn't wanna hurt the rest of, uh, my teammates, I guess, at the time. So I made that decision. Um, uh, it is interesting to think about, like, how it's... I guess it's changed a little bit because you kinda, you don't wanna go to medical because you're... It's kinda problematic if you go, type thing, like... So it w- it was kinda one of those things where I was like, "All right, maybe I'll just push through it." Um, but then turning...

634:

Then once I got out and I went... They make you go to medical when you get out. Um, they like X-rayed my lungs and stuff, and I guess I had pneumonia. But... So then after that, I, I- I had one of my friends that, uh, went to medical right before Hell Week 'cause he had cellulitis, which was like, obviously he had to go. And he ended up getting rolled. So that's something that-

Dr. Dixon:

Hm.

634:

Is in my mind sometimes. I'm like, man, I wonder... You know, wonder if, what could've been type thing? But honestly, I mean, there were so many people that like went through like having SIPE or whatever it was. Like, they made it through. So it's like, it's no excuse, but it's just interesting to think about.

634:

But yeah, so I went... First three weeks were pretty good. End of week three, I was kinda like, man... I wonder what's going on? Like, um, the transit runs were a little bit... Like, they were harder than they should've felt, and I was kinda getting in my head about it a little bit. And then I just kinda shook it off, and took the weekend, and tried to (laughs) take a bunch of stuff. Like, I just bought some like Mucinex-

Dr. Dixon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

634:

And things like that. And I thought it was helping, but no. And then, um, went in Sunday, an- and then, s- like I was saying, Sunday was good. And then, Monday, I just couldn't keep up. So then, uh, yeah, I made that decision then. Um, yeah, it's pretty quick when you think abut that. (laughs) But-

Dr. Dixon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

634:

Uh, like... It really was the first two and a half, three weeks were good, and then it just kinda all came to a head in the end. So-

Dr. Dixon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Was there a time, and maybe that was it, when you had to make a difficult decision during training at BUD/S? And what went through your mind? And could you give me an example?

634:

Yeah. Um, so it was during, um... That was the biggest tour. You're running with a boat all over, um, here and then dry side. Um, and I was hanging on by a thread on, like, over here. And then once we got over to the dry side, I just kept... Like, the boat just kept running over me pretty much.

634:

And I guess in that time, I, I knew that I wasn't really... I wasn't performing. I wasn't, um, meeting the standards. So I had to make that decision to leave the program to, well, in order to, uh, not hurt everyone else around me-

Dr. Dixon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

634:

And injure someone else.

Dr. Dixon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). So, looking back on it now, is there anything that you would've done differently?

634:

Um, I mean, I, I don't know. I mean, I guess... I don't think so. It's like... I- I, I train, train hard. Uh, felt like I was in, like, really good shape coming into it.

Dr. Dixon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

634:

Um, maybe I, maybe I could've been more selfish and just kept letting the boat run out, but that's just kinda not, uh... I don't know, that's just not really who I am I guess. So it's just-

Dr. Dixon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). What, can you tell me more about that? What do you mean, being more selfish? And maybe it's my unfamiliarity with exactly what you do. I mean, I've watched what they do during BUD/S. But do you mean, like, when you were doing the boat, with the boat on your head? Like, what do you mean, running over?

634:

Yeah, so kinda what happened, like... It seems, it's kind of like 50/50, seems like. But if some people get run out... So basically, what happens is you're running. And I think at the time, we had two boats going, which was kind of a weird thing when you think about like... I think it was like Monday. Um, wha- u- our class was pretty small.

634:

Um, but basically, if you can't keep up, like, you go... You basi- you either try to stay up or fall. Or they... Or you just kinda go out and just run behind the boat 'cause you can't keep up anymore. But, um, being selfish I guess would be continuing to go, even though you're not running with the boat. And then-

Dr. Dixon:

Oh, I gotcha.

634:

And then the instructors, uh, punish the entire class for your short-coming. So, you could be more selfish in that regard and go on for maybe another, uh, 8 to 10 hours, and then they might performance roll you. Or, or... Yeah, I mean, you might get rolled in that, uh, regard. 'Cause then you might have a chance to go to medical. But it's a different, um... It's a different aspect in Hell Week as far as medical goes.

634:

I mean, there are people like with all kinds of, uh... So the, like SIPE or whatever, that was really affecting people pretty bad. And one of my friends, like, (laughs) he looked like a, kinda like a zombie. And he didn't get rolled, so... But then there were other people that did get rolled, so it's just kind of hit or miss type thing. Um, and i- and, and the people that got rolled stayed, stuck around longer, and maybe weren't performing, but they just stuck around longer. So I, I wo- that's what I would say, like, being a little bit more selfish would, um, would entail.

