**TRANSCRIBER NAME: ENS Kacor**

**Date: 1/24/2022**

**Participant #: 656**

Interviewer (Code in blue): r. Deirdre Dixon

Participant (Code in black): #656

**Interview Guide**

**Okay, it's the 6th of January, this is Dr. Deirdre Dixon and I am with number**

**656**

**And is it okay if I record?**

**Yes.**

**Okay, Thanks so much. Okay, so what phase did you leave?**

**I left in first phase**

**And then how so how many weeks ago was that?**

**How many weeks ago was probably, probably like around eight weeks ago.**

**Eight weeks ago, okay. So take a minute and tell me a little bit about your childhood, like are you an only child? Are your parents still together? Did you move around a lot? Where are you from?**

**Okay, so I'm from Long Island, New York. Um, I grew up in a family with three other brothers. I have one twin twin brother, who I went through training with, um, played sports my whole life. All my brothers also played sports. Um, my parents have a healthy relationship. So, they they're still together, and didn't really move around that much. I um, I grew up in a town called Garden City. It's a, it's a pretty, it's like mostly white, like kind of wealthy town. Um, And, so in high school, I went to a Catholic school called Chaminade High School. Um, and from there I went to Wesleyan university, um, didn't move until after, after high school was probably like my sophomore year of college, to a town called Bayville. Um, Growing up, I guess one big part of my life was my dad losing his job in 2008. Um, So kind of growing up in like a wealthy town and not really having a lot of money was something that impacted me a lot.Um, in high school, even though I went to a private school, with tuition and everything, my brother and I still had to pay for school. So we would work as janitors at the end of the day. Um, so I guess the one one kind of like way to describe my situation was I was growing up um in an environment where a lot of people had a lot of privilege, and that privilege was kind of handed to them. Whereas all my privilege I kind of had to work for. Um, So that's one thing that's kind of stuck with me a lot.**

**Okay, do do you remember the distinct like, did you work before he lost his job? Or did you always work?**

**Um, I mean, I was, I was too young to really work when he lost his job.**

**Okay.**

**Um, but once, once he did lose his job, the pressure to start working, definitely increased a lot, significantly. And, uh, I think at the beginning, I was too young to really understand why my parents were pushing me to get a job. And then like, in high school, obviously, the bigger picture kind of like kicked in, and I had a better understanding of why I was working so much, and a lot of my friends weren't. Um, but yeah.**

**And if you, so you and your brother are twins, are you the oldest or the youngest?**

**I’m the younger one, yeah.**

**Okay, but, alright. Okay, so we have, we have one younger brother who is a year younger than us, like a year and a half younger. Okay. And then we have an older brother who is three years older.**

**Okay. Okay, that's so you guys are in the middle?**

**Yeah, we’re in the middle**

**Okay. Awesome. So if you had to describe your personality in three traits, how would you describe it?**

**Um, I would say empathetic. Um… I would say I'm just empathetic, resilient, and, um, hopeful.**

**Okay, thank you that, that works. So, the past five years prior to starting BUD/S, so it sounds like you were maybe a senior in high school, then you went to college? Then you joined the Navy?**

**Yes.**

**Okay. So that works. And, um, besides that life changing experience when your dad lost his job in 2008, are there any other big events in your life that you significantly remember, like a shift in anything or had a big meaning?**

**Um, I think one of the one job that I had that kind of impacted me a lot was sort of during this transition. So starting, like, I think in eighth grade, I was working at a, uh, special needs camp, and I worked at I’d gone to work at that camp for seven years, um, and during that time, I worked with people who are in wheelchairs their whole lives, people with Down syndrome, autism, all kinds of disorders. Um, and that definitely changed my perspective on life, um, in terms of just gratefulness for what I have. Um, so that was like, that was definitely the experience for me, um, and that was every summer for seven years.**

**Wow.**

**Um, So I think that's kind of impacted my life in the terms that I had, like, it gave me the understanding of it's you know, life isn't about making money and, you know, gaining status, it's more about what you can do for other people, uh, which is also kind of what led me to join the Navy and want to do a job like Navy SEALs. Um, the goal was to do a job where I can help as many people as possible, uh, in the biggest way. So, that's definitely something that impacted me.**

