**TRANSCRIBER NAME: Brendan Reilly**

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**Participant #: 674**

Interviewer (Code in blue): CDR Andrew Ledford

Participant (Code in black): #674

CDR: All right. Do you mind if I record?

674: Yeah. Go ahead.

CDR: So it's January 6th, 2022. This is Andrew Ledford. I'm with 674. All right. So you started with 339.

674: Correct.

CDR: So you started with 339.

674: Began with 339, uh secured with 25 others in 339. Went on to second phase with 339. Uh was rolled for OC8 into 340. Uh and at the end of the OC weeks with 340, was dropped from the program uh at my board with Commander Merinex and Master Chief Hanson. Was graciously given the opportunity upon request to go back to 1-1 Day, which I started the next week with 342 01-1. Uh I secured 342 1-1, secured hell week with them. Uh we did one week of first phase. But then that two month stand down for COVID.

CDR: Oh yeah.

674: Then started first phase again, uh secured hell week with them. Moved on to second phase.

CDR: Wait. You guys had to go back to day one? You guys go through first phase through hell week, COVID hits, and-

674: So, no. We only did one week of first phase. So we got out of BO, did one week. And on that Friday morning, they called it for the COVID stand down. So no, we did not come close to hell week. That was just one week.

CDR: What did you guys do during the COVID stand down?

674: Uh we were broken up into three different groups. Uh if I recall correctly, it was either three or four. Uh and we would have one workout a day. Um if you want to call it that. More of just be moving and kind of still made very aware that you're a white shirt and are nothing here.

CDR: Mm-hmm.

674: Um and then also we were clinging to compound constantly, uh still doing collaterals. That honestly was more miserable than being in phase and being productive. Just standing by dealing with everything, just waiting to start again.

CDR: So countdown is not counting.

674: That was a pretty miserable time. But um we got through it. Uh got through first phase. Went through second phase. Uh made it to the last week on the island in which I was rolled for rifle.

CDR: This is now third phase with 342.

674: Correct. Uh was rolled. Failed rifle qual by a point. And was rolled into 343. Uh began the next week with 343 uh doing ... At the beginning of third phase. Uh and then secured uh BUDS with 343 after going to the island again doing all of third phase. Uh went ... did the first few parts of uh SQT with 343. Uh was rolled in a CQC block uh for the four man test. Started back up with 44 in the CQC. And two days before the four man test, the senior chief and LT of the training cell uh pulled me from the class. And uh I was subsequently dropped from the program. Uh yeah, later on, uh that ... that senior chief was under investigation by the command for his handling of that block. Because I was far from the only one to be dropped during that.

CDR: What were they stating as why you were dropped?

674: Uh they said it was a rollback. I was failing to grasp material uh effectively enough and that uh I'm not able to handle pressure in a strenuous environment and that this is not the community for me.

CDR: Wow.

674: Did ... did not even get to do the four man again, which is pretty heartbreaking.

CDR: So when did that happen? How long ago was that?

674: That occurred in April of 2021.

CDR: And what have you been doing since then?

674: I was in the Phoenix division. Uh well, as soon as I was dropped from the program, I saw it as a good opportunity to address the significant amount of injuries I incurred throughout two years of BUDS an SQT. Uh I just turned 30 a few months ago um. So at an early age too. Uh because of that and the plethora of injuries I do have, I've been LD the whole time.

CDR: Limited duty, right?

674: Correct. And during most of that, I was in the Phoenix division um mustering twice a day. And uh I had my GOVE so I was duty driving uh students about. um and in December of '21, uh I was uh given the opportunity to interview over at WARCOM uh and subsequently hired to uh help with administrative tasks over there. So my TAD is currently to that command.

CDR: Okay.

674: As of December of '21.

CDR: What are you doing at WARCOM?

674: uh a whole slew of tasks. uh but mainly just administrative support. uh so a few weeks ago we had a bunch of different VIPs visiting, and just handling logistics and setups and whatnot. uh but it's front desk admin for the admirals essentially. uh which I'm just grateful for the opportunity to be able to feel useful and give to the community that I was hoping to join in a different regard. Being in Phoenix was very despairing and upsetting after coming from where I was.

CDR: I can imagine. All right. Holy cow. We haven't even got to the first question yet. Can you tell me a little bit about your childhood? Like parents together? Did you guys move around a lot? Siblings?

