
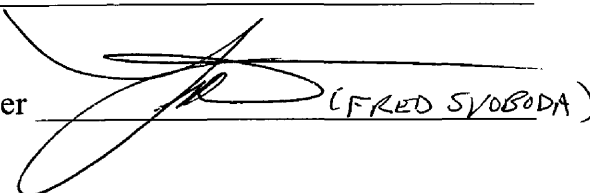


Shadow Warriors:
Navy SEALs and their Rise in American Society

By
Cory Butzin

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Introduction

“It makes no difference what men think of war,
said the judge. War endures. As well ask men
what they think of stone. War was always here.
Before man was, war waited for him. The ultimate
trade awaiting the ultimate practitioner.”

Cormac McCarthy¹

The recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are very important to American history. They were the first wars that the United States fought using, primarily, Special Forces soldiers. General Tommy Franks, commanding officer of Central Command (CENTCOM) from 2000-2003, based his military strategy on making full use of the United States military's Special Forces capabilities. One group that took a substantial role in those events was the United States elite maritime Special Forces, the Navy SEALs.²

The acronym SEAL stands for the elements in which they are experts at operating in: SEa, Air, and Land.³ That versatility allowed them to benefit from the new military strategy, being able to work in every environment that the military may encounter. Among the first soldiers in the region, they were given some of the most dangerous missions and were able to make a significant impact on the region in the early stages of the war.⁴

Navy SEALs have a long, storied history dating back to World War II. The SEAL Teams were not officially created until 1962, but the history of Navy combat divers goes back to the Navy Combat Demolition Units (NCDU) who went onto the

¹ Mark Bowden, *Black Hawk Down*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), x.

² Tommy Franks, *American Soldier*. (New York: Regan Books, 2004), 257-262.

³ Dick Couch, *The Warrior Elite: The Forging of SEAL Class 228*. (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001), 1; Kevin Dockery from interviews by Bud Brutsman, *Navy SEALs: A History of the Early Years* (New York: Berkley Books, 2001), 275.

⁴ Dick Couch, *Down Range: Navy SEALs in the War on Terrorism*. (New York: Crown Publishers, 2005), 3.

beaches of Normandy in the D-day invasion to clear obstacles preventing American armor from reaching the beach. In the Pacific, Underwater Demolition Teams (UDT) performed hydrographic reconnaissance of enemy held beaches, gathering information to make charts of the harbors, as well as clearing the area of obstacles (mines, coral reef, etc.).⁵

As the situation in Southeast Asia escalated in the middle of the 20th Century, and direct United States involvement in Vietnam seemed imminent, President John Kennedy saw the need for the United States military to acquire unconventional warfare capabilities. Under his administration, in 1962, the Navy SEALs and the Army's Special Forces (Green Berets) were created, just in time to take direct involvement in the war in Vietnam.⁶

Southeast Asia is where the SEALs made a name for themselves. The majority of SEALs operated in the Rung Sat Special Zone, which was a patch of swamp in the Mekong Delta near Saigon. It was a hideout for criminals, and a place where Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army could rest. The SEALs did a good job of harassing the enemy in their safe zones. The SEALs became known as the, "men in green faces", and there was a reward on all of their heads, dead or alive.⁷

In the 1980's, terrorism became the new adversary for the SEAL Teams. They took part in conflicts in South America, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and the

⁵ Dockery, *A History of the Early Years*, 59-60, 69-77, 104-105.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 274.

⁷ Couch, *The Warrior Elite*, 2; Gary Smith and Alan Maki, *Death in the Jungle: Diary of a Navy SEAL*. (New York: Ivy Books, 1994), 38.

Caribbean.⁸ It was a very important time for the SEAL Teams. They were able to prove that they were valuable even in times when the country was officially at peace.

SEALs were instrumental in driving Iraq out of Kuwait in the Persian Gulf War. Their leadership saved the lives of many American soldiers at the Battle of the Black Sea in Mogadishu, Somalia in 1993. SEAL Teams are deployed throughout the world at all times to combat such threats. So when terrorists hijacked planes and flew them into the World Trade Center Towers and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001 SEALs were already stationed in the Middle East to take early action against the Taliban.⁹

In recent years, the department of defense has begun an intense campaign to increase the number of Special Forces soldiers within the military without reducing the standard. They have requested that those forces be increased by 15-20%. That is not an easy task.¹⁰ SEALs have one of the hardest training programs in the world. In a single year, Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL (BUD/S), the basic training course for SEALs, graduates fewer than 250 trainees, not all of whom become SEALs. Compare those numbers to the Marine Corps who trains 20,000 new Marines each year, and the Army Rangers which develop 1,500 new Rangers each year, and it becomes clear that it takes a special person to make it through BUD/S. One thing that does seem to be a standard for BUD/S is a simple fact that has been proven true time and time again. In order to find one good man, you must start with five. History has shown that about eighty percent of

⁸ Chuck Pfarrer, *Warrior Soul: The Memoir of a Navy SEAL*. (New York: Random House, 2004), 236-249.

⁹ Kevin Dockery from interviews by Bud Brutsman, *Navy SEALs: Post-Vietnam to the Present* (New York: Berkley Books, 2003), 212-214. Bowden, 406, 422. Couch, *Down Range*, 1-3. Couch, *The Warrior Elite*, 1, 11-12.

¹⁰ Linda Robinson, "Walking Point." *U.S. News & World Report*, Oct, 2004: 48-50; Steve Liewer, "SEALs looking for ultra-athletes; Navy hires mentors to help recruiting," *San Diego Union-Tribune* 29 July 2006, A1, in LEXIS/NEXIS [database on-line], University of Michigan-Flint library; accessed January 3, 2007.

trainees who actually “class up” at BUD/S will drop out or get injured too badly to continue training. After extensive, advanced training their numbers are winnowed down even further. These intense selection and training standards leave SEALs to comprise the smallest group in the United States Navy.¹¹

Over the last two decades, a lot of books have been written by retired SEALs. Most of them are autobiographical providing extremely detailed information about the lives and careers of SEALs. Several books have been published that are compilations of interviews with former SEALs. These interviews and autobiographies are extensive and very detailed.

Navy SEALs have become increasingly popular in the media in recent years, as well. They have been the object of many movies, television shows, video games, and fiction novels. In movies and TV shows, SEALs perform nearly impossible tasks. They face seemingly insurmountable odds and somehow prevail. The majority of television advertisements for the Navy show jobs performed, primarily, by SEALs.

Many fiction novels have been written using Navy SEALs as their central characters. They feed on our imagination to create an almost superhuman, hero figure. They have been written by both former SEALs and by individuals who did not serve in the military. The contrast of the two can be effective in determining what the public may see as the role of Navy SEALs, compared to that of former soldiers themselves.

Navy SEALs are very important. Their roles within the military and even within American culture have grown by leaps and bounds since their creation. The general sentiment towards them has changed, too. In the beginning they were not liked by the conventional military, and their very existence was kept secret from the public. Many

¹¹ Couch, *The Warrior Elite*, 1.

people, within the military, thought SEALs were rogue cowboys, who went their own way without regard to the discipline and integrity of the Navy. While some still believe that, it is widely known that SEALs are highly motivated, intelligent, capable soldiers who can accomplish extremely difficult tasks. “Since the first navy frogmen crawled onto the beaches of Normandy, no SEAL has ever surrendered. No SEAL has ever been captured, and not one teammate or body has ever been left in the field. This legacy of valor is unmatched in modern warfare. In Korea, Vietnam, Lebanon, Grenada, Somalia, Panama, Iraq, and Afghanistan, SEALs appeared where no enemy thought possible and struck with a ferocity far out of proportion to their number.”¹²

¹² Pfarrer, ix, 237. Couch, *Down Range*, 1-3.

Birth of the Navy Frogman

“Valor is a gift. Those having it never know
for sure whether they have it till the test comes.
And those having it in one test never know for
sure if they will have it when the next test comes.”

Carl Sandburg December 14, 1954¹³

America’s use of Special Forces combat swimmers dates back to World War II. Adolf Hitler had fortified the French coast of his European empire, and Japan had taken control of, and fortified, a large portion of East Asia, as well as most of the Pacific islands. The United States military needed to develop a method for infiltrating fortified, enemy beaches. It was decided that combat swimmers would have to be trained to clear enemy held beaches of natural and man-made obstacles. Those combat swimmers are the forefathers of modern day Navy SEALs.¹⁴

By 1943, the United States had formally been involved in World War II for more than a year and had begun to take action against the Japanese. Rear Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner was placed in command of Operation GALVANIC, the invasion of the Gilbert Islands, in the central Pacific. The Tarawa Atoll was the first step in the island hopping campaign of the Pacific, and SEAL legend recognizes it as the birth of Navy Special Warfare.¹⁵

Prior to World War II, the United States had not successfully conducted an amphibious landing onto an enemy beach since 1898, when Teddy Roosevelt and his Rough Riders landed in Cuba. In World War I, Allied forces attempted to take control of

¹³ Smith, *Death in the Jungle*, 36.

¹⁴ Orr Kelly, *Brave Men Dark Waters*. (New York: Pocket Books, 1992), 16.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5-7; Dockery, *A History of the Early Years*, 58-59.

Gallipoli, on the Dardanelles channel, which marked the boundary between Europe and Asia. The invasion force missed their insertion point, resulting in the deaths of nearly fifty thousand Allied soldiers.¹⁶

The military was afraid of a similar debacle. If they failed at Tarawa, their entire island hopping idea would be questioned, and they would have to draw up an entirely new plan for defeating the Japanese. To prevent disaster, prior to the invasion of Betio, the bigger of two islands in the Tarawa Atoll; they took extensive measures to gather as much information as possible about the island. Planes flew over the island taking photographs, and ships studied it with telescopes. Former island residents, fisherman, and merchant seamen were interviewed to determine as much information as possible about the harbors. It was determined that at high tide, the landing crafts would have between four and five feet of water above the coral reef, which would be sufficient to proceed with the invasion.¹⁷

On November 20, 1943 nearly seventeen thousand Marines boarded landing crafts to begin the invasion. Despite all their precautions, the military failed to take into account neap tide. Neap tide is the time when there is the least difference between high and low tide. The water was at neap tide during the invasion, causing the level of water over the coral reef to drop. The landing crafts became trapped on the coral, hundreds of yards away from shore. Naval bombardments had also failed to destroy the Japanese defense on the beach. Armor and combat laden Marines were forced to try and wade hundred of yards to shore facing devastating fire from the Japanese. Most of the armor sank and hundreds of Marines drowned trying to make it to land. After three days of

¹⁶ Ibid., 9-10; Ibid., 5-6.