**So when did you think about joining the Navy?**

**Im, it didn't…graduating college, I was going through a lot of job interviews, um, my older brother works in real estate, so I was looking to do something similar to that kind of like typical, like work in New York City, work at a desk, um and then I was I had a conversation with my grandma, um sorry, my grandpa, probably like, like a month or two after graduating. And he was in the Navy, served in the Navy as a SeaBee, and he, he kind of took our background and said, “you guys might be a good fit for the Navy, you should think about it.” And it was something that never really occurred to me, so my brother and I did all the research we could and after doing all the research and talking to people that we knew who were in the Navy, it seemed like the right fit for us, so**

**Was it a given that you and your twin were going to do the same thing?**

**Um, so at the time, my brother actually had a job offer that he accepted, um, in New York, he was working, he was doing sales for a company called WeWork.**

**Yeah.**

**And I had kind of decided, I think I decided to do to do the Navy first, and he saw it as, okay, like, if you're going to go do this cool thing, I'm not gonna let you go alone, like, I want to do it too. I don’t want to let you, like, live out this cool life, and I'm here doing a sales job. And, uh, that's kind of always the way it's been. I mean, we always have, we've always had similar interests. It’s not like we need to do everything together, um, it's just that, somehow we always end up in the same place.**

**So you went to the same college**

**Went to the same school, yeah. All same schools, everything.**

**Okay. All right. Well, that's interesting. Okay. So, um, what do you think motivates you on a daily basis?**

**Um, I'll say the biggest thing is probably my family and other people who are counting on me. Um, It's, I mean, like I said, I don't really care about like, you know, being someone who's like high in status, or someone who like impresses other people, it's more about people who are counting on me, people who need me to, you know, do a good job, be successful, have resources, um, so that I can, you know, pay it forward, and people who have helped me in life, I need to repay them back. Um, and it's, uh, I'd say that's the biggest thing.**

**Great, Thank you. And then could you tell me what happened to your experience at BUD/S? Obviously, you came in wanting to be a SEAL, and now we're here, what, what, what happened along the way?**

**So, I think once I mean, once you… in BUD/S Orientation, it's more of like, you're doing all these timed evolutions, and everything's fine. I mean, it's not really, there isn't really any intensity, there's no pressure. And then once you get to first phase, there's a lot of emphasis put on performance, um, and myself being an officer, I went in seeing it as, as an officer, I need to perform at a higher level than my enlisted counterparts. So, and I remember, it was like the, it was like the weekend before first phase and started the, the OIC of first phase came and talked to all the officers, and he talked about, it's hard to be a leader if you're not performing at the level that is asked of you. So, um towards, I would say, so I made it until the Friday of the third week of first phase, and as time went on, I kind of saw my body start to break down, and I wasn't performing at a level that I deemed, you know, fit to, uh, enable me to lead, you know, in the right way and set the example as an officer and really meet like the physical standards.**

**Okay.**

**And, um, the day that I quit we were on a run.**

**And what day was that? First day, Second day, fifth day?**

**It was, so it was the Friday of the third week of first phase, so it was the it was the 20, the 21st, so the last day before Hell Week.**

**Okay**

**Um, and we were on a run, and I was, I was in the back, and I was having trouble breathing. And I was having trouble breathing, I was having trouble keeping up with the run, and there were a bunch of enlisted guys pushing me on my back to make sure that I could keep up, and that was something that really like, that was really, really where my mindset switch, and I was kind of saying myself, This is not, this is not like, the officer standard, I'm not meeting a standard, um, this is really just a conditioning run. Um, and they're enlisted guys who are sacrificing um to help me, and it's not, it's obviously my dream to make it through BUD/S and become a SEAL, but it's not their dream that I become a SEAL and make it through BUD/S, ao why should I be the guy who's going through and having other other people sacrifice their own, you know, physical, you know, limit to help me get through. Um, so I didn't want, I didn't want to be someone in an environment where I was taking away from other people, rather than giving to the people around me, um so that was kind of a situation where I was like, okay, if this is how it is the Friday before hell week, I'm going to go into hell week in the same physical condition, and this is going to continue to happen, and if it gets to the point where someone gets injured, or someone has to make through because I'm the one that's taking away from them,um, it would be hard for me to live with that, and make it through then to uh, drop out and know that the guys who deserve to make it actually make it through. So**