674: Yeah. I was uh born in Boulder, Colorado in 1991. Uh currently 30 years old. Uh I had a very solid childhood. Uh parents are still together. Uh I have one younger brother. He is currently 27. Uh we did move a lot for no particular reason outside of family jobs and just uh neighborhoods. Uh we were affluent enough where we had shelter and food. But it wasn't in excess. Never had the nicest block er house or car or gifts on the block. But comfortable enough where I could enjoy my childhood uh and do most things that I wanted to. Um moved to Boston, Mass when I was about eight years old. So middle of second grade. And uh thereafter uh, moved several times within Boston, but uh was there through the end of my high school tenure. And then so for me, most of my development I would say occurred in the suburbs of Boston proper. Um and then I went to college, William and Mary in Virginia, uh and came back to Boston to support my family and grandparents, and found work there.

CDR: So what was your degree at William and Mary?

674: Uh it was government with a focus on international relations.

CDR: BA?

674: Yes. Uh and studied a bunch of other courses, but didn't get a minor or major in either.

CDR: So you go from William and Mary. Then you go back to Boston. What are you doing there?

674: Correct. Uh back in Boston, my primary 9 to 5, I was working at Harvard Business School uh with the business government international economy unit doing administrative work and uh academic work for professors there. Uh I was also running a masonry and landscaping company on the side uh and building custom motorcycles as well.

CDR: How long did you do all of that?

674: That was five and a half years in totality. Uh at which point I recognized I was about to turn 28 and this has been a dream of mine since uh 6th grade and that I needed to fulfill it and just do it.

CDR: Yeah.

674: It was uh ... As you can see, I spent five and a half years there. I got not complacent, but comfortable uh with the environment I was in. Uh I was responding to all the opportunities they had and also felt pretty obligated to help support my family. Uh and all that, just time flew by. Even though I wanted this prior to college and since middle school.

CDR: If you had to describe your personality in three traits, what would that be?

674: Uh compassionate, driven, um energetic.

CDR: I think we covered the last five years prior to BUDS, what you were doing.

674: I was also before going back to Harvard Business School, I was working at uh two different projects at William and Mary. A-data and project on peace and international security about research centers essentially.

CDR: Okay.

674: Um international relations focused.

CDR: Okay. Prior to coming to the Navy, what experiences from your life shaped you? That stuck out and that really molded you in particular?

674: Uh I would say moving a bunch. Uh I think I moved about eight or nine times prior to college. Uh without question, being in a new environment, uh being the new the new guy that was easy pickings, uh and the way I looked and who I was uh made for a lot of uh abuse and bullying. So that definitely stands out to me. Um ... Yeah. That definitely shaped me pretty substantially. Um can you repeat the question again too?

CDR: Yeah. What prior experiences would be life-shaping, that kind of molded you, if you're going to look back in your life?

674: Uh losing my grandfather shortly before joining the Navy, uh very shortly before the Navy definitely uh was one of the most difficult and heartbreaking and meaningful parts of my life. Um let's see. College in totality was definitely shaping. Um though I was recruited for a bunch of different sports, I didn't end up playing any. But the sports that I did do in high school, uh the victories and losses within those definitely helped shape me and grow me.

CDR: Which sports did you play?

674: Uh it was cross country, swimming, track and field, and I did triathlons. Uh I was a partially sponsored triathlete. And then uh in college and at Harvard Business School, I was playing rugby as well. And then I also dabbled pretty extensively in extreme sports, uh like adrenaline based sports. But very unorganized in that sense.

CDR: How would you say any of those experiences in particular the moving around a bunch, being the new guy, losing your grandfather, college in totality, how would they have affected you in training?

674: Uh Yeah. Uh certainly adapting, um analyzing in different environments, seeing where I fit in, uh seeing where I can contribute, uh knowing that things are finite, uh life will continue on one way or another. Uh definitely got good at making friends and, uh eventually making friends and becoming one with my new environment. Um I think I gained a lot of compassion that I currently have from those experiences. Still starkly remembering how I was mistreated or kindly treated. And those memories will forever stand out to me. Uh but making sure that uh I forever on will care for others and be good to them. Um ... Yeah. Losing my grandfather just reminded me to take in every single moment that you have in life, both the good and the bad. Appreciate it, recognize it, uh ... Yeah.