¹⁷ Ibid., 5-7; Roy Boehm and Charles W. Sasser, *First SEAL*. (New York: Pocket Books, 1997), 77.

fighting, the Marines prevailed in gaining control of the island. However, they lost more than one thousand men, along with over two thousand wounded. The Japanese suffered many more casualties. Of their five thousand man force, only seventeen soldiers were taken prisoner, along with 129 Korean laborers.¹⁸

In the aftermath of “Terrible Tarawa” an idea was proposed by Admiral Chester Nimitz to create two Underwater Demolition Teams (UDTs). These teams would chart harbors and clear obstacles for an invasion force. The military wanted to have the two UDTs ready by mid-January 1944. The man chosen to organize and train combat demolition swimmers, and become known as the father of all Navy Special Forces, was Draper L. Kauffman.¹⁹

During the depression, the Navy used any excuse to deny commissions to graduates of the United States Naval Academy. In 1933, when Kauffman graduated from the academy, his poor eyesight was an excellent reason to deny him a commission. However, by the invasion of Tarawa, Draper Kauffman would have more combat experience than almost anyone in the Navy.²⁰

In 1940, he joined the American Volunteer Ambulance corps in France. He was captured by Germans in June, 1940 and was held for two months. In August, he was released and made his way to England, where he joined the British Navy as a bomb disposal officer and was highly distinguished. Nearly a year later, he returned to the United States and accepted a commission as a lieutenant in the Navy. He arrived only weeks before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, and his experience disposing of bombs was invaluable as he helped clear the harbor of Japanese ordinance, for which he was

¹⁸ Ibid., 5-7; Ibid., 77.

¹⁹ Dockery, *A History of the Early Years*, 27, 58-60; Kelly, *Brave Men Dark Waters*, 16.

²⁰ Ibid., 26-27; Ibid., 16-20.

awarded the Navy Cross. In 1942, then Lieutenant Commander Kauffman organized bomb disposal skills at Washington Navy Yard and another at American University.²¹

Prior to the invasion of the Tarawa Atoll, exactly one year before the D-day invasion, on June 6, 1943 Admiral Ernest J. King had given an order to begin training Navy Combat Demolition Units (NCDUs) to aid invading forces by clearing obstacles with explosives. Lieutenant Commander Kauffman received the assignment five months prior to Tarawa. He set up a program to organize and train NCDUs at the Naval Amphibious Training Base at Fort Pierce in Florida. The first volunteers came from the Seabees, the Navy's construction battalions, with most of the officers coming from bomb disposal schools. There was not an official curriculum, so training was made up as they went along. It was determined that the basic NCDU unit would consist of one officer and five enlisted men. They would paddle to shore in a seven man rubber boat, using the extra space to store their explosives and equipment.²²

Teamwork was essential to the success of the NCDUs. A single person giving up could jeopardize the mission and the unit, so Lieutenant Commander Kauffman came up with an idea unique to the military. Officers would train right alongside the enlisted men. Because of time constraints, he came up with an elimination event to begin training and weed out anyone who may quit. The entire physical training program of the Army's Scouts and Raiders was condensed down to a single week known as Indoctrination Week, or less affectionately as Hell Week. Little sleep and continuous physical training was designed to make the trainee question his commitment and get rid of anyone who did not possess the mental and physical toughness to complete a mission no matter what

²¹ Ibid.; Ibid.

²² Ibid.; Ibid.

happened. After Hell Week, their training focused mainly on physical training and learning demolitions. Immediately after the completion of training, most of the graduates would be sent to Europe with NCDUs for the invasion.²³

In the aftermath of Tarawa, and the creation of UDTs, NCDU sailors were gleaned to fill the ranks of the new units. NCDUs already possessed the necessary demolition qualifications, but many lacked the necessary swimming ability. Draper Kauffman himself was a poor swimmer and needed extensive help in that area. They transferred to Maui, where UDT training was held, and their training focused on swimming, demolitions, and learning how to chart harbors.²⁴

At the time, there were two methods for developing hydrographic reconnaissance surveys. An administrative reconnaissance took place after a beach was secured. Information was gathered during the day under relative safety. They were more accurate, but they were drawn up to late to be useful to the invasion force.²⁵

The other method for drawing up hydrographic reconnaissance surveys was called a combat reconnaissance. UDT swimmers would swim into the harbor the night before an invasion. They would use strings marked in increments attached to a lead weight. Each swimmer would take measurements of his section and mark them on a slate with a grease pencil. After their reconnaissance, measurements were given to a cartographer who would draw up a chart for the invasion force, and then they would perform the demolition swim. The Navy did not have scuba equipment, so UDTs were confined to how long they could hold their breath to plant demolitions and destroy obstacles.²⁶

²³ Ibid., 27-37, 75; Ibid., 20.

²⁴ Ibid., 61-70, 106-107, 160-161; Smith, *Death in the Jungle*, 19-20.

²⁵ Ibid.; Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.; Ibid.

By the end of January, 1944 two UDTs consisting of fourteen officers and seventy enlisted men each were sent to operate in the Pacific. Stories quickly spread of these naked warriors who went onto the beach ahead of the invasion force wearing only a swimsuit and armed with only a knife and some explosives. Marines were known for being the first soldiers on the beach. Imagine their surprise when they landed on Pacific beaches and were welcomed by signs from UDTs, welcoming the Marines to the island.²⁷

NCDUs took part in the successful invasion of French North Africa as part of Operation TORCH, but their true baptism through fire occurred in the D-day invasion. The beaches of Europe were heavily fortified with mines, machine gun emplacements, and mortar pits. There were not enough NCDUs for the needs of Operation OVERLORD, so Gap Assault Teams (GAT) were organized consisting of six NCDU sailors, five Army engineers, and three Navy seamen. GATs would move onto shore under the cover of infantry and armor, and blow gaps in the German fortifications.²⁸

To accomplish this, Lieutenant Carl P. Hagensen developed a special explosive pack, which now bears his name. The Hagensen pack is a waterproof canvas pack filled with twenty pounds of explosives. They could be easily attached to an obstacle, and rigged so that several packs could be set off simultaneously.²⁹

On June 6, 1944 GATs moved onto the beaches of Normandy with the Allied invasion forces. At Utah beach, GATs were successful in destroying the majority of the obstacles on their beach, while losing only six NCDUs, with an additional eleven wounded. “Bloody Omaha” beach was a different story. Heavy German resistance, combined with the loss of armor in the channel, made the beach a killing field. GATs

²⁷ Ibid.; Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 17-25; Boehm, 76-77; Kelly, *Brave Men Dark Waters*, 23-24.

²⁹ Ibid., 17-25; Ibid., 76-77; Ibid., 23-24.

lost some of their explosives when landing crafts sank, so they were forced to salvage explosives from German mines to blow gaps in the obstacles. Thousands of Allied soldiers were killed at Omaha. NCDUs suffered over fifty percent casualties, with thirty one fatalities and sixty wounded.³⁰

After the successful D-day invasion, most NCDUs stayed in the region for a few days clearing the beaches of obstacles. Afterwards they were transferred to NCDUs assisting in the invasion of southern France as part of Operation DRAGOON. No further NCDUs were killed in their operations in Europe. Many sailors transferred from NCDUs to UDTs after D-day, to take part in the island hopping campaign in the Pacific³¹.

UDTs were successful working for General Douglas MacArthur in the Pacific. They left Australia hopping from New Hebrides throughout the Philipines. They were so valuable that they personally briefed General MacArthur and his staff on conditions of a harbor for a potential invasion site. While Marines suffered heavy casualties at Iwo Jima, that was not the case for UDTs. They cleared harbors and led Marines onto cleared sections of beach, while suffering few casualties. Four Teams took part in the battle. For the UDTs, Iwo Jima was a warm-up for their involvement in the battle at Okinawa.³²

A total of eight UDT teams would be used in the invasion of Okinawa, which would add up to almost one thousand combat swimmers. An unexpected enemy awaited those UDTs at Okinawa. In 1945, UDTs did not have wet suits to protect them from cold water. Prior to Okinawa, they had only operated in warmer, southern waters. The water around Okinawa was seventy degrees, which can be deadly if a swimmer is submerged for more than a few hours. The Japanese had also put sharpened stakes, some rigged with

³⁰ Ibid., 76-77; Kelly, *Brave Men Dark Waters*, 27.

³¹ Ibid.; Ibid.

³² Kelly, *Brave Men Dark Waters*, 39-46.

mines, in the coral reefs close to the shore. UDTs were sent in to clear those obstructions. In two days, UDT 11 cleared one thousand three hundred yards of beach in the face of heavy enemy fire.³³

Shortly after Okinawa, a plan was drawn up for the invasion of the main Japanese islands. Over thirty UDT teams would be used, meaning roughly three thousand combat swimmers. Captain Draper Kauffman, who would take part in the invasion of Japan's southern island of Kyushu, estimated that they would be lucky to lose only two thirds of their men. That turned out to be unnecessary, as the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki forced the Japanese to surrender, ending World War II.³⁴

Nearly three thousand five hundred men served with either the NCDUs or UDTs in World War II. They suffered 231 casualties, of which eighty-three were killed in action. Following the war, thirty of thirty four UDT teams were decommissioned. Two of the surviving teams, with seven officers and forty five enlisted men each, were assigned to the Atlantic Fleet at Little Creek, Virginia. The other two teams were assigned to the Pacific Fleet in Coronado, California. The existence of UDTs was declassified after World War II, and a magazine doing a profile of the unconventional unit called the unique warriors "frogmen" for their unorthodox methods. The nickname was picked up by men in the Teams and is still used by SEALs today.³⁵

NCDUs were decommissioned following World War II. Some of those sailors transferred to UDT Teams, while some went back to the regular Navy, and some left the Navy altogether. Those NCDUs that transferred to UDTs found themselves under the

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Dockery, *A History of the Early Years*, 42, 183; Smith, *Death in the Jungle*, 16; Boehm, 99.

command of Commander Francis “Doug” Fane, and they found themselves struggling to find a place in the post-war Navy.³⁶

UDTs could not afford to be complacent after the war, or they might lose even more to cutbacks. To help expand their capabilities, Commander Fane worked closely with scientists to develop underwater breathing equipment. Closed-circuit oxygen rebreathers were developed to be used in underwater operations. This rig let the diver breath pure oxygen. After it was exhaled, a canister in the diving rig captured the gas and scrubbed carbon dioxide out of it, allowing the diver to continue breathing clean air. It also prevented bubbles from being released, which would give away the diver’s position. The ability to use submersibles and underwater breathing equipment made the UDTs more flexible, thereby more valuable to the peace time Navy.³⁷

UDTs did not have to wait long to test their new capabilities. One June 25, 1950 the communist North Korean Peoples Army crossed the thirty-eighth parallel into South Korea in an attempt to unify their country with their democratic brethren in the south. President Harry Truman ordered his Pacific commander, General Douglas MacArthur, to help South Korea however he could. UDTs from Japan were immediately called for to help United Nation forces drive North Korea back across the thirty-eighth parallel.³⁸

UDTs were used in a variety of situations in Korea. They improved upon some of their old skills learned during World War II, and they developed new ones too. One old skill that came in handy for the UDTs was the ability to perform hydrographic reconnaissance survey of Korean harbors and dispose of the mines. Their ability to dispose of mines, combined with the extensive experience they gained in Korea led to

³⁶ Ibid., 43, 184-185; Boehm, 99-101.

