**TRANSCRIBER NAME: Nico Sbrocco**

**Date: 20 April 2020**

**Participant #: 143**

**Interviewer: Dr. Deirdre Dixon**

Interviewer (Code in Blue)

Participant (Code in black)

Interviewer: I’m gonna need your number and your consent to record.

#143: Yes. 143 is my number and you can record.

Interviewer: 143. Great, awesome.I’m just gonna start with some easy questions. How many siblings do you have?

#143: Uh, two siblings, older sister and younger brother. We’re all pretty much separated by two years.

Interviewer: OK. And then, when you think of your life experience what one would think would you describe as your crucible of life shaping experience that you’ve had?

#143: Uhm, so I was actually in a previous class here, in 321, and I’m now in 338. I didn’t quit, but I had a liberty violation. I got in trouble on the last day of...If you're familiar with the pipeline at all, it’s the very end before you come out here. And, yeah I got dropped with a couple of my buddies, and I had to go to the fleet for two and a half, three years. So that was pretty, especially with this career, life shaping I’d say.

Interviewer: Yeah, I would say so too. So how did that factor into your experience at BUD/S?

#143: This time around?

Interviewer: Yeah.

#143: Uhm, you can’t really mimic or create in your own mind, uh that whole, uh experience that I had being in the fleet. I didn’t enjoy it at all. It’s not anything I ever wanted to do, and it’s really hard to get back at all. So, I think in the back of my mind that was always there. I think I would have made it the first time through to be honest with you. But, definitely this time around I had a respect for what the alternative is if you don’t make it.

Interviewer: OK. I would agree with that. So do you think your personality contributed to your successful progression through that?

#143: I think so. I think so.

Interviewer: In what way?

#143: I think I'm generally a pretty easy going guy. And, I think, like a lot of people here we find a lot of humor in the bad stuff, uhm the hard stuff, uh, when its time to you know buckle up and do it we all get it done, you know, buckle up and work hard but, I think we all have that kind of sick sense of humor, almost. I think it's pretty helpful making it through a long grueling pipeline, like this.

Interviewer: There is. I would agree. OK, so then, describe your background that led you to becoming part of the seal community?

#143: Sure, well hopefully, but yeah. So I'm 28 years old. I come from a good family. Upper middle class. Uh, we, I grew up in Richmond, VA, mainly, but I had moved all over before. My parents, uh, both, uh, they met at Princeton. I’m sure it will come up. All five of the people in my immediate family went to Princeton. Uh, so they met there, had really successful New York jobs, quit, traveled the world and then kinda settled down after that. And then, growing up, we also traveled to Paris, and Abu Dhabi, and abroad when I was really young, those are my first memories. Uhm, but grew up in Richmond mainly, and now my family lives right outside DC. And, uh, basically what I’m saying is none of that would have shaped me to be a SEAL, but maybe, 28, I’m old enough to remember exactly where I was when 9/11 happened. I’m probably one of the few guys in this class that even remembers that. My parents knew people that were there, and my mom would have been working in the World Trade Center if she stayed in New York. So little things like that, uhm, not little things like that. But, that was a huge, I guess catalyst, that had me thinking about it from a very young age. I played sports. I played sports in college. So being a part of a team was always a big thing.

Interviewer: What kind of sports?

#143: I played lacrosse. But, I played every sport imaginable growing up. In high school, I played football and basketball, as well. Uhm, so I loved that. I really, really enjoyed that.

Interviewer: So what did you enjoy about that?

#143: Uhm, so growing up, I was always the best at the sports. Which was great. Then you get to college and Princeton lacrosse is routinely top 10, top 20 in the country. I got there and was not as good as I was relative to when I was in high school. And, so you really kind of learn how to be a very good teammate, I think. And I think I really didn’t even learn it until my senior year. When you get to the point where you’re more happy to see your teammates succeed than you succeed, which you know, everyone kinda says that. And, I said that when I was in high school, college eve, but I remember distinctly getting to that point where I was just so happy that this guy, who essentially was taking my spot, I was just really happy, that he was succeeding. And I think that brotherhood, if you will, is really only replicated in the military, especially kinda in the elite military but I think that that really steered me towards SEALs. Even over any other branch or unit. Uhm, I was looking for that and I think I definitely found it so I'm really happy.

Interviewer: What about your childhood, how were you disciplined as a child?

#143: My parents were very strict, but not in a like I loved them the whole time. I was never fearful of my parents.They were the best parents I think you could have, I had an awesome childhood. Uh, a lot of you know, fun vacations and I mean they were great.

Interviewer: If you did something wrong, what did they do? Did they spank you? Timeout?