CDR: Okay. How would you say what is your background that led you to join the Navy?

674: Uh so my direct family is not military. uh I've had a few very distant relatives serve. Uh so it was never expected of me by any means. Uh certainly my parents had ideas of what they wanted for my life. But they also were uh courteous enough to let me choose my way for the most part. Um in 6th grade is when I found out about um the teams. Uh And from that point forward, uh just consumed as much as I could about the community uh.

CDR: How did you find out about the teams?

674: Uh I was at a road race. And after completing it, was talking with uh some other members of the community at the road race. And uh a ... a friend of one of my family friends came up uh and introduced himself and said I should consider joining the military. Uh I was very fit most of my life. Er uh he said I should consider looking at the military down the line. Um and he told me about the BUDS program. Um not sure if he was a SEAL or not himself. He never said so. But from what I remember of him, he certainly fit the part. Um but at that point, one of my friends from the school I just moved to uh lent me BUDS class 234. Uh so that was the foundation after getting informed about the community. Uh and then just continued reading everything. At that time, it was far more difficult to get your hands on material. Um but I did everything I could to learn everything I could. Uh and then especially uh tried to meet people in the community or people in the military. Uh and just want continuously impressed by the quality of character and uh impressed just overall by who the men I was meeting were. Uh and the more I learned about the community, the more I wanted to uh be a part of it and contribute to it. Uh and then uh most of my life I've been athletic, outdoors, uh always moving about. Uh I've had tons of different jobs. Uh I know I like working hands on. I also love academics, love to learn. And so just throughout high school, just continued driving forward with that ultimate goal in mind. Um mainly explained why I did cross country and swimming. Uh and then I did at that point promise my parents that I would go to school. Because they didn't at the time realize that this wasn't just a fad or some silly idea I had in my mind. Uh and because of all the moving I did throughout my life, they ... they are the closest people to me. And I promised I would do that for them. Um so went to school, took advantage of as many opportunities as I could to progress uh both academically and physically. Still keeping this goal in mind. Um eventually, obviously found my way to working at Harvard Business School and a slew of other jobs. And even though this was what I always and knew that I would be here at some point, I let that go on the back burner for a while there. Um never losing sight of it though.

CDR: How would you describe your experience at BUDS?

674: It was an odyssey. Highest of highs and the lowest of lows. Uh it was eye opening. Uh I experienced a gamut of human emotions I've never even come to close to in my life prior.

CDR: Yeah.

674: Uh it was absolutely wild ride that I'm exceptionally grateful for and just utterly stoked that I had the opportunity to be a BUDS and SQT student. Uh yeah it was incredibly difficult, uh especially just being on, riding that lightning so many times, being on that cutting block over and over and over, just two years straight of not knowing if it's going to work out.

CDR: Yeah.

674: Uh so it was extremely intense, uh exciting. Uh yeah, I definitely have a range of emotions when I reflect on it. Uh, met some incredible men. Both students and cadre alike. Have also met some people I would hope never to associate or see again. Uh learned a lot, without question, about myself. And I know that when I came to this program, I wasn't going to quit. Everyone says they're not. I ... I deeply felt that. I was proven right twice over on that. Um and it felt good to fortify that knowledge about myself that when I do believe in myself, I can make things happen. Um obviously disappointed in the final outcome of this program. But uh proud of what I brought to the table, how I handled myself, what I did for the community, uh my teammates that is, and then when I was in rollback land, helping this place just function. At the end of the day, just grateful for what I was able to experience uh and the time I've had here.

CDR: Is there anything you would've done differently?

674: Uh I mean, you can never train too much before coming here. I was definitely in solid shape. Uh I wish I had known how critical uh shooting was. I had never shot a gun before uh prior to coming here. And I think it was possibly the only one in my class for a least one of the classes out on the island. So I was way behind on the learning curve there, which made that experience pretty stressful. Um but no, I felt very informed coming here. You can never truly understand what you're about to go through until you go through it. Uh there's no way in my mind to train for the mental strain and the mental grind of BUDS other than working a hard job or uh if you're a father balancing uh raising a kid properly and caring to your wife or significant other. Uh so I don't think there's anything I could've done different prior to coming here. I've pushed myself academically. I've pushed myself uh in my work. And I've pushed myself physically throughout my life.