Dr. Dixon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Well, thank you for that explanation. That makes sense now. You wanted to... Seems like you wanted to let your, help your team more.

634:

Yeah.

Dr. Dixon:

And by dropping, that helped your team, versus staying in there regardless, and that would help you-

634:

Yeah.

Dr. Dixon:

'Cause you wouldn't have left.

634:

It's a weird-

Dr. Dixon:

Okay.

634:

Um, it's a weird dynamic for sure. (laughs)

Dr. Dixon:

Yeah. So, um, I've done a lot of interviews with s- people that have made it, that graduated. And one of the things I found that was surprising to me was that a lot of 'em had been to SEALs before, t- been to BUD/S, and they dropped out. And they went back to the fleet for a year or two, and then they came back. Is that something you'd ever consider? Coming back to try again?

634:

I mean, uh, possibly. Um, I- I might come back later on, but right now, um, so... I was fortunate enough on my, like, job sheet to, uh... EOD was on there, so I'm gonna pursue that for right now.

Dr. Dixon:

Oh, great.

634:

But-

Dr. Dixon:

Okay.

634:

Maybe, maybe do that contract. And (laughs) I think the quickest way to get out would be to get out completely and then re-enlist. Like, so that, that might be an option, but I don't know. With the way I see how the program is right now, it seems like, um, it's kinda... It's not lu- I mean, there is a little bit of luck, but it's not all complete luck. But it's just kinda like...

634:

You can do al- you can prepare all you want and stuff, and then still, something can happen. So, maybe, uh, maybe later on, but yeah. Right now, I'm gonna pursue this and see how it goes, so.

Dr. Dixon:

Yeah, that's a great option too.

634:

Yeah.

Dr. Dixon:

Yeah, absolutely. Okay, we're almost done. What practices, if you used any, like physical, mental, spiritual practices to push through challenges?

634:

Um, I think during like... I mean, during surf torcher and stuff, I mean... I don't know, everybody... You just kinda like drift away a little bit during that. And it's really... It's cold, but it's not like that bad. But during like logs and things like that, or different, um, physical exercises... Just, especially logs, and even boats.

634:

Like, like [inaudible 00:16:13] phase... What motivated me was I really, like, like wanting to carry more weight to help out your team was like something that I always thought about. Like, making sure you're getting maybe a little bit more of the log than the person next to you 'cause you wanna help them that much more, is kinda what motivated me, um, and got me through different physical challenges and stuff like that. So I would say that.

Dr. Dixon:

Okay. Okay. And then, how do you think this experience changed you as a person?

634:

Um, I, I mean, I think it was great, um, to see... I mean, however many years of preparation and f- to finally get here and stuff, it was, like, awesome to be a part of. And, uh, I think it's really a test to me right now. You know, like, it's really proven like, are you really as resilient as you think? Or, are you not?

Dr. Dixon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

634:

But I think, um... 'Cause I mean, it's, it's really strange when you get done. 'Cause you're like, man, like, your body's... Y- I don't think you realize how messed up your body is until a week or so later. And then you're trying to get back into it, and nothing, nothing feels the same. It's like, wow... So that's, that's kinda s- like staying committed and not, not getting frustrated with, like, like goin' to...

634:

I- I- I ran an eight-mile... Um, that was the first run I did when I got back. I was like, yeah, I wanna run an eight-mile s- for some reason. And it was like at an 8:35 pace. And I was just like, wow.

Dr. Dixon:

(laughs)

634:

Like, this is... And it was, the heart rate was like 185 or something crazy. Something just-

Dr. Dixon:

Whoa.

634:

Like, wow.

Dr. Dixon:

Yeah.

634:

And like that, so having those, like, failure, after failure, after failure... You're just like, man. Like, this, this sucks. Like, I, I put all this, um, time and energy into this. And I broke down... I really got worse from all of the work I put in, 'cause at a certain point, your body's, uh-

Dr. Dixon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

634:

What is that? Atrophy? Yo-

Dr. Dixon:

Yeah.

634:

Yeah, so you're just-

Dr. Dixon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

634:

Breaking down muscle, and you're just getting worse. You're getting sick. You're not sleeping and stuff. (laughs) And then you're like trying to train again, but nothing feels the same. So I think e- e- I think it really t- it's, it's tested me now, getting back into it. Like, kinda tests my character, commitment, everything.

Dr. Dixon:

Yes.

634:

But, um, yeah. I think it's gonna benefit it in the end. And, uh, really, uh... I think it'll really help in the end. Like, sh- just... Going from, uh, the days like... I think you start at like 3:15, 3:30, and then ending at like 11:00 or so. Like, just proving yourself you can do those long days, and still-

Dr. Dixon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

634:

Um, make it and stuff throughout the day and everything. So I think that's a really big plus from this experience and stuff.