³⁷ Ibid.; Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 189-209.

UDTs having members of their teams explosive ordinance disposal qualified, a requirement for SEAL Teams even today.³⁹

In Korea, UDTs performed their first extended operations on land. Prior to the war, they had begun to learn small arms tactics. With their demolition experience, they were qualified to perform guerrilla operations behind enemy lines. UDTs went onto land to destroy North Korean railroads and bridges, cutting their supply lines. They also helped set up command posts to organize guerrilla forces in enemy territory.⁴⁰

Even with their new found competence on land, UDTs never lost their affinity for water. Their ability to maneuver in the water, and use small boats, made them a vital asset in the recovery of downed pilots in North Korean waters. The most unorthodox operation the UDTs took part in occurred off North Korea's coast. Extensive fishing nets had been set so North Korea could take advantage of the region's large fish populations. North Korea was able to feed their troops, and deny that nutrition to South Korea. UDTs went into the water for long hours to destroy those nets, allowing food to make it to South Korea.⁴¹

Navy frogmen have a distinguished history. Their success in World War II was crucial to the overall success of the Allied forces, both in Europe and in the Pacific. In Korea they went on land for the first time to conduct guerrilla operations against the enemy. These early combat swimmers took part in two of the largest wars in United States military history, and were absolutely instrumental to many successes in both instances. Those men set the foundation for one of the finest Special Forces units in the world today, the United States Navy SEALs.

³⁹ Ibid., 213-224.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 193-195, 222; Boehm, 103.

⁴¹ Ibid., 222-225.

SEALs Face Baptism through Fire

“Courage is almost a contradiction in terms.
It means a strong desire to live taking the form
of a readiness to die.”

G.A. Chesterson⁴²

The 1960s were a tumultuous time for the United States. Crises throughout the Caribbean, as well as the election of a young president, John F. Kennedy in 1960, signaled a turning point in the evolution of the Navy frogmen. Political upheaval in Vietnam intensified, leading officials to believe that full scale American involvement in the war was imminent. The terrain, economic poverty, and political fragmentation of Vietnam made unconventional warfare the most effective and logical tactic for Vietnamese fighters, but the United States military was not prepared to fight a guerrilla war. On May 25, 1961, in a joint session of congress after the Bay of Pigs fiasco, President John F. Kennedy ordered the creation of units with unconventional capabilities, and the Navy SEALs were born.⁴³

The SEAL acronym stands for environments that these operators are qualified to work in SEa, Air, and Land. The original vision for the SEAL Teams was put forward by Admiral Arleigh Burke. He proposed taking Underwater Demolition Team (UDT) operators, giving them escape and survival training, and then sending them to train with

⁴² Darryl Young, *The Element of Surprise: Navy SEALs in Vietnam*. (New York: Ivy Books, 1990), ix.

⁴³ Kevin Dockery from interviews by Bud Brutsman, *Navy SEALs: A History of the Early Years*. (New York: Berkley Books, 2001); 152-154, 182, 274.

the Army's Special Forces. The job of building the Teams, according to this vision, was given to Lieutenant Commander William Hamilton in the summer of 1961.⁴⁴

Hamilton was given a \$4.2 million budget and ordered to have the team ready to be commissioned by the end of the year. Commander Hamilton had been stationed in the Caribbean a few years earlier, where he had been in charge of teaching Special Forces how to dive. When Commander Hamilton went about building the SEAL Teams, he went to Fort Bragg to gather all the information he could from the contacts he had made. A large portion of SEAL tactics was inspired by the Special Forces. Commander Hamilton was provided with training manuals and pamphlets, as well as anything to help the organization of the new commando unit.⁴⁵

Commander Hamilton gave the job of manning and arming the SEAL Teams to Lieutenant Roy Boehm, who was given a presidential priority to assemble the Teams and gather any equipment he needed. Time constraints did not allow him to go through normal military channels to acquire material, so Lieutenant Boehm used less approved channels. Boehm took UDT operators to local department stores and private companies to acquire equipment. They filled up trucks with pistols, watches, uniforms, and holsters. A new rifle, the AR-15, had yet to be approved by the Bureau of Weapons, but that did not stop Lieutenant Boehm. He used his presidential priority to bypass the bureau and acquire over one hundred rifles for the Teams. His unorthodox approaches led to Lieutenant Boehm facing several boards of inquiry, which could have led to several court martials, if not for the intervention of President Kennedy. After inspecting the fledgling

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 275; Bill Fawcett, *Hunters & Shooters*. (New York: Avon Books, 1995), 182.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 278-285.

commando outfit, President Kennedy intervened and five boards of inquiry disappeared.⁴⁶

The only guidance Lieutenant Boehm received about the SEAL Teams came from Commander Hamilton who said, “When you’re called upon to do something, and you’re not ready to do it, then you’ve failed.” To acquire new skills SEALs were sent to schools throughout North and Central America. Schools such as the Royal Canadian Air Force Survival School in Edmonton, Alberta, the Army’s Jungle Warfare School in Panama, and the Marine Corps Escape and Evasion School in California were attended to teach prospective SEALs how to be warriors. SEALs went through Ranger training. They learned how to sail at the Naval Academy in Annapolis. They even went to prisons because SEALs had to know how to crack safes, hotwire cars, and pick locks. Who better to teach them than career criminals? SEALs studied photography and they learned how to gather intelligence. They went to Airborne School at Fort Benning, Georgia where they became parachute qualified. Lieutenant Boehm worked closely with Special Forces Captain Rudy Kaiser to develop a system where UDTs would teach Special Forces demolitions and diving. In turn, Special Forces would teach SEALs small-unit tactics and how to operate with foreign weapons.⁴⁷

SEAL Teams were not ready until January 7, 1962, but the official record backdates the commissioning to the first of the year. SEAL Team One was stationed in Coronado, California under the command of Lieutenant David Del Guidice. SEAL Team Two was stationed in Little Creek, Virginia under the command of Lieutenant John Callahan. Each Team consisted of ten to twenty officers and fifty to seventy enlisted

⁴⁶ Ibid., 291-304; Fawcett, 8.

⁴⁷ Ibid.; 291, 310; Boehm, 141-157.

men. The primary mission profile of the SEALs was to conduct clandestine operations, i.e. sabotage, demolish, and interdict, in enemy territory bodies of water. Their secondary mission profile was to develop doctrine, tactics, and equipment for the Teams.⁴⁸

Immediately following their commissioning, SEAL platoons were deployed throughout the world. SEALs went to Vietnam, Korea, and the Caribbean. In the Cuban missile crisis, a platoon of SEALs was sent to perform a hydrographic reconnaissance of Cuban beaches for a possible invasion force. Three years later a series of revolutions occurred in the Dominican Republic. Juan Bosch, a communist sympathizer, came to power. SEALs were sent in to perform a hydrographic reconnaissance and scout the beaches for a possible invasion force. No incidents arose from either event. They were simply warm ups for the SEAL's entry into the war in Vietnam.⁴⁹

The strength of SEALs resides in their realistic training and emphasis on teamwork. Underwater Demolition Team Replacement training, which was changed to Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL (BUD/S) training, is the hardest training program in the United States military and it is completely voluntary. A constant rule in BUD/S training is that to find one good man, you must start with five. Statistics have shown that 75-80% of every training class will quit or become injured too badly to continue training. In one class, not one person graduated. Everyone quit.⁵⁰

The moment potential SEALs enter training, teamwork is preached. Nonconformity is not tolerated. They must give everything they have into doing their job

⁴⁸ Ibid., 289-290; Ibid., 162-163.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 299-302; Ibid., 185; Robert Gormly, *Combat Swimmer: Memoirs of a Navy SEAL*. (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1998), 39-45.

⁵⁰ Smith, *Death in the Jungle*, 223; Young, ix; Fawcett; 3-4, 75-82, 138; Hans Halberstadt, "U.S. Navy SEALs," in *U.S. Special Forces*. (Osceola, WI: MBI Publishing, 1992), 305.

the best they can, because in a real world mission their life or the life of a teammate might depend on it. Countless hours were spent training to build that trust that teammates could depend on each other. Seven men may have to go behind enemy lines against superior enemy forces. SEAL platoons are the epitome of the phrase, “you are only as strong as the weakest link.” SEALs are so close with each other that in many cases, the Teams fulfilled family, social, and even religious requirements.⁵¹

BUD/S is a six month ordeal that tests a trainee’s mental and physical aptitude. BUD/s is unique to the military, in that officers and enlisted men train together. Naval Special Warfare training is supervised by officers, but it is carried out by enlisted SEALs with combat experience. This ensures that competent officers complete training. It ensures that the officers that make it through are people that experienced SEALs would be willing to follow.⁵²

SEALs work in very dangerous environments, but they are prepared, because they go through hard and dangerous training. In BUD/S, there are over 8,000 high risk training evolutions each year, but due to excellent medical care and supervision there are few major injuries and very few training deaths. At each high risk evolution, an ambulance is always on hand and several Navy corpsmen, medics and experts in trauma and combat care, are present.⁵³

First phase is the conditioning phase. The main purpose is to work the trainees very hard, and to keep them miserable, to test their commitment. Trainees are constantly made to run into the water, with all their clothes on, and then roll around in the sand.

⁵¹ Ibid., Ibid., Ibid.

⁵² Young, x; Kevin Dockery from interviews by Bud Brutsman, *Navy SEALs: The Vietnam Years*. (New York: Berkley Books, 2002), 37-39.

⁵³ Kit and Carolyn Bonner, *U.S. Navy SEALs: The Quiet Professionals*. (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Military History, 2002), 32.