CDR: Yeah.

674: Um I would definitely say though knowing how to shoot would've been nice.

CDR: Are you married, have kids?

674: Um single.

CDR: Okay. What practices did you have, if any, like physical, mental, spiritual practices that you used to push through challenges?

674: Prior to BUDS?

CDR: At BUDS.

674: Can you repeat that one more time?

CDR: So any practices, spiritual, mental practices that you had used consistently to push through challenges.

674: Yeah. Uh breathing is super important. Uh I learned about Wim Hof prior to joining the Navy and found his work to be useful. Um I'm not religious in any sense. Uh I do feel spiritual however. There are powers within this universe I do not understand. Uh but I would definitely say I'm spiritual. But the most grounding thing I did in BUDS was just breathe-

CDR: What kind of breathing?

674: Just box breathing. But also just reminding myself I'm good to go, words of encouragement to myself. Just uh self talk. Pushing myself forward. Oftentimes I'd find myself reflecting on how difficult or miserable I was, but then being like, well "This race I did back in cross country was worse. I got this." Or, "I've stayed up longer than this before." Just reflecting on memories of the past. Uh so self talk. Just reminding myself I'm good, I'm here, um just keep going, keep breathing. Didn't do any praying, didn't do anything of that sort.

CDR: Okay. How has this changed you as a person? If anything.

674: Yeah. I'm definitely a different man than I was when I came here.

CDR: How so?

674: Um I'm far more present in every day, uh in every moment really. Uh I'd say I've been pretty grateful my whole life. uh but now like even sitting in a chair, it's nice. You notice really small things. Um so I'm just eternally uh just eternally grateful, but also grateful for minuscule things that uh a lot of people, myself included, would would not have noticed prior to this experience. Um lets see, I certainly am more receptive and a better listener uh than I was previously. Uh definitely talk less and listen more. Uh I would say I'm far more humble. My humility is greater. I recognize that I am no one. But at the same time, I recognize that I am a good person and uh who I am is good. But definitely recognize that you've never made it. Uh you are no one. You're a cog in the machine, but this machine and the world. Uh but how you handle every situation is what matters. What you do, how you ... how you treat people, what you say is critical. Uh I'd say I was far more confident prior to getting dropped in myself and who I was. I felt uh very secure uh because my ultimate dream of being here and making it to the teams, and ideally becoming a medic uh was seemingly on path. Uh so I felt uh very complete. Even though I was not nowhere even close to getting to the teams uh, still a few months out on SQT. But having done all that twice and then being an SQT, being on that proper trajectory there, fulfilling a dream I've had more than half my life uh felt just amazing. I felt on top of the world even though I was still a nobody. Uh and I felt confident. My sense of purpose was complete. Uh I felt true to myself in having gone through what I did and knowing that those next steps were right behind. Uh but after getting dropped, I would also say that last year was the most dark, despairing, difficult time of my life. Uh there were months there where every day I woke up hating myself, not wanting to exist, uh lost my passion and my energy and zest and zeal for life and for my hobbies and my friends and family. So it was a horrible, horrible, horrible experience uh that I would not wish on anyone.

CDR: And this was after SQT?

674: This was when I got dropped uh before taking the four man. And then uh I'm still working through everything. But uh I still feel like a shell of a man, uh a shell of who I used to be. Uh and honestly my identity, my sense of self is still missing. Um I ... I need to figure out what now matters most to me. Uh I need to figure out a path forward uh because for example, duty driving is not how I want to be spending my life. Uh especially when I have so much more I feel that I can give to either the Navy, the government, or the world at large. Um so being in uh the Phoenix division after getting to where I got and getting dropped in the manner I did, uh that was just soul crushing and ate me alive. Um so grateful to be here. Uh I've found my passions again. Still working on sense of self. Um still making peace with how everything went. But just like losing my grandfather out of nowhere, some of the other difficult things I've gone through in my life. You know things happen, you work through them, and life moves on.

CDR: Yeah.

674: Um so definitely this program has given me more than I ever knew it could. Even though I didn't make it. Uh definitely the highest of highs and for sure the lowest of lows.

CDR: Okay. Awesome. I'm going to stop the recording.