**What do you say to your brother?**

**Um, honestly, after I made the decision, it was kind of like a, hindsight like, 20/20. I was like, okay, I could have… the weekends about to start, I have all this opportunity to recover and rest, um, but when I talked to him, I said, you have to realize that even though guys are sacrificing for you, if you're in a situation like I was, like I was in, uh, just kind of stick it through for as long as you can wait for, wait for one of the enlisted guys or one of the guys in your boat crew to say hey, like you might want to think about dropping, um, because I didn't I didn't wait for someone else to say, hey, think about like, dropping, because I kind of made the assumption, you know, this is this is what guys are thinking. Um, so I kind of said to him, stay in as long as you can. Don't, don't quit just because I'm not around anymore, like I'm I still need you to make it through. Um, so my message was pretty much, uh, just don't make a decision so fast like I did, like in the moment. God**

**Right. So did he stick it out? Is he still in?**

**No, no, he's actually he's, um**

**Oh, he was in that**

**first study as well.**

**Okay. Oh, good.**

**Um, so yeah. So in how we keep, his situation was a little similar.**

**Okay. All right. You don't need to go into that. I was just wondering if, if you impacted him?**

**Yeah, mmhmm**

**his decision or not? Okay. Thank you. What about the, what did you find about the leadership? In what class were you in?**

**Um, 351**

**What did you find about the leadership, um, from the people in 351? Like, did they ever tell you that you should probably quit or ?**

**No, I was, no one ever told me I should quit, but I, there were many scenarios where guys were told to quit. Um, pretty much because their, their performance was at a level it was just like egregiously bad, and they kind of like dragged it on. And going, and going through phase and seeing that, I never want to be like that, that kind of person. But the, the leadership was, I would say in the the first few weeks in orientation, it was, the class morale was very, like Kumbaya, let's all stick together, and we got this, it's us versus the instructors. Um, but once once we got to first phase, and you had all the remediations, and everything where if your boat crew wasn't performing, you get punished, It was kind of like, it was more of like a every man for themselves. I would say it was more like every boat crew for themselves. Um, but obviously, if there was one person in each boat crew who was kind of holding the boat crew back, everyone would kind of turn on that single person to kind of, like purge the class of the guys who were holding everybody back. So it was, I would say it was definitely cutthroat, and I think that's the way the instructors want it to be. They kind of like put the burden on us to get rid of the people who didn't belong. Um, so yeah, I would say it was just it was, it was cut through, but I think that was the appropriate, I think that's the way it should have been.**

**Mmhmm, okay. Uh, tell me about a time that you had to make a difficult decision at BUD/S, and what went through your mind as you made that decision? And can you give me an example?**

**Um, yeah, so I would say, so there was, there was a night of evolution, it was, I think the, I think it was Wednesday of the third week, so it was like the maybe the 19th day where we were, I was in a boat and we were paddling out into into the surf. We were hit by a wave, and I dislocated my shoulder. It popped out like a few seconds and then it popped back in. So I finished the evolution, I finished the night, and, you know, it didn't, it didn't feel great. And then the next morning, we had an O-Course run, and I had to go through the O-course. And by the, by the time I had finished the O course, my arm was numb, and I could barely lift it over my head, and I kind of had to decide, you know, like, I'm about to go into Hell Week, um, should I see a medic and see if something's wrong with it? Or should I just push through? In my mind, it was only five more days. So I was kind of deciding, do I leave my brother in the class? Do I, you know, go try to get medical attention and risk the chance of going and then finding out that nothing was really wrong, and then people look at me as the guy who is, you know, people might consider, oh, was he just going to medical because he wants to get a roll. And you know, like, he doesn't want to do this anymore. He wants to just like, get another chance to maybe train harder, and then go into a different class. Uh, so that was definitely, that was definitely a difficult decision for me. Um, I ended up going to medical, I got an MRI and I, I had partial tears my labrum and they gave me the chance to be the rolling or continuing with the class, which was another hard decision. Um, and I inevitably, obviously, chose to stay with the class. Um, but yeah, that was that was kind of a decision where I did I had to look at my physical state and examine, um you know, is this a state where I can continue with the training and make it through and do what I need to do without hurting anybody else? Um, so, yeah, that was definitely a big decision for me, and a lot of thought went into that, so.**