Then they resume training wet and sandy. Sometimes trainees have to do this if they do not win a race, if they go somewhere without a swim buddy, or even just to make them miserable.⁵⁴

The obstacle course (o-course) is one of a few major training evolutions in BUD/S. The o-course is a series of walls, vaults, rope bridges and logs arranged and built to work the trainees in specific areas. Most of the obstacles are designed to build upper body strength, and they are meant to prepare the trainees for things they may need to do in the Teams. While in Vietnam, SEALs had to carry weapons, ammunition, demolitions, food, and water, while operating in swamps.⁵⁵

To move on to Second Phase, trainees have to pass other tests as well as training evolutions. They have to pass a life-saving practical, and they have to complete a fifty-five meter swim underwater, holding their breath, and do so without fins. Every trainee has to pass drown proofing, as well. In drown proofing, a trainee's hands and feet are tied, and he is made to swim several lengths of a pool. Then he has to tread water for awhile, and he has to let himself sink down to the bottom then float up to the surface for air, then sink back down, etc. Finally, he has to retrieve his mask from the bottom of the pool. The purpose of this exercise is to teach trainees to remain calm while in the water, and teach them how to swim when they cannot use their hands or feet.⁵⁶

Perhaps, the most well-known event that occurs during BUD/S is the infamous Hell Week, first developed by the father of all frogmen and SEALs, Draper Kauffman in 1943. The United States was in World War II, and Lieutenant Commander Kauffman needed to get men through training. He had visited the Scouts and Raiders, and borrowed

⁵⁴ Couch, *The Warrior Elite*, 52-53.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 78-89. Smith, *Death in the Jungle*, 151-158.

the idea of their Indoctrination Week: “train the best, forget the rest.” The Scouts and Raiders specialized in maneuvering boats in the surf zone and moving from the surf inland. Their eight week physical training program was condensed to one week and called Indoctrination Week, which quickly became known as Hell Week. The idea was to work the young soldiers hard so the stragglers and the undependable would quit, and the instructors could concentrate on training the strong and reliable soldiers.⁵⁷

Hell Week lasts from breakout Sunday night, until sometime Friday afternoon. Each class gets between two and five hours of sleep for the whole week.⁵⁸ The main objective of Hell Week is to put trainees under stress that approaches that of actual combat, and see how they react. When they are tired, hurting, and cold, can they continue to perform? SEALs work in very dangerous environments, and teammates have to be able to count on each other. By the end of the week trainees are hallucinating from lack of sleep.⁵⁹

The water around Coronado is between fifty and sixty degrees all year around. Hypothermia is a very real risk. The corpsmen on duty carry immersion tables that tell how long the trainees can stay in the water. Trainees’ temperatures often dip into the low nineties and high eighties. Some trainees eat peanut butter or sticks of butter for calories and energy during Hell Week.⁶⁰

Monday morning, after Hell Week, trainees are back in the classroom. They learn how to chart harbors and pinpoint obstacles in harbors and the surf zone. First they learn it in the classroom, then they do it during the day, then they do it at night. Frogmen have

⁵⁷ Couch, *The Warrior Elite*, 163-167.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

⁵⁹ Halberstadt, 313; Couch, *The Warrior Elite*, 119, 146; Smith, *Death in the Jungle*, 14, 47-48.

⁶⁰ Couch, *The Warrior Elite*, 56, 133-165.

been doing hydrographic reconnaissance missions since World War II. Whenever the United States military needs to secure a beach or survey a harbor they always call the SEALs to perform a hydrographic survey.⁶¹

Second Phase is the diving phase. The first couple of weeks in Second Phase are spent in the classroom studying math and physics, so they can learn diving physics, medicine, and decompression tables. After the classroom work, the class takes to the swimming pool to practice their new diving skills.⁶² For the rest of Second Phase, trainees learn how to buddy breathe, check their equipment, and practice free swimming ascents (FSA). When a diver breathes oxygen underwater, they have to exhale as they surface because the air expands in their lungs. If a diver does not perform a proper FSA, their lungs could over expand and kill the diver. The last major evolution in Second Phase is Pool Competency Week. During the week trainees gear up and enter the pool. While they dive, they are roughed up by the instructors circling over them. Their masks are torn off, their regulators are pulled out and knots are tied in them. The trainees are thrown around also. It is meant to simulate a wave surge. Their proficiency in water is what separates the SEALs from other Special Forces units.⁶³

Third Phase is the land warfare and demolition phase. During Vietnam and up until the early 1990's, land warfare and demolitions were taught during Second Phase, and diving was taught during Third Phase, is divided into two segments.⁶⁴ The first five

⁶¹ Ibid., 171-194.

⁶² Ibid., 172.

⁶³ Ibid., 195-215.

⁶⁴ Pfarrer, 33.

weeks trainees learn land navigation and become proficient with an assortment of weapons.⁶⁵

The final four weeks are spent on San Clemente Island, where trainees learn more tactics, shooting, demolitions, and conduct field exercises. While on the island, the classes learn how to plan missions, use demolitions, set up ambushes, small unit tactics, and other maneuvers. There are two maneuvers that the class will practice over and over, and they are OTBs and IADs.⁶⁶

OTBs are over the beach operations. That is when a SEAL platoon begins their mission by coming from the surf over the beach in-land. That is when SEALs are the most vulnerable. First, the platoon anchors the boat a few hundred yards off shore, then a pair of scout/swimmers swim in and scout the beach. When it is safe, then the rest of the platoon comes ashore. In Vietnam, the majority of SEAL missions began from a boat dropping them off at a strategic point in a canal or river.⁶⁷

IADs are immediate action drills. They are maneuvers that a SEAL platoon would use when they are ambushed or forced to retreat. The two basic maneuvers that every SEAL learns are the leap frog and the center peel. With the leap frog, one part of the platoon will lay down suppressive cover fire on the enemy while the other half of the platoon moves. Then they stop and lay down fire while the first half of the platoon moves, and so forth. The center peel is used when a platoon is patrolling in staggered file formation. In this example, the point man would initiate contact and expend all the ammunition in his magazine, and then he would fall back through the center of the two files changing magazines on the way to the back of the formation. Then the front two

⁶⁵ Couch, *The Warrior Elite*, 227.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

men would expend all of the ammunition in their magazines, and then fall back through the two columns, and so on.⁶⁸

The last major exercise in BUD/S is a field exercise where the students put together everything they have learned in BUD/S and put it into a simulated mission. They bring their boats in and perform an OTB. Then they patrol to their objective and ambush it, then they extract from the area. Sometimes a group of instructors will “ambush” the trainees to see how they react. After its successful completion, Third Phase is over and the remaining trainees are ready to graduate from BUD/S.⁶⁹

Immediately following their graduation from BUD/S, new SEALs entered advanced training programs to prepare them for the war in Vietnam. After becoming parachute qualified, SEALs attended Jungle Warfare School in Panama, and numerous survival and escape schools. Then they attended SEAL Basic Instruction (SBI). The first SEALs that went to Vietnam did so without combat experience. They were forced to learn on the fly. After they returned from Vietnam, SBI was formed using those combat veterans as the training cadre. They taught platoons how to operate in Vietnam. SEAL platoons underwent weapons training in the Chocolate Mountains, and they ran simulated missions near the Alamo River. It was a marshy, swampy area that resembled the terrain in Vietnam. They studied small-unit tactics and land navigation. SEAL platoons learned how to patrol and set up ambushes. They practiced prisoner handling and first aid, and anything else to make them better prepared.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 252-263.

⁷⁰ Smith, *Death in the Jungle*, 29-32; Young, xxii; Richard Marcinko, *Rogue Warrior*. (New York: Pocket Books, 1992), 77.

Vietnam had been at war for decades prior to American intervention. Communist Viet Minh guerrillas had fought French imperialists to make Vietnam an independent, united country. Communist North Vietnam, under the control of Ho Chi Minh, established its capital in Hanoi. Meanwhile democratic South Vietnam established its capital at Saigon under Bao Dai, who named Ngo Dinh Diem prime minister. To unite their country, Viet Minh took up their fight against South Vietnam. Their devious tactics and tenacious fighting style led American servicemen to call them Viet Cong (VC).⁷¹

On March 8, 1965 Marines landed on the beach near Da Nang. They were greeted by a sign saying, "Welcome U.S. Marines UDT-12." Nearly a year later in February, 1966 SEAL platoons were sent to Vietnam as part of Operation JACKSTAY to combat communist forces in South Vietnam. Platoons from SEAL Team Two patrolled the Mekong Delta looking for valuable prisoners and information. Platoons from SEAL Team One were sent to the Rung Sat Special Zone, near the Mekong Delta by Saigon. The Rung Sat was a thirty by thirty five kilometer area of mangrove swamp. Vietnamese called it, "The Forest of Assassins" because of its history as a hideout for pirates, outlaws, and contrabandists. The North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and VC used it as a sanctuary and resting area. The Rung Sat contained some of the harshest and most difficult terrain in all of Vietnam, which made it impossible for conventional forces to go there. Some areas, such as the T-10 area, were free fire zones and SEALs were authorized to fire on anyone they encountered. In the T-10 area, SEALs encountered enemy resistance on 100% of their missions.⁷²

⁷¹ Dockery, *Navy SEALs: The Vietnam Years*, 3-6.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 31; Smith; *Death in the Jungle*, 38, 63, 88; Fawcett, 133; Marcinko, 71; Gormly; 61, 89.

The mission of SEALs in Vietnam had many facets. Routinely, they went on patrols and ambushed VC and NVA in their safe areas. SEALs would wait for days on a site to ambush the enemy. SEALs usually operated in boat crews of seven men. They would go behind enemy lines in the middle of the night to harass the enemy. Regularly SEALs operated with a Chieu Hoi, which was a VC or NVA who switched sides. Usually they were first in the patrol. That way, if he betrayed the SEALs, the Chieu Hoi would be the first one killed. SEALs were greatly outnumbered, being the only friendly forces in the area, but they were far more maneuverable and they carried a tremendous amount of firepower. At all times on a mission, Navy Seawolf helicopters and Navy Boat Support Units were on call to provide SEALs with fire support and extract them from missions.⁷³

SEALs were instrumental in organizing South Vietnamese paramilitary capabilities. They worked for the Central Intelligence Agency to develop Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU). A single SEAL would command a PRU of up to one hundred Vietnamese, Montagnards, Chinese, and Cheu Hoi mercenaries. SEALs also organized and trained Lien Doc Nguoi Nhia (LDNN) units. LDNN translated means, “soldiers who fight under the sea” and they were South Vietnam’s equivalent to SEALs.⁷⁴

One of the more controversial programs SEALs were involved in during Vietnam was the Phoenix Program. Funded by the Central Intelligence Agency, the main objective of the Phoenix Program was to destroy the VC intelligence structure using PRUs. By capturing and in some cases killing VC leaders, PRUs under the command of

⁷³ Smith, *Death in the Jungle*, 31-48; Young, xxiv; Fawcett, 18.

⁷⁴ Fawcett; 16, 26, 42.

SEALs were taking away the head of the monsters that told the body where and how to fight. VC leadership was extremely difficult to replace. In effect, the purpose of the Phoenix Program was to destroy VC from the top down, and it was very effective.⁷⁵

However, many of the PRU mercenaries had family members who were killed or tortured by VC, or were tortured themselves. In some cases, they were corrupt and mercilessly brutal. It was not uncommon for a PRU company to torture or kill entire families just on the suspicion that they may be VC sympathizers. When SEAL commanders tried to stop them, SEALs themselves could become the focus of the PRUs fury. Vietnamese citizens were caught between a rock and a hard place. If they did not cooperate with VC, they were punished. If corrupt PRUs found out they were helping VC, they were punished. That brutality led to the Phoenix Program developing a reputation as an assassination program.⁷⁶

SEALs were great practitioners of psychological warfare. Their extensive camouflage and aggressive behavior lead to the Vietnamese calling SEALs, “Men with green faces.” A legend among Vietnamese said, “They came out of the swamp and went back into the swamp, they were never tired, they never slept, they never ate, and if they took you with them, you would never return.” SEALs would booby trap VC weapon caches. They would enter villages in native dress and ambush VC while they slept. VC and NVA feared SEALs so much that they place bounties on the heads of every “green

⁷⁵ Ibid.; 44, 197; Young, 19; Gary Smith and Alan Maki, *Death in the Delta: Diary of a Navy SEAL*. (New York: Ivy Books, 1996), 4-7.