#143: Maybe a timeout? I don't know, and this sounds bad, because I definitely don’t think I'm this way now, but it was the most well behaved kid you could imagine. The school I went to, you had a dress code, you had to wear a collared shirt, tuck your shirt in, “yes ma’am, yes sir” kinda thing, cute little Southern Virginia boy. And I was that, so I mean I never wanted to make them get to that point, but if they did, you know, you could tell I just, maybe, we were never grounded or anything like that. There was never any incentive to, like, get A’s or anything like that. Couldn't watch TV during the week. We had family sit down dinners during the week every night. And you know, I think my parents both \*undecipherable\* those were two really important things. We were really close in the family. Um, my mom would go like come home from school and like they let me play first and instead of doing homework right away. My mom would throw the football with me and my dad would come home late and we would play, um I had a great childhood. Which, yeah. I don't know if there is anything there that necessarily.

Interviewer: Not looking for anything in particular.

#143: Exactly, yeah. But no, none of those like horror stories that I ...

Interviewer: No, no, I am not saying… What have the last five years of your life looked like prior to BUD/S?

#143: Um, so, right after college, I was actually a sixth grade history teacher, um which I loved. Uh, and it wasn't like I was a substitute teacher or an assistant, I was, this was … sorry I don’t know if I am allowed to say that, but yeah, so I was a history buff and I taught 91 kids at private school in Atlanta, 5 classes about 20 kids in each class and uh I taught um uh I guess we start with pre-history all the way up to medieval times, Rome, Egypt, Greece, all that, very basic stuff, but I had a blast. Uh, I had the same kind of maturity level back then. I coached three sports three seasons. Um so, I loved it, but kind of like I said before this was always calling. Um, I had surgery my senior year of college on my hip, so I didn’t really, I wasn't physically ready to enter right away and I didn't really want to go straight in, um so teaching for a year was awesome. I do wish I had probably done two or three retrospect after I ended up getting kicked out, you know, for…

Interviewer: Yeah.

#143: Then going into the Navy. But uh, so that's what I, I did that, then spent probably 6 months getting in shape and preparing to come into the Navy and then I’ve been in the Navy since March 2016, so coming up on almost 4 years. So, I was uh, a corpsman based out in Norfolk.

Interviewer: OK. What motivates you on a daily basis to keep going?

#143: Um, I mean it’s not like every day I wake up I’m like “hooyah” to get going, but when you talk about what motivates me each day, um, well I am married too, and my wife, she’s in grad school, she’s very disciplined in everything she does, much like better than I ever was, so you know, she’ll come home and immediately start studying and we’ve got a dog and she takes him and feeds him and all that stuff, um where as you know I come home from this and I just want to watch netflix and relax. But uh, she definitely, it’s definitely an inspiration to keep going and my parents are both very successful, not, you know, workaholic type people, but they just, you know, are always wanting to kind of do something. So, I think maybe that good type of pressure from my family…

Interviewer: What did your family say when you, you know, you graduated from Princeton, and you were a history…

#143: When I initially told my mom, she cried \*laughs\*. Her dad was actually in the Navy as well. And her grandfather was 4 star admiral in the Navy, um, and her dad was at Pearl harbor when it was bombed, so there is some history there. But, by no means was I raised in a military type family. They have always been very supportive of anything I wanted to do. There has never been, almost to a fault, almost, never pressuring one direction, like “hey I am doing this, what do you think,” kind of like “whatever you want to do” like, you know when I was choosing schools, I really didn't want to choose Princeton because it was expected and everyone did that. They never steered me in any way there, same with my sister and my brother. They all kind of do their own things, like “alright, that’s kind of the route that works best for all of us.” So, it has been pretty cool and I hope at least when I am a parent to be like that. I dont want to ever force anything on my kids.

Interviewer: Sure.

#143: So, yeah. enlisted versus officer, yeah. I am enlisted too. So, kind of explaining that once again there was never a “you should be an officer” or “you shouldn't be in the military.”

Interviewer: Did you think about that, being an officer versus being enlisted

#143: I mean, maybe initially, a little bit. Once I kind of, learned more, you know, I know some people and once I learned more of what the job entails, I do want to be the guy, the one that is doing a little bit more, uh, that I think is more in line with the enlisted route than the officer route. I don't know how familiar you might be, you know, I might even be…

Interviewer: Twenty-two years in the army, but, I don’t know much about Navy, so

#143: It is probably fairly similar, but you know, the officer, you get a couple deployments, some action I guess, and then after that it is more administrative, but uh…

Interviewer: I agree with that.

#143: So, that is the way it was kind of pitched to me. The other way appealed to me, especially because I figured if I really wanted to, I could always go to OCS hopefully. It’s honestly not even something I have thought about to this point.

Interviewer: So, going back to BUDS what was the most challenging thing to you, like think about your hardest day at BUDS and what, what was that most challenging thing you had to do?