**Okay, and next question might lead back into that. So is there anything you would have done differently at BUD/S?**

**Uh, I would have taken the role, for my shoulder. Um, other than that? Yes, I think I would probably, so at the end of the day we do collaterals ya know, uh everyone you know, sweep the grinder and clean, you know, whatever they needed to clean, if it was the instructors vehicles, or the boats, or whatnot. And, um, I definitely think I could have stuck around later at night, with the guys who were still working when my job was done. So I could have sacrificed more of my time to help my classmates with their collaterals to make sure that, you know, the guys who were working later had the help they needed to get their job done so that they go back and work on their personal gear at the end of the night.**

**And is that because of your leadership position in the class? Did you have a leadership position in the class?**

**Um, yes, I mean, every, every boat crew I was in, I was the boat crew leader. And then in terms of collaterals, I was, um, I was in charge of the spray paint that we would use to spray paint the helmets. I was in charge of the group that would go at the end of the day to put the cool, the pool covers on. And then in the morning, we would go and take them off. And I was also in charge of bringing the, um, the smoke signals to the swims. So I was you know, I, every day I was in charge of, you know, a certain group of people. And yes, that that definitely has an impact on why I wish I had done that a little more.**

**So when you're saying that you wish you would have stayed with till everyone was finished their callatorals? Are you talking about your guys or are you talking about the whole class?**

**The class as a whole, I mean, even I mean, even though I was in charge of whatever, like my boat crew were the guys who were on my collateral. I think as an officer, I mean, there was, there was only so few of us, especially by the time we got to the third week, I would say there's probably like, maybe eight officers left in the class. Um, which means that the burden kind of grows as the number of leaders kind of diminishes, even though enlisted guys would step up and be leaders, um, I think I didn't realize that the burden was, was growing as the class got smaller. Um, And I wish I had kind of taken more of that burden and done the extra work to make sure that the class as a whole was taken care of**

**What made you see that?**

**Um, I don't know, I just I think just thinking, thinking back on it.**

**I mean, that's pretty insightful.**

**Yeah.**

**So I'm just wondering, how did it hit you now, after you left, was it after you left that you decided that or you thought?**

**Yeah, I think it was it was it was kind of like a transition. I mean, I started to think about it towards like the third weekend I was doing more in third week. But I think the first two weeks I was so I was so hyper focused on myself and making sure that you know, my, my gear was clean and the guys on my boat crew were all set and I think after that I'd say Okay, I'm done, I've, I've helped the guys on my boat crew, now I can help myself. But as time went on, I think the class got smaller and the group got closer, and you kind of started, zoom out, relax and see like the bigger picture. Um, so that helped a lot. And then obviously, like, we started doing peer reviews, and I noticed the best guys in the class, the guys who I would always want my boat crew, I was, I would always want next to me in a bad situation, were the guys who were sacrificing more of themselves for the team. Um, and obviously, like, that's something that I should have seen earlier. Um, but I mean, it was it was very obvious, like in BUD/S, it's very obvious you can, you see the guys who are who are selfless, and then you see the guys who are, you know, it's like they're on their own program, they're only worried about themselves, and that hurts your reputation a lot if uh, you're not, you know, sacrificing for for other people. So.**

**So we've done a lot of interviews, so far, a lot of people who have graduated, some people who haven't graduated. And what I thought was interesting was so many people that we interviewed who had graduated from BUD/S didn't make it the first time. They left, and then they came back, like a year or two later. Would you ever consider that?**

**If I mean, if I had the opportunity, yes. I think, I think honestly, the mistake that I made was, was the training that I did beforehand. Um, even though, you know, in phase, you get sick, and you get lung infections, or whatever, um and that affects your performance, I think my baseline of performance was not high enough to be able to take those hits, in terms of getting sick or whatever, um, and I'm pretty confident that if I had the opportunity to do it again, um, and train for maybe another year, and then go back, I would, I would definitely be more successful in the pipeline. Um, and I don't think I would have been in a situation that I was where I had guys helping me um because I couldn't perform physically, or, you know, keep the standard. So, yeah, I definitely would, I would do it again. If someone came up to me and said, Would you go back tomorrow? I would say yes, without a question.**