Dr. Dixon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

634:

So-

Dr. Dixon:

Okay, so last question... So we're hoping to write this article about what people have learned, what we've learned... You know, what makes people resilient? What else should I have asked you? Like, what would you have wanna known a year ago before you started this program? What would've helped you?

634:

Like if I could tell someone something?

Dr. Dixon:

Yeah.

634:

Um, u- one thing that I was kinda curious about from y'all's standpoint is, are y'all worried about having data from 3... 38, 339, and 340, and trying to bridge that gap with the recent classes? And I- I was curious if y'all were kinda worried if there's a change in the program a little bit? Um, is that something I can talk about?

Dr. Dixon:

Yeah. W- yeah.

634:

'Cause then, I'll, I'll voice that to like... 'Cause I would love to tell someone, "Hey, look, this is..." It's a little... I think it might be a little bit different now. I don't, I don't know what those guys went through. It's, it's just a little bit different now, I think.

Dr. Dixon:

You think it's different now because of after COVID? Or-

634:

Um, I don't know-

Dr. Dixon:

'Cause we're-

634:

I don't know if it's different after COVID. I don't know if... If somebody tells you that it's pretty overmanned, then maybe... Maybe you just consider that. Like if you're considering coming in, you know, you gotta prepare yourself. Because I mean, it's gonna be like i- I mean, the, the rucking...

634:

The ruck running's different now. It's... You're ruck running 9:15, 9:30 pace per mile, with 35 pounds. And then on top of that, it's just, the, the c- the pile of everything is just different. You have to, you have to be maybe a little bit selfish. And you have to have a good boat crew. You have to have a good log crew. Like, you have to really kinda... You gotta be a little bit selfish, and that's what it's kinda tough for some, like people I'd say that are kinda similar to me. Like-

Dr. Dixon:

Yeah. You-

634:

You know? It's a little bit weird. So you gotta-

Dr. Dixon:

No, no, you're not the first person actually to tell me that. You're like my seventh interview, and you're not the first person to say, "Maybe I wasn't selfish enough."

634:

Yeah.

Dr. Dixon:

That's why I wanted to make sure I understood what you meant by that, to see if it was the same thing-

634:

Yeah, it's a little-

Dr. Dixon:

As other people.

634:

It's a little weird now. But if, I guess if I could tell someone anything... I mean, if they're just gonna go after it, just you know, prepare for it. You know, really prepare for it. Uh, and just... I would say, from a training standpoint... Man, I mean, you can rack on a ton of mileage if you want. And then like putting in weighted running and stuff like that. But at the end of the day, like, I guess it's just how your body's gonna respond to all of the stress and everything.

634:

Um, it's just, uh... It's a little bit... I'd say it's a little bit different than it used to be. As far as m- it might be the lack of sleep. It might be that th- it got a little faster. It might be all those things combined. But I guess I would just say, like, prepare wisely 'cause it's a little bit different now.

Dr. Dixon:

So it sounds like... Tell me if I'm wrong. It sounds like you're saying though that it's different that maybe even it was two years ago when we were here for 338th. What, what do you think is different? Do you think they're trying to drop more people? Is that what you're, is that what you're thinking?

634:

I don't-

Dr. Dixon:

Or-

634:

I don't know if they, um-

Dr. Dixon:

An- and I don't know.

634:

Yeah. I don't know. I don't know if they have a standard, a new standard, or if they've, um... I- I don't know if there's... I- it's so many, there's so many like weird rumors. I mean, there's things like all this... This is gonna be a push class. Like, there's gonna be, like, 40 [inaudible 00:22:43] this class, or something. Like, there's all th- all this talk like...

634:

And yo- you can't really listen to that at the end of the day. Like, whatever's gonna happen, you have to make it happen for yourself. But I would say what's different now is, I know for... So there were some prior, um... There was a couple fleet returnees that had been in previous BUD/S classes I think th- somewhere in the 330s.

Dr. Dixon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

634:

And the days are just longer now. And then that means-

Dr. Dixon:

Oh.

634:

The nights are shorter. So like, over time-

Dr. Dixon:

You can't-

634:

Your body's not recovering. So I think that's a huge change, um, that's happened. And I, I don't think you can really prepare for that, honestly. 'Cause you're just gonna be breaking yourself down. So I'd say that's a big change that really, um, people don't think about in th- in the moment, but it really adds up for sure, is a lack of recovering I would say.

Dr. Dixon:

Okay. Thank you. That, that's very helpful. I'm gonna turn this off.