#143: Um, the hardest part was roll, I was in 337 initially, but I was rolled for OC8 which is our pool comp. Uh, so, the scuba test where they are tying your hose behind your back and you can’t breathe all that craziness, and that was the first time where I was like, at least in um, the first phase, everything that is hard physically, is like “okay this sucks, but I can do this.” With that one, you can’t really grind out, you really have to slow down and focus, um, so that was kind of the gut check for me saying, OK, it’s not like, you know, plenty people are tough enough but you really have to focus when you are under stress I think. And in that respect, ithink that test is pretty awful and I was able to practice it, which I was really proud of, I practiced it for two months with all the other rollbacks, which was a bunch of… practiced for two months, we got really good at it. You know crushed it on the next time through, which was probably the proudest I have been through this whole process. You know, it feels good to feel like you crushed something that previously seemed insurmountable. Uh, so that was fun.

Interviewer: Good, and then, what motivated you to push through that event and did you feel like your classmates helped you, like were you supported by them?

#143: Definitely, like… this, 338, I am glad you guys are doing the test on 338 because, previously being in 3-7 and then 3-8 and I love the guys in 338. In 3-7, I like them a lot, and thought that you know, OK, “we are tight, we got this,” and then I got here and I realized what a better class 38 was. So, yeah, there was at the time, at the time I was retaking my last test, they had only known me for a couple weeks, uhm but the rollbacks, you know I’d been with through hellweek and through the first part of uh 3-7’s second phase, uh we all got really close, which was awesome. That was probably the most fun I’ve had, going back into second phase with these guys. So, and then going back to the whole team and not just being a team but being a, literally a brotherhood, and the type of team where you want everyone to succeed so badly, uh, even more than you want yourself to succeed, that I think we all haduh, among that crew, and we all did, all the rollbacks passed, which I think is pretty rare. I don’t know, but all of us, I think there were 16 of us and 16 of us passed the second time and…

Interviewer: Nice.

#143: And I think that says a lot about our motivation, or yeah, our motivation.

Interviewer: What about, what practices did you use to help push through the challenges, like spiritual, mental, physical?

#143: Yeah, so, um, typically, I guess previously, challenges were like, “aw man I didn't make the starting line up, or I didn’t do well on this test, whatever” then coming to something like this where it’s like, alright this is essentially life or death, you know, im either gonna get through this or i'm not gonna get through this. It was the first time I had turned to, you know, I was super, I had never been this stressed out in my life, so I actually, yeah I definitely probably read more, listen to, like, podcasts and actually did some meditation apps, which if you told me I was doing meditation apps before I would have been like “no way,” but I actually did some of those things. And we learned, and it was nothing new to me, but like visualization techniques, and things like that, that I previously never really employed, but I definitely employed this time around. Uhm, definitely employed this time around. Especially with OC8, by the time, my second time around, I was kinda really at peace with what was gonna happen. I was like “I’m as prepared as I was for any test in my life, and it’s gonna happen or it’s not gonna happen.” And then, that moment when you hit the water and I was like “OK, I got this.” And I think that was the most zen I had been in my life and there have been times that I had that zen moment, but I think, probably all those factors contributed to it.

Interviewer: OK. And then, think of a decision that you had to make during BUD/S. What went through your mind as you made that decision and can you give me an example?

#143: Uhm, give me a moment. First, I’d say people talk about, “Oh did you ever think about quitting?” And the honest answer is no, I never thought about quitting, uhm, as far as the decision, uhm.

Interviewer: Maybe there aren't a lot of decisions that you make in BUD/S?

#143: I think there is. I mean like, as far as like, a “keep going thing,” or like uh, I mean there was definitely times where, uh. I don’t know. Sorry.

Interviewer: That’s OK.

#143: Maybe, can we swing back around?

Interviewer: Yeah, sure.

#143: I’ll see if I can think of a good one.

Interviewer: And, why do you think you were successful in completing BUD/S?

#143: I mean honestly, I think a lot, I think I’d go back to, even though I said it probably didn’t attribute anything, my upbringing. Uhm, uh, just the fact that i've put so much effort into this. Uhm, and I do, I don't think that I'm like a type-A crazy person. But, I am, I am very competitive, and I do definitely kind of put pressure on myself, I guess.

Interviewer: But you're not a type-A?

#143: I don’t think I'm a type-A a guy. I usually say I’m not a type-A guy, but I guess I probably don’t…

Interviewer: Ok.

#143: Don’t have the right idea of what type-A is.

Interviewer: OK. Nope that’s fine.

#143: But, no, uhm, you know I just want to, I want to be a SEAL for all the corny reasons. Uhm, but you know I do wanna also, uhm, be a part of this team and be able to have that sense of purpose, too. So I think that does drive you. And on a day to day, I just kinda look at it as any other thing, you know. It’s not like you go to school, you go to school everyday, it’s not like you, I don't know. It’s…

Interviewer: Well, let me ask you this, then. What about the people that didn’t make it? What differences did you see with them?