**Okay, that's helpful. Were there any practices like physical, mental, spiritual, that you used to push through challenges that you found at BUD/S?**

**Um, yes, I would say. So, so leading up to BUD/S I, I started to meditate a lot. I had like a mindful mindfulness practice. Um, so early mornings, when we would do surf torture, and it would be really cold, and it's kind of like, it's not like a physical evolution where you see yourself, either keeping up, you're not in the front of the pack, or the back of the pack, everyone's going through the same thing. Um, I would definitely kind of like practice mindfulness, kind of like take a step back, try to calm down and just, you know, focus on how I felt and maybe why the sensations I was feeling, I was having like, a negative connotation with them, and I kind of flipped that around and try to make it like a positive thing, you know, like, the longer I'm in here, the closer I am to finishing things like that, like, you know, having certain models in my head. Um, so yeah, that was, mindfulness was definitely something that I used throughout, throughout first phase.**

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

**Uh, yeah, definitely. I mean, like, like I was saying before, it taught me a lot about sacrifice. And what it takes to be the kind of person that people want to be around or the teammate that people want to have on their team. And then in terms of suffering, obviously, it taught me a lot about um how much I can take in terms, in terms of like, my physical abilities, and how far I can push my body. Because going into BUD/S , I definitely felt like I was in the best shape of my life. But leaving BUD/S I felt like, Oh my God, I could have been in such, I could have pushed it so much more, and I didn't realize, so that's certainly one takeaway. And then yeah, I mean, it's, it's also pushed me to I mean, I've thought a lot about the reason that I quit., and I relive that, that run over and over. And I mean, you're doing a study on why what makes people tick and I think I found out what makes me tick. The biggest thing is letting people around me down. Feeling like I'm not doing a good enough job. Um, had, takes a bigger toll on me than the suffering itself. I mean, I never had a problem with being cold or being wet or being tired like that was, I expected that, and I definitely embrace it, I think, but once it got to the point where other people around you had to sacrifice for me it, it kind of broke me down mentally. And that's what, you know, led to my downfall. So**

**Okay, thank you. What events did you struggle with the most?**

**Um, my, I mean, my, my least favorite evolution was definitely in surf torture. Um, but no, I would say so land portage where you're running with the boat on your head was obviously a very stressful evolution and was probably the most physically, if the, you know most of the physical exertion. Um, and there were some days where, you know, I was I was tired and I wasn't really like, and I was struggling to keep up with my boat, and that also had an effect on me where, you know, I was an officer in my boat, I was supposed to be leading and, you know, yelling orders and, you know, motivating people around me, and there were days where I kind of had to just like, go internal and just like make it through the evolution, and just make sure that I wasn't hurting anybody around me, um which was a situation where I like didn't really have the ability to lead, and that made it very challenging for me, so.**

**Hmm, Okay, thank you. And then do you think your class like you?**

**Um, I think at first, I think at first, there were guys that didn't like me. Um probably because as an officer, they saw me as someone who, oh, like you're an officer, you can do whatever you want. And I was still in that mindset where I'll just take care of the guys on my boat crew, and then I take care of myself. And you would have guys who were staying late at night to do their collaterals, and I was, in my mind I was done, and they would look at me as okay, you so you're, you know, you have your like your little job to take care of and then you don't really care about anybody else. Um So definitely, yeah, at first, probably made like a bad impression, and then as time went on, I think I bond a lot more with the guys around me, and a lot of the enlisted guys in my class who aren't around anymore, you know, they didn't make it, I have a house in town there, they come over my house all the time. Um So I've,I've been able to maintain relationships outside of the class. So yes, at first I think there were people that didn't really like me, and then towards the end, I think I was able to fix that.**

**Good. Good. Thank you. And then what do you think was different about anybody who didn't make it? Do you see any difference in any of the people who made it that you said, Oh, Well, if I would have just done this, or any traits you saw that they had?**