⁷⁶ Ibid.; Ibid.; Ibid.

face” dead or alive. However, it was never collected because no SEAL or body has ever been left behind.⁷⁷

Navy SEALs fought with distinction in Vietnam from 1966-1973. During that time, total SEAL strength never exceeded one hundred fifty men, and it was not uncommon for SEALs to serve as many as five or six tours in Vietnam. SEAL platoons accounted for six hundred confirmed enemy dead, three hundred probable, and over one thousand prisoners, all while losing fewer than twenty men to enemy actions. Awards for valor added up to three Medals of Honor, two Navy Crosses, forty two Silver Stars, 402 Bronze Stars, two Legions of Merit, 352 Navy commendation medals, fifty one Navy Achievement medals, and hundreds of Purple Hearts. Around 90% of SEAL combat veterans from Vietnam were awarded a Purple Heart for being wounded in combat.⁷⁸

The war in Vietnam tore this country apart. War protesters and the draft made it difficult to be a serviceman, but that did not affect SEALs. They went through some of the most difficult military training in the world and volunteered to serve several tours in Vietnam, performing some of the most difficult missions of the war. SEALs built a solid reputation in Vietnam and established themselves as a premiere fighting force in the United States military.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Young, xxiii-xxiv; Marcinko; 105-106, 142-143; Gormly, 121; Dockery, *Navy SEALs: The Vietnam Years*, 254-255.

⁷⁸ Ibid., xxiv; Fawcett, 24; Gormly, 180; Dockery, *Navy SEALs: The Vietnam Years*; 34, 297.

⁷⁹ Bonner, 32; Gormly, 180; Dockery, *Navy SEALs: The Vietnam Years*, 34, 297.

Post-Vietnam Introduces a New Enemy

“The impulse to mar and to destroy is as ancient and almost as nearly universal as the impulse to create. The one is an easier way than the other of demonstrating power.”

Joseph Wood Krutch, *The Best of Two Worlds*⁸⁰

The period following the Vietnam War was difficult for the United States military, and specifically the SEAL Teams. For over ten years, their soul purpose had been to train and fight in Vietnam. With the end of the war, SEALs suffered from widespread military cutbacks and from a lack of purpose and direction. However, SEALs would encounter a new purpose and enemy that was not restricted to a single nation or people. That new enemy was terrorism.

The last combat platoons of SEALs left Vietnam in 1971. SEAL advisors continued to deploy to Vietnam, but by 1972 they had been withdrawn also. Both SEAL Teams were devastated by military cutbacks, especially SEAL Team One which had quintupled from its original enrollment to provide the primary SEAL commitment to Vietnam. The Teams simply did not have the money to support their personnel.⁸¹

In October, 1973 during the Yom Kippur War, SEAL Team Two could only fully equip two out of seven combat platoons. In Coronado, SEAL Team One had thirty scuba rigs for three units with sixty to seventy men each. Many SEALs had to pay their own way for training to keep their qualifications up. They were given “no-cost orders” meaning they had to pay for their own meals and lodging. For the price of a single F-14

⁸⁰ Smith, *Death in the Jungle*, 87.

⁸¹ Gormly, 263-265; Dennis Chalker and Kevin Dockery, *One Perfect Op: Navy SEAL Special Warfare Teams*. (New York: Avon Books, 2002), 81, 95-96.

fighter, an entire Team could be financed for five years, but the funding was just not available.⁸²

The general consensus among a lot of military brass was that all of the Special Forces, including SEALs, had performed well in Vietnam, but there was no place for them in a peacetime military. It would be best to, “put them back in their cages” until the next war. SEALs and Special Forces were reduced in size, and Army Rangers were disbanded all together. An event occurred that would change that thought for many and change the direction of the Teams for good.⁸³

On November 3, 1979 sixty three Americans were taken hostage when Iranian terrorists took control of the American embassy in Teheran. A plan was developed, designated Operation EAGLE CLAW, to free the hostages. Aircraft carriers would take equipment, helicopters, and several units of the Army’s elite counter-terrorism command, Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta into Iran. Delta Force’s soldiers would meet their helicopters at an abandoned refueling base, designated Desert One, near the city. Delta would sneak into the city during the night, and when the order was given, they would storm the embassy, rescue the hostages and escort them to nearby helicopters waiting to transport them to safety. President Jimmy Carter authorized the plan and it was scheduled to take place on April 24, 1980.⁸⁴

Complications arose as a large sand storm met the rescue team at Desert One. Several helicopters were lost in the storm and the Delta officer in charge, Colonel Charlie Beckwith, was forced to abort the mission. On the return trip to the base, a helicopter

⁸² Ibid.; Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 263-265, Kelly, *Brave Men, Dark Waters*, 208-209.

⁸⁴ Kelly, *Brave Men, Dark Water*, 208-209; Marcinko, 225; Dockery, *Post-Vietnam to the Present*, 225; Terry Griswold and D.M. Giangreco, “DELTA America’s Counterterrorist Force,” in U.S. Special Forces. (Osceola, WI: MBI Publishing, 1992), 135-145.

crashed into another aircraft killing eight men. It was a huge embarrassment to the United States. The hostages were held for over a year, and released within minutes after Ronald Reagan was inaugurated as President.⁸⁵

In the wake of the Desert One disaster, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at the request of the Secretary of Defense, decided to create a hostage-rescue task force. It would contain Army elements, such as Delta Force, specialized Air Force pilots, and it also called for the creation of a special SEAL Team to combat terrorist threats in a maritime environment.⁸⁶

In the fall of 1980, Lieutenant Commander Richard Marcinko was tasked with building SEAL Team Six, the Navy's equivalent to Delta Force. Six was outside the Navy's chain of command, with its commander reporting directly to the Joint Chiefs. Where Delta had several years to become operational, SEAL Team Six had six months. Six had to learn how to board ships at sea, climb oil rigs, swim, and shoot. In their first year, Six fired more rounds than the entire Marine Corps. Commander Marcinko, by his own demands, had to, "fit 408 days of training into 365." He would let his men sleep on the plane rides to their training sites.⁸⁷

Six was supposed to be the elite of the elite. They took the best operators from the SEAL teams. They had an unlimited budget to take their entire command to exotic training sites. Where SEAL Team Two may take a platoon to run a training exercise at Camp A.P. Hill in Virginia, SEAL Team Six would fly their entire command to Germany and perform live fire training missions. The men of Six wore civilian clothing and they

⁸⁵ Ibid.; Ibid.; Ibid.; Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 209; Ibid., 236-240.

⁸⁷ Chalker, 63-74; Pfarrer, 235-246, 264; Kelly, *Brave Men, Dark Waters*, 210-220; Dockery, *Post-Vietnam to the Present*, 24-27; Marcinko, 240-243.

had modified grooming standards. Ponytails and facial hair were encouraged. Six was on a constant war footing. Within four hours notice, they could deploy and fight anywhere in the world. They needed to blend in with indigenous populations at a moments notice. It was much easier to cut their hair than it was to wait for it to grow, or wear a wig.⁸⁸

In the spring of 1983, it was decided that the UDTs were no longer needed. They performed valiantly in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. UDTs even worked for NASA, recovering space capsules from the Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo space missions. However their primary mission was to perform hydrographic reconnaissance and the clearing of obstacles, and those jobs could be performed by SEALs.⁸⁹

On May 1, UDTs were disbanded and reorganized into the SEAL Teams. UDTs Eleven and Twenty were reorganized into SEAL Teams Five and Four. UDTs Twelve and Twenty two were reorganized into SEAL Delivery Vehicle (SDV) Teams One and Two. SEAL Teams Three and Eight were also created, which allowed the military to have three SEAL Teams and an SDV Team to be stationed on each coast.⁹⁰

In the SDV Teams, SEALs specialized in the operation of long range underwater transportation. A submarine could release a submersible capable of carrying a SEAL platoon and their equipment over much greater distances than SEALs could swim. That way they could carry more firepower, and have more energy to complete their mission.⁹¹

Lebanon is a small Middle Eastern country on the Mediterranean Sea. Built in the old colonial style, Beirut was called the, "Paris of the Middle East." A French colony,

⁸⁸ Ibid.; Ibid.; Ibid.; Ibid.; Ibid.

⁸⁹ Dockery, *Post-Vietnam to the Present*, 58-61.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

Lebanon became an autonomous state following World War II. The Republic of Lebanon had consisted primarily of Maronite Christians and Sunni Muslims. A National Pact, drawn up after the war, established Lebanon as a sovereign country and drew the district lines so the Christians were given the majority in parliament. The president would be a Christian. The prime minister would be a Sunni, and the speaker of parliament a Shiite. Christians and Muslims continually clashed, and after a series of revolutions and civil wars, the international community was forced to intervene.⁹²

In 1982, a multinational peacekeeping force of Americans, British, French, and Italians went to Beirut to try and restore peace. SEALs were ordered to Beirut in May, 1983. SEAL responsibilities ranged everywhere from reconnaissance in the city and the direction of air support to explosive ordinance disposal and hull searches. In short, they were responsible for the security of all United States naval vessels in the region, and any tasking for direction actions taken against hostile forces in Beirut.⁹³

In Beirut, the United States military suffered one of their greatest single losses in history. On October 23, 1983 a suicide bomber drove a truck full of explosives into the Marine headquarters building at the Beirut International Airport killing more than 240 Marines. It was one of the largest non-nuclear explosions in history. The bomb was designed by an Iranian trained member of Hezbollah named Imad Mugniyah, who specialized in planning attacks on United States barracks and would go on to impress Osama Bin Laden, with his savvy for planning attacks against the West. Within moments

⁹² Pfarrer, 122-126, 130.

⁹³ Ibid.

after the blast, SEAL Corpsmen were on hand to administer aid to the wounded and dying. For several days, SEALs helped rescue survivors and recover bodies.⁹⁴

By the fall of 1983, Captain Bob Gormly had relieved Commander Marcinko and taken command of SEAL Team Six. He did so just in time for Six's first combat operation. Grenada, which is a member of the British Commonwealth, is a small island in the Caribbean. In October, 1983 the democratic government was overthrown by a government supported by Cuba. Cuban advisors were on hand to help the army and their engineers modify the airfield at Point Salines to accommodate military cargo planes from the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union, in turn, could use it as a staging point to support communist revolutions throughout Latin America. The United States was extremely uncomfortable having a military airfield in a country aligned with the Soviet Union so close to home. When the Grenadian prime minister was executed, American military forces were sent to Grenada.⁹⁵

The objective of Operation URGENT FURY was to procure the safety of American medical students at the medical school in Grenada, and that of the Grenadian governor general, Sir Paul Scoon. After American Special Forces regained control of the island, they would return power to the governor general. Army Rangers were sent to secure the airfield. Two elements of SEAL Team six were sent to secure the governor general's safety and gain control of the island's radio station.⁹⁶

On October 23, 1983 SEAL Team Six parachuted into the sea near Grenada to link up with an American destroyer. The drop was originally supposed to take place

⁹⁴ Ibid., 190-196; Dockery, *Post-Vietnam to the Present*, 114-115.