#143: Uhm, throughout my, both classes, or really all three classes I’ve been in, there have been people that really surprise me. Uh, as far as the ones that really surprise you go, whether those are people that you know I got along with really well, uh, for whatever reason, friends that didn’t make it. Honestly I would probably attribute it to some type of moment of weakness, or, I don’t think that it was necessarily...I wouldn’t label them as a quitter, I wouldn’t say, I wouldn't, I wouldn’t not trust that person with something later on in my life you know if we run into each other it’s not like I think oh he's not gonna follow through on this. But maybe, I don't, know, I don't know, I just never thought that I wasn't gonna make it, and maybe that’s part of it.

Interviewer: OK. Would you consider yourself impulsive?

#143: Uh, I wouldn’t consider myself impulsive…

Interviewer: Like, do you have tattoos, do you binge drink?

#143: I don't have tattoos, uh, I like to, I like to be spontaneous, but I dont think it's impulsive, I don't buy things, I don't do anything crazy like that, I'm pretty, you know, fiscally conservative. Uhm, yeah no tattoos, no, uh...

Interviewer: No? OK.

#143: I don’t think I’m impulsive, yeah.

Interviewer: We’re getting down to the wire. We have two more questions. How did this experience change you as a person? Getting through this time?

#143: Uh, this time’s weird I’d say that, you get pummelled, I think because there was not really, but I definitely, you know when you go home and people say oh that’s incredible what you did, it makes you feel uncomfortable too, uh, say how cool it is. I mean I don’t know if that’s a good answer.

Interviewer: No, yeah.

#143: But, yeah, I guess maybe, a little, I like to think I was humble before, but hopefully better now. I think that’s what it does to people. You know, you make it through, but you always think of those times when you definitely weren't at your best and youre like “oh, wow, I still got a long way to go.”

Interviewer: OK. And then, my last thing. We’re doing this for SOCOM so they can help us, and really the Navy, figure out, how do we bring in people that are gonna be successful? How do help these people be more successful? What should I have asked you, that I didn’t ask you that maybe would help the next group?

#143: I guess you kinda asked, or maybe I just rambled on, I think I mentioned a lot, I guess the “why?” I guess I mentioned the catalyst and everything, you know, 9/11. And everyone’s got a different one, but I think as long you like, but I think you mentioned that, so. But, yeah, that's always something that maybe, I think people can make one up, but you never really know. I don't know. You could piggyback off other people’s “why’s?” in a good way or a bad way, but as long as I think you know what your “why’s?” are you’re fine. But, I don't know, I think a big part is just, yeah not wanting to leave these guys, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, no that’s good. I have to ask something off script. So, when you were in Princeton going through that, did you think about these days?

#143: Uh, yeah, so I always, I probably decided I wanted to be a SEAL, uh this would be when I read *Lone Survivor*, which was my senior year of highschool in 2010, oe 2009, and that was when I was like “huh, I wonder..” You know, cause everyones heard about it , but you don’t really know. And then freshman year, there’s kinda been a weird, not weird, it makes sense, I guess, but a pipeline of Princeton lacrosse players that have come through. So when I, my freshman year there, there was a guy who had just graduated and was just starting out, uhm and uh, who actually was the OIC of our next training block, but he just left, so I was bummed that I just missed him. But, there’s been like this kinda pipeline through, uhm, through those guys. So yeah, I definitely thought about it and playing a division one sport where it’s year round, you're getting up everyday, you're doing these workouts with all these guys, and it’s New Jersey, it’s cold mornings, you’re getting up early in the morning and doing these tests. And, a lot of the tests are pretty similar to what we do here. Similar type of athlete, where you need to be fast, you have to run for endurance, you have to be strong. Uhm, so it all kind of, you know, lacrosse is one of those sports where you find a lot of these guys who played in this program. So, so yeah, I definitely thought about what these would be like, what the days would be like, I probably thought about it every day since 2010, and now I finally got to do it. And, it was pretty close to what I expected.

Interviewer: And another thing that I think is interesting is that you’re my third guy, and everyone, this is your second time through. And I thought that you couldn’t come through a second time.

#143: Oh yeah? So there’s not too many of us. There might be 7 of us, so it’s good that you have a few of them.

Interviewer: Yeah.

#143: But yeah, I’ve gotten to know those guys a lot too. And you get to know them here and you’re like “how did you not make it through?” So, uhm, yeah.

Interviewer: No thank you, that’s perfect.

#143: And, I always remind them I didn’t quit. \*laughs\*

Interviewer: Right, right, well, yeah. You learned something.

#143: Exactly.

Interviewer: Thank you, this was very helpful.