**Um, honestly, if you if you'd asked me, who would make it through um Hell Week, like the like the the Monday of Hell Week, my answer would be, it would include a lot of people that didn't make it, and then there are a few people who made it, who I kind of was confused by. Um, I think a lot of luck went into it. I know there are a lot of really good performers who never really had any trouble with any evolutions who might have gotten SIPE or might have had some other kind of physical issue where they went to medical and they're given some medical attention, but thorough examination wasn’t really done on them, and they kind of just throw them back in, and that put them in the same situation that I was in, whether they were an officer or not, I mean, the biggest thing is, are you able to sacrifice for your team, and if you can't do that, um you're hurting other people. So honestly, there are some guys that made it who I could see kind of being in a situation where they were hurting, and they're hurting other people around them, but they, for some, they, for some reason, had the ability to just kind of say, trust that the guy's that they had done, what they needed to do, uh the weeks before Hell Week to build that level of trust, to know that the guys around them were willing to sacrifice for them, so when they were in like a tough situation, it wasn't like, hyper focus on hurting the people around me it was kind of like, okay, even though I might be hurting the people around me, they are willing to sacrifice for me to make sure that I make it through, um so maybe the ability to kind of step out and see the bigger picture um guys like that kind of made it through.**

**Okay, so thank you. And then so we're doing this study to try to help people who haven't been to BUD/S yet or learn about how you can make it through. What else do you think I should have asked you that's really important for or what do you wish you would have known a year ago before you came here?**

**Um do you mean like outside of like, preparing, like physically like training or**

**Is that one of the things you would have said?**

**Oh, absolutely. Yeah, I mean, I wish, i wish i had like a room of people who, who are about to got through the pipeline to explain what you need to do, because this, I think going in um ya know they harp a lot on performance and meeting the standard, but before you go into the pipeline that standard is kinda blurred, whereas , obviously you have the timed evolutions, the timed runs, O-Courses and the swims nd those times are well known. What isn’t really well known is the pace for the rucks and how many people secure each ruck, so leading up to BUD/S I thought, okay, if you ruck at like at 13 minute pace with like 35lbs on for 4 miles then your okay, then I realized when, when you are in phase, um the pace is actually 9 minutes and 30 seconds and its a lot faster um I think I would have, if I was talking to someone was about to go through I would tell them, ya know, the standards are a little higher than what you might think, um and being able to push through kinda like illness and injury is a big thing, and whats gonna help you do that is a higher baseline of physical preparedness. Uh, another thing I would talk about is just what makes a good candidate. Um, like I said before a lot of it was being able to sacrifice um even when you were hurting, um, and that’s what its all about, I think it’s all about sacrifice. Um, so be the kind of person that is able to put their physical discomfort aside, step out and see the bigger picture, and you know, work with your teammates and try to understand what people around you need so you can give that to them um so that your team can win, and then you're better off, um and the bigger picture of not being remediated. Winning evolutions everyone is just in a better mood, it makes the whole experience uh seem a little bit easier, even if its not.**

**Hmmm. Okay. And I’m just going to ask you one more because you're in a unique situation. How do you think having your brother here helped or hurt you?**

**Um**

**Or affected you, i guess**

**I, So I think there are ways that helped me, there are definitely ways that hurt me, um I would say it helped me because obviously um in times like, where I was really, in times where I was like ah this really sucks like, I would just kinda look over, and my brothers right there doing the same thing with me, and its another person that I don't want to let down. Um, especially someone that is that close to me. Um, one way it hurt me was the comparison. I mean I think our whole lives we’ve been compared in almost every aspect of what we do, so um, if there was a day where he was beating me on like a run, the instructors would notice it and they would use that kinda against us, and they’d say like, oh you really suck today whereas if i didn't have a twin brother and i was in the middle of the pack on a run, um I would kinda, like, blend in a little bit more but i think we definitely stood out cause we were twins and the instructors found out um and then they would kinda like pit us against each other. Which uh, never really worked because you know, we’re used to it, we’ve done it our whole lives, but I think in the bigger picture it definitely helped me more that it hurt me.**

**Okay. Okay. And then the other thing i think i forgot to ask you was what sport did you guys play?**

**Uh, we both played lacrosse. Yes, we played lacrosse up until college. Um, we played 4 years at Wesleyan university.**

**Oh, so you played in college also?**

**Yep**

**Okay. Okay, Well, thats great. Well thank you I appreciate your taking the time um the next thing to do…**