⁹⁵ Chalker, 139; Orr, *Brave Men, Dark Waters*, 238; Gormly, 202.

⁹⁶ Ibid.; Couch, *The Warrior Elite*, 4-11; Orr Kelly, *Never Fight Fair*. (New York: Pocket Books, 1995), 307-313; Gormly, 202-203.

during the day, but a mix-up with the time change led to it taking place during a moonless night. An unexpected squall showed up during the drop, and in the confusion four SEALs lost their lives. No one knows for sure what happened to them, because their bodies were never found; but it is believed that they became tangled in their parachutes, were quickly pulled underwater by the powerful currents and drowned. They were the first SEAL losses since Vietnam.⁹⁷

Two days later on October 25, Operation URGENT FURY commenced. Upon their insertion, the helicopters began taking heavy ground fire. The SEAL element going to the radio station easily suppressed enemy fire and secured the site. However, without their knowledge, their radio frequencies had been changed. They were completely cut-off. Grenadian forces began arriving to retake the radio station. The SEALs were able to repel the attack, but they had used a lot of their ammunition. When Grenadian reinforcements and armored personnel carriers arrived, the SEALs were forced to retreat to the sea, where they were picked up after nightfall.⁹⁸

The SEAL element sent to secure Governor Scoon at his mansion quickly secured the governor and his staff. Originally it was estimated to take less than an hour, however their radio frequencies had been changed, as well. They were able to establish communications with the airfield using the telephones, but it took more than a day before a company of Marines arrived to help the SEALs escort the governor general and his family to safety.⁹⁹

An international event occurred on October 8, 1985 when Youssef al-Molqi and three accomplices, all members of the Palestinian Liberation Front (PLF), hijacked an

⁹⁷ Ibid., 185; Pfarrer, 268; Gormly, 208.

⁹⁸ Couch, *The Warrior Elite*, 4-11; Kelly, *Never Fight Fair*, 314-321; Gormly, 208-224.

⁹⁹ Ibid.; Ibid.; Ibid.

Italian cruise ship, the *Achille Lauro*, off the coast of Alexandria, Egypt in an attempt to obtain the freedom of fifty PLF soldiers held in Israeli jails. There was a crew of 340, mainly Italian and Portuguese, as well as ninety passengers, of which ten were American citizens. By international law, the United States had the right to board and secure the vessel. They turned to their elite maritime counter-terrorism unit SEAL Team Six.¹⁰⁰

The hijacking was organized by Mohamed Abul Abbas, also known as Abu Abbas. Abu Abbas was the leader of the PLF, as well as a member of the Palestinian Liberation Organization's (PLO) executive council, and close confidant of Yassar Arafat. He personally chose al-Molqi to lead the mission to hijack the *Achille Lauro*.¹⁰¹

The terrorists had set a three o'clock deadline for the release of their comrades and entrance to the port at Tartus in Syria. Syria refused to allow them entrance to Tartus, and Israel was not about to release fifty convicted members of the PLF. The deadline came and went without meeting the terrorist's demands. They responded by taking Leon Klinghoffer, an elderly, crippled American topside. In full view they executed Mr. Klinghoffer and threw his body overboard, along with his wheelchair. They were quickly contacted by Abu Abbas who ordered them not to harm any other prisoners and to set sail for Port Said, Egypt.¹⁰²

The aircraft carrying SEAL Team Six was still in the air over the Mediterranean when the terrorists surrendered to Egyptian authorities at 4:20 p.m. Egypt assured the United States that the terrorists had surrendered and left the country. In actuality, they had boarded an EgyptAir 737 aircraft, along with Abu Abbas. Abu Abbas and Yassar Arafat had arranged for Tunisia, the home of the PLO headquarters, to accept the

¹⁰⁰ Pfarrer, 276-277; Gormly, 232-241.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 275.

¹⁰² Ibid., 278-279; Gormly, 232-241.

terrorists. The United States learned the true whereabouts of the terrorists, and the next day, October 9, 1985 American F-14 fighters found the aircraft and forced it to land at an American and Italian airbase in Sigonella, Sicily. The aircraft was met by SEAL Team Six who quickly surrounded and secured the plane. The only problem was that the plane had actually landed on the Italian side of the base, but the United States did not want to give up the terrorists. A lengthy stand-off occurred before SEALs turned the plane over to Italian custody.¹⁰³

The four terrorists were captured and sentenced to prison. Abu Abbas and another PLO officer were smuggled aboard a Yugoslavian airliner, which honored their diplomatic status, and spirited them away. Within two days, they were safe in Baghdad. On April 15, 2003 United States Special Operations Forces raided a villa on the outskirts of Baghdad, as a part of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. Abu Abbas was captured while he slept and taken into custody. He is currently being held at an American military base for questioning.¹⁰⁴

Arguably the most significant event in the evolution of the Navy frogman occurred in 1986, with the Goldwater-Nichols Reorganization Act. The first reorganization of the Department of Defense since its establishment in 1948 gave decision making power to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Commanders in Chief of regional war-fighting commands now had the power to control their forces even during times of peace.¹⁰⁵

The Nunn-Cohen amendment established the United States Special Operations Command (SOCOM). Throughout their history Special Forces, in all four branches,

¹⁰³ Ibid., 282-288.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Gormly, 261-278; Dockery, *Post-Vietnam to the Present*, 161-162.

struggled to co-exist with conventional forces. The conventional military saw Special Forces as undisciplined cowboys who were a disgrace to the military. Special Operations was seen as a career killer for officers. With the creation of S.O.C.O.M, all of the Special Forces; Army Rangers, Special Forces, 160th Special Operation Aviation Regiment, the Air Force Special Operations Commands, SDV and SEAL Teams were put under one command, with a four star officer in charge. S.O.C.O.M received better funding, training, and had a direct representative to congress. Nearly fifty thousand Special Operations soldiers became available for individual tasking by regional commanders.¹⁰⁶

The United States signed a treaty with Panama in 1979, stipulating that the United States would defend the Panama Canal for twenty years, after which it would be turned back over to the Panamanian government. Being the most direct route between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, the Panama Canal is an extremely vital trade route and valuable to whoever controlled it. Throughout the duration of the treaty, the United States was bound to defend the canal from any outside forces.¹⁰⁷

In 1981, General Manuel Noriega became the military dictator of Panama. Under his regime, Panama became involved in the drug trade from South America to the United States. In February, 1988 General Noriega was indicted by the United States for money laundering and drug trafficking. President Ronald Reagan's administration developed Operation BLUE SPOON, which would neutralize any military opposition, capture Noriega, and return the country to democratic rule.¹⁰⁸

On May 7, 1989 Panama held democratic elections. The results were not in Noriega's favor, so he overturned the election and set himself up to be president for life.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.; Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Dockery, *Post-Vietnam to the Present*, 177-178.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 178-182.

Six months later on December 15, 1989 Panama's People's Assembly, which was full of officials appointed by Noriega, declared war on the United States. The next day a Marine and his wife were captured and another Marine was killed. That was the last straw.¹⁰⁹

President George Bush dusted off Operation BLUE SPOON and renamed it Operation JUST CAUSE. December 20, 1989 nearly three thousand airborne paratroopers jumped into Panama to provide an American military presence on the ground. SEAL Team Six took part in an attempt to capture General Noriega, but they were unsuccessful. Delta Force was sent to the local prison to rescue an American prisoner, who supposedly worked for the Central Intelligence Agency. Elements from SEAL Team Two and Four were sent in as well.¹¹⁰

SEAL Team Two was responsible for destroying Noriega's gunboats. Like the UDT frogmen from World War II, combat swimmer pairs were sent in with demolition packs to destroy the gunboats. They successfully completed their mission without suffering any casualties.¹¹¹

An element from SEAL Team Four, which numbered sixty-two men, extremely large by SEAL standards, was sent to take control of Paitilla Airfield and destroy Noriega's personal Lear jet. Upon reaching the airfield the SEALs were ambushed by a force of around twenty Panamanian soldiers with superior firepower behind fortified positions. In the ensuing firefight four SEALs were killed and nine were wounded. It was the most casualties suffered by SEALs at a single time in their history. They were inflicted heavy casualties on the Panamanian soldiers and forced them to retreat. After

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Chalker, 301; Kelly, *Brave Men, Dark Waters*, 256-266; Dockery, *Post-Vietnam to the Present*, 178-182.

¹¹¹ Ibid.; Ibid.; Ibid.

holding the airfield for thirty seven hours the SEALs were relieved by two hundred fifty Army Rangers. Manuel Noriega was captured and taken to the United States for trial. By January 2, 1990 every SEAL involved in Operation JUST CAUSE had returned to the United States. By May, Panama was returned to democratic rule.¹¹²

The years following the Vietnam War were a turning point for the SEAL Teams. Until that time, they had primarily been jungle fighters. When the war on terror truly began, in the late 1970s and 1980s, SEALs had to expand their capabilities to prepare them to combat anything terrorists may try to do, in every environment in the world. Political unrest throughout Latin America and the Middle East kept SEALs busy and they were able to grow and develop into the extremely capable and intelligent warriors. In many ways, the 1980s shaped the SEALs into the elite force that they are today.

¹¹² Ibid.; Ibid.; Ibid.

Navy SEALs in the War on Terror

“People sleep peaceably in their beds
at night only because rough men stand
ready to do violence on their behalf.”
George Orwell¹¹³

The Middle East has been a hotbed of war and revolution for centuries. Tribal and religious hatred has been rampant throughout the region’s history, and for the last several decades the West, in particular the United States, has been the object of that hatred. For decades, Navy SEALs have been in the frontlines to fight those wishing to do America’s citizens harm.

On August 2, 1990 Iraq invaded its tiny neighbor of Kuwait. At the time, Iraq had the fourth largest military in the world, had acquired a massive debt from its almost ten year war with Iran in the 1980s, and was looking to profit from extra oil reserves. One hundred thousand Iraqi soldiers crossed the Kuwaiti border at 2 a.m. that day. The tiny nation was conquered in less than half a day and declared the 19th providence of Iraq by Saddam Hussein.¹¹⁴

American forces in the region were immediately dispatched to the area, including Navy SEALs. By August 11, SEALs were already deployed to Dhahran, a desert base deep inside Saudi Arabia. Their primary objectives were to serve as an early warning system, direct air support, and gather intelligence for the invasion force. They were virtually the only American forces in the area preventing Iraq from further conquest.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Pfarrer, index.

¹¹⁴ Orr, *Brave Men, Dark Waters*, 272; Dockery, *Navy SEALs: Post-Vietnam to the Present*, 210-211.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

The international community's response to Iraq's invasion first came in the form of United Nations Resolution 661, putting trade sanctions on Iraq and Kuwait. Nearly three weeks later on August 25, United Nations Resolution 665 authorized a naval force to ensure the embargo of goods to Iraq was kept. An amphibious task force of SEALs and Marines was rerouted from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf as a part of Operation Desert Shield.¹¹⁶

The commanding officer of the United States Central Command was General Norman Schwarzkopf, and his area of responsibility extended all the way from the horn of Africa throughout the Middle East. General Schwarzkopf had an extreme dislike for Special Operations Forces, especially SEALs. The joke in Little Creek, Virginia was that when Army Special Forces reported to Schwarzkopf in the Middle East they said, "The bad news is, we're here. The good news is, we didn't bring the SEALs." Of the 540,000 soldiers deployed to the region, only 9,000 came from SOCOM of which only 260 came from Naval Special Warfare command. Excluding Special Boat Units and support personnel, only sixty Navy SEALs were deployed to the Persian Gulf.¹¹⁷

Captain Ray Smith, commodore of Navy Special Warfare Group One, was in command of the Naval Special Warfare forces in the Gulf. Even though their forces in the region were minimal, the Persian Gulf War put the SEALs in a unique position. Until that point, SEALs had never been an integral part of a large conventional force. They operated on their own in Vietnam and were involved in small altercations throughout the

¹¹⁶ Dockery, *Navy SEALs: Post-Vietnam to the Present*, 212-213.

¹¹⁷ Orr, *Brave Men, Dark Water*, 275-276.

Caribbean. This new war would put the SEALs in a unique position to drastically impact events.¹¹⁸

Captain Smith developed five guidelines for their operations in the Gulf. First, they had to have a high probability of success; he was not willing to needlessly throw men away. They had to be in a maritime environment. That was the SEALs' specialty and what made them unique. All operations had to support the central command and contribute to the overall war effort. Finally, they all had to be single platoon and squad level operations. They would not perform any large, multi-platoon operations like they did in the disaster at Panama.¹¹⁹

At 04:00 on January 17, 1991 the air campaign began against Iraq and Operation Desert Shield officially became Operation Desert Storm. The SEALs' role was mainly supportive. They manned observation positions and provided security for ground combat units. Much of the SEALs work took place in or around the water. SEAL snipers and EOD personnel destroyed mines, while SEAL platoons laser designation high value targets, capturing Iraqi oil platforms, and performed combat search and rescue for downed pilots and isolated American soldiers. SEALs captured an oil platform used by Iraqis as a military base capturing twenty three Iraqi prisoners. Qarah Island, the first Kuwaiti land recaptured, was taken by SEALs.¹²⁰

The most significant action of the war performed by SEALs occurred on the night of February 23, 1991 and into the next morning. Four weeks before the ground campaign began, SEALs performed elaborate rehearsals for the landing of the amphibious task force on Kuwait beaches. The press was even invited to watch and report. On the night

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 273-276.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.; Franks, 151-153; Dockery, *Navy SEALs: Post-Vietnam to the Present*, 213-222.

of the 23rd, air strikes and naval guns fired on Kuwait's beach to soften them for the invasion. A platoon of SEALs took a zodiac into the water to drop off five SEALs a couple hundred yards off shore. Those five SEALs swam to shore 1/8th of a mile apart, where they planted C-4 packs with timers and swam back out to sea. At 1 a.m. those charges began exploding in two to ten minute intervals. SEALs marked the invasion channel with buoys and fired on the beach with machine guns and mortars. Iraq responded by pulling two division away from the Saudi border to meet the oncoming invasion. That invasion never came. The SEALs were only a distraction. American tanks crossed the Saudi border into Iraq and rolled over inferior forces on their way to Baghdad. Five SEALs were able to draw two entire divisions away from the fight and help end the war in a matter of days.¹²¹

SEALs did not have to wait long nor travel far for their next conflict. Somalia is a small, war-torn country on the horn of east Africa. In 1991 Dictator Siad Barre was overthrown by local militias, but his government was not replaced. Instead, control of the country was divided among warlords of rival family clans. As severe famine and drought hit, those warlords took all the food, water, and supplies to support their militias. After 100,000 Somalis died from starvation, the United Nations realized that it needed to help and they began sending aid. However, the warlords stole all the food and any equipment they could. As a part of Operation RESTORE HOPE, three ships carrying a Marine Expeditionary Unit, Special Boat Unit, and a platoon of SEALs was sent to secure the airport in Mogadishu for the United Nations aid and relief forces. The SEALs performed hydrographic reconnaissance to get current charts for the amphibious landing.

¹²¹ Ibid., 278-282; Ibid.; Ibid.; Halberstadt, 300-303.

When the media welcomed Marines to the beach, SEALs were a quarter of a mile down, avoiding the spotlight.¹²²

Attacks by local militias on United Nations forces continued and led to the intervention of American Special Forces. It was believed that Somalia could be controlled if Mohammad Aideed, leader of the Habr Gedir clan, was captured or killed. In the fall of 1993, the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, Army Rangers, Delta Force, and four members of SEAL Team Six were sent to dispatch Aideed.¹²³

On October 3, 1993 American forces were involved in the worst urban battle since the Tet Offensive in Vietnam. Special Forces, including SEALs, assaulted a hotel in Mogadishu to capture two of Aideed's lieutenants. Two American Blackhawk helicopters were shot down and an operation that was supposed to take half an hour, took over a day as they scrambled to recover the bodies of America's fallen soldiers. In the fierce firefight that ensued, one hundred Americans were surrounded by thousands of hostile Somalis.¹²⁴

Eighteen Americans were killed and seventy were wounded. Two SEALs were wounded, but none killed. Well over one thousand Somalis were killed and many more were wounded. The Army Rangers gave credit to the SEALs and Delta. They kept their composure and held everything together during the worst moments of the battle. They were responsible, in large part, for getting most of the Rangers out alive.¹²⁵

Naval Special Warfare has undergone tremendous changes since the turn of the century, specifically their advanced training and organization. During World War II a

¹²² Orr, *Brave Men, Dark Waters*, 275-279.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 279-282.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 281-282, Bowden, 3-5, 422.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*; *Ibid.*.

frogman could complete UDT training and deploy overseas in a matter of months. During Vietnam, a SEAL could be setting ambushes less than a year after beginning BUD/S. Today it takes three years of training to make an operation SEAL ready for deployment. Even then they are considered apprentices. It takes two six-month deployments and close to six years before a SEAL is considered a veteran.¹²⁶

Early in Vietnam, SEAL Teams began developing advanced training courses called Cadre Training, where veterans taught new guys tricks of the trade. It was a rather informal course that continued until the mid-1990s when SEAL Tactical Training (STT) was introduced. In STT, advanced training became more standardized with each coast having training for all of their teams. This also freed up the individual platoons to focus on their pre-deployment training. In 2001, STT was discarded for a more improved SEAL Qualification Training (SQT).¹²⁷

SQT is an advanced training course designed to make BUD/S graduates qualified Navy SEALs. It is an eighteen-week course that makes BUD/S graduates experts in a wide variety of skills needed to be a SEAL. A prerequisite for SQT is the Junior Officer Training Course (JOTC), which is designed to teach leadership.¹²⁸

JOTC is designed to make competent officers for the SEAL Teams. Officers learn their responsibilities; not only are they responsible for the soldiers under them, but they are responsible for those soldiers' families as well. They learn how the United States fights wars and their role in that strategy. They listen to guest speakers who have served in previous conflicts. Young officers learn how to train and how to plan missions. In Somalia, the goal was to capture Aideed. American Special Forces destroyed

¹²⁶ Couch, *Down Range*, 5; Couch, *The Finishing School*, 7.

¹²⁷ Couch, *The Finishing School*, 143-144, 457.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 30-37.

Aideed's militia, but they did not capture Aideed and therefore they failed the mission. In Afghanistan, the goal was to get Osama bin Laden. American forces routed a military force that bogged down the Soviet Union for almost a decade and forced a regime out of Afghanistan in a matter of weeks. However they have not found Bin Laden, so they have failed. SEAL officers learn policy aimed at a single person sets them up for failure. Aim policy towards large structure to set your team up for success. Following JOTC, officers begin SQT. The training works out so that officers begin SQT with the enlisted men from the BUD/S class immediately after them. It gives them practice leading men, some of whom they may not know.¹²⁹

SQT encompasses nearly everything a prospective SEAL may encounter. They go through extensive land navigation exercises using map, compass, and global positioning systems. Every weapon in the SEAL arsenal is introduced to them, and they practice firing them until they are experts with every one.¹³⁰

Advanced training has evolved a great deal over the years. As SEALs serve in more conflicts, lessons learned are incorporated into training. Since their inception, SEALs have used civilian emergency medical training in combat. After Mogadishu, they studied the history of medical treatment for combat wounds. In Vietnam, 60 percent of combat deaths were the result of head wounds or surgically uncorrectable torso trauma. It would have been extremely difficult to save those soldiers in an American hospital under the best conditions. Twenty five thousand others died from extremity wounds where they bled to death or suffocated from tension pneumothorax, where a lung collapses from compressed air in the chest cavity. Using that knowledge, SEALs

¹²⁹ Ibid., 30-45.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 61-81.

developed Tactical Combat Casualty Care. Today the tactical situation determines the type of treatment they can offer; if a man suffers a terrible wound and is unlikely to survive, give him the best treatment you can and make him as comfortable as possible, but do not jeopardize the team by taking all of your resources out of the fight.¹³¹

Trainees spend three weeks at the Navy Special Warfare Desert Training Facility. Camp Billy Machen, named after the first SEAL killed in combat in Vietnam, is set on a barren landscape east of San Diego. The terrain is similar to sections of Afghanistan and Iraq. There they learn weapons training, demolitions, and other specifics of operating in desert and mountain environments.¹³²

Close Quarters Defense (CQD) is a section of training in SQT designed to teach SEALs hand-to-hand combat. CQD is a mixed martial arts designed to teach a SEAL how to control the situation. Determine the level of the threat to determine the proper level of aggression. If a suspect is compliant, a hold or grapple can keep them under control without harming the individual or endangering the SEALs. However if a suspect is not compliant, they learn a series of strikes that can disable or even cripple an enemy. Lethal force is not always required. CQD allows SEALs to protect themselves and their teammates by controlling the situation. They can act safely and appropriately towards complacent and violent people alike.¹³³

Cold Weather Training takes place at the Navy's Special Warfare base at Kodiak Island, Alaska. At Kodiak, students learn combat mountain climbing. Civilians climb mountains during nice, sunny days with little wind. SEALs climb mountains at night in terrible conditions in the enemy's backyard. They learn how to patrol and take care of

¹³¹ Ibid., 43-45, 55-58.

¹³² Ibid., 91-109.

¹³³ Ibid., 115-133.

themselves if they fall through ice or suffer from hypothermia. In short, they learn how to fight and survive in deadly arctic conditions.¹³⁴

After successfully completing SQT, the students are no longer trainees. They are presented with the trident, a pin insignia signifying their place as United States Navy SEALs. After SQT's completion they are sent to their individual SEAL Teams to begin pre-deployment training.¹³⁵

Professional Development is the first six-month section of pre-deployment training. A platoon enters this phase directly after it comes home from deployment. During this time veterans take leave to spend time with their families, and new SEALs attend special schools to build a more extensive skill set. They study to become experts in communications or combat air controllers, and some become qualified SEAL snipers. Some even study with linguists to learn the language or languages of the region where they will be deploying, to make it easier for the platoon to communicate with indigenous populations.¹³⁶

The second phase is called Unit Level Training. During this phase, units train as a whole. They practice mission planning, and run simulated missions to test their preparedness. Their training is tailored to address situations they may see while on deployment. If a platoon is deploying to the Middle East, its training will be different than that of a platoon deploying to Southeast Asia or the Arctic.¹³⁷

The final six-month phase is known as Squad Integration Training. During this phase SEAL platoons, the command structure, and support personnel all come together to

¹³⁴ Ibid., 151-161.

¹³⁵ Couch, *Down Range*, 19, 31-38.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

form a squadron. All equipment and combat crafts are prepared for deployment. Linguists, cryptographers, and theater specific intelligence personnel are all gathered to help the commanders and shooters perform their jobs better.¹³⁸

In 2002, Naval Special Warfare's structure and purpose were dramatically overhauled. Prior to this time, when SEALs were sent overseas it was as a complimenting attachment of an Army, Marine, or Navy element. In 2002, Naval Special Warfare Task units were developed. With this arrangement, SEALs and other Special Operations Forces were put under the command of a senior SEAL executive officer. He was then under the command of the Naval Special Warfare Group commander from either Coronado or Norfolk, who supplied assets to the commanders. Now Special Operations Forces were given theater responsibilities and they were supported by conventional forces. At any time six SEAL platoons from each coast were deployed overseas. It was a landmark change for the United States military.¹³⁹

In addition to the creation of these task units, Naval Special Warfare 21 Concept (NSW 21) was introduced. NSW 21 created the SEAL squadron to meet the ever-changing and growing responsibilities of the SEALs. A SEAL squadron is comprised of six SEAL platoons of sixteen men, two officers and fourteen enlisted men, which could be broken down further into an eight-man squad. Also included in a SEAL squadron are SEAL commanders, combat craft, and support personnel.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Ibid.,

¹³⁹ Ibid., 38-41.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 30-31; Couch, *The Finishing School*, 166-168.

Also included in NSW 21 was the creation of two new SEAL Teams: Team Seven in Coronado and Team Ten in Virginia. They would not have to wait long to see their first action overseas.¹⁴¹

The entire scope of the free world changed on the tragic Tuesday morning of September 11, 2001 when al-Qaeda terrorists hijacked several planes crashing them into the Pentagon, a slope near Camp David, and the two World Trade Center towers in New York City. Approximately three thousand American citizens were killed. Within days American soldiers were hunting for the man responsible for the attacks, Osama Bin Laden.

Bin Laden is a Saudi Arabian nationalist, who grew up as a member of the Wahhabite sect of Islam. Developed on the Arabian Peninsula in the 1930s, the Wahhabite sect preaches strict adherence to ancient Islamic law. They dedicate themselves to the destruction of everything else, including Western values and even moderate Muslims. They are a big supporter for al-Qaeda in terms of both money and recruits.¹⁴²

Al-Qaeda worked closely with Afghanistan's government, the Taliban. The Taliban had begun to take control in the mid-1990s. Following Afghanistan's protracted war with the Soviet Union, feuding warlords had left the country in ruins. The Taliban gained support by promising to end the corruption and restore Islamic law throughout the country. They slowly began targeting and eliminating factions throughout Afghanistan and by 1998 had gained control of almost all of the country. The Taliban's strict, violent actions did not stop when they gained power. Instead, they were turned on the people of

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 29-41.

¹⁴² Ibid., 12.

Afghanistan. Public executions were reinstated. Frivolous activities such as watching television or any kind of media were banned, and women were restricted from school or the workplace.¹⁴³

On October 7, 2001 less than a month after 9/11, Operation ENDURING FREEDOM began with one of the largest air campaigns in history against al-Qaeda training centers and visible military targets. Special Operations soldiers were sent into the tunnels and caves in the Afghan mountains to eliminate terrorists and their supplies.¹⁴⁴

General Tommy Franks and his staff developed a four-phase plan to accomplish the goals they had set for Afghanistan. They wanted to build a military under the control of the new autonomous government. Plan combat operations and conduct them with Special Forces working with Afghanistan Northern Alliance forces to bring down the Taliban. The Coalition wanted to expand its area of operations using flexibility and rapid reaction. The Soviets had proven that a sustained ground war in Afghanistan was a recipe for disaster. The final phase was the administering of humanitarian aid to the people and prevention of the return of terrorism, which could take up to five years if the insurgents resorted to guerrilla combat.¹⁴⁵

The war in Afghanistan was unique because it was the first war fought primarily with Special Forces in United States history. Special Operations Forces (SOF) containing soldiers from SEAL Teams, Green Berets, and the CIA Special Activities Division were organized to train and lead Northern Alliance forces to attack roving forces

¹⁴³ Marcus Luttrell, *Lone Survivor* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2007), 62.

¹⁴⁴ Orr, *Brave Men, Dark Waters*, 290-293.

¹⁴⁵ Franks, 261-272; Couch, *Down Range*, 69-72.

of Al-Qaeda fighters and target important Taliban targets for air strikes. Whenever SEALs went into the field, they almost always took Air Force Combat Controllers with them. Combat Controllers specialize in calling air support for ground forces. Those specialists could allow small contingents of SOF to penetrate deeply behind enemy lines while still being supported.¹⁴⁶

SEALs were a vital part of a Joint Combined Special Operations Task Force designated Task Force K-Bar. K-Bar was a force of three thousand SEALs, Special Forces, Rangers, Air Force Special Tactics Teams, and SOF from Australia, Denmark, Germany, Norway, and Turkey. SEALs were important because of their adaptability. Their scenario based training allowed them to react quickly to situations. Other SOF needed approval to act on perishable intelligence, where SEALs could equip themselves in a matter of minutes, and plan the mission on their way to a helicopter.¹⁴⁷

The first week of January, 2002 K-Bar was involved in one of the most significant events of the war. The Zhawar Kili Valley is an immense mountain range on the Afghan-Pakistani border, one hundred fifty miles northeast of Kandahar. On January 7, seventeen SEALs, fifty Marines, two Air Force Combat Controllers, and assorted personnel were sent to check for an al-Qaeda operations center. What they discovered was the largest al-Qaeda arms cache and training base found to date.¹⁴⁸

The Zhawar Kili stronghold was a series of tunnels and caves, built with American help and money during Afghanistan's war with the Soviet Union in the 1980s. The tunnels, reinforced by bricks and steel i-beams, were impenetrable even to precision guided air strikes from the Air Force. Initially the mission was supposed to take twelve

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 260-262; Ibid., 7-10, 69-72, 145-146.

¹⁴⁷ Couch, *Down Range*, 82-83, 96.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 103-122.

hours, and the SEALs had taken one hundred pounds of C-4 explosives. The caves extended hundreds of yards underground and were filled with thousands of tons of weapons and ammunition, everything from tanks and explosives to artillery and anti-aircraft guns. As higher-ups in the chain of command, including General Franks, learned of the SEALs' incredible find, they took center stage. The SEALs and their comrades were ordered to stay and destroy all of the weapons caches. However, the regular SEAL way of exploding ordinance, C-4 packs, would have taken months. Instead the SEALs, EOD technicians and Combat Controllers devised a new way to destroy the caves. They could use delayed fuses on two thousand pounds JDAM (spell out), allowing the bombs to penetrate the cave walls before exploding. After cataloguing the caves, the Air Force would be called and the JDAMs would penetrate into the cave before exploding, often setting off a series of secondary explosions from other ordinance. In the end, the mission took eight days, and an al Qaeda weapons cache and cave complex that took years to develop was destroyed.¹⁴⁹

Following the close of active military conflict in Afghanistan, the United States turned its attentions towards Iraq, which had become increasingly belligerent. General Franks had a difficult task to complete. For starters, he had to get military forces into the area. A large portion of the American war machine had to be stopped and redirected from Afghanistan to Iraq without abandoning Afghanistan and the progress that had been made. They wanted to shape the battlefield with air strikes and conduct combat operations against enemy forces and leaders, neutralizing them for the security of both American forces and the Iraqi people. Following the successful completion of these

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

phases, post-hostility operations would begin. That would include the formation of an autonomous government and humanitarian aid, which could take several years.¹⁵⁰

SEALs immediately went to work in Iraq marking high-value targets for air strikes and securing oil platforms under Saddam Hussein's control. In these activities, SEALs worked closely with the Polish GROM, elite Special Forces designed after the British Special Air Service.¹⁵¹

Three days into the war on March 23, a story gripped America's heart when vehicles in the Army's 507th Maintenance Company came under heavy enemy fire and Private Jessica Lynch was taken prisoner. The military initiated a massive search for the young soldier. American forces received a tip that she was being treated for injuries she received in the battle at the Saddam Hussein Hospital in Nasiriyah and a rescue force of SEALs and other Special Forces was immediately dispatched to the hospital. On April 1, 2002 American Special Forces stormed the hospital and rescued Private Lynch.¹⁵²

On June 27, 2005 United States Special Forces and the Navy SEALs suffered their worst loss in history. Local intelligence had informed American forces that one of Bin Laden's top lieutenants was going to be at a small village deep in the Hindu Kush Mountains of Afghanistan. As a part of Operation REDWING, Navy SEAL Petty Officers Danny Dietz, Matthew Axelson, Marcus Luttrell, and Lieutenant Michael Murphy were sent to capture or kill the Taliban leader.¹⁵³

While observing the village from the mountainside, the SEALs were discovered by local Afghan goat herders. Within minutes they were surrounded by close to one

¹⁵⁰ Franks, 350-352.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., Couch, *Down Range*, 136, 168.

¹⁵² Couch, *Down Range*, 210-213.

¹⁵³ Luttrell, 179-184, 205-349, 381.

hundred Taliban fighters and a fierce firefight ensued. Several times the SEALs were forced to jump off the side of the mountain to escape enemy fire. In the middle of the firefight, seeing that his men were being overrun, Lieutenant Murphy walked into the middle of the battle to call for help. In doing so, he was mortally wounded. However his call made it through to headquarters. A quick reaction force of SEALs raced to a helicopter to reinforce the beleaguered reconnaissance team. When the reaction force reached the mountainside they were met by the Taliban, which fired a rocket-propelled grenade crashing the helicopter and killing all sixteen men onboard.¹⁵⁴

After several hours of fighting, scores of Taliban fighters lay dead, along with nearly twenty American Special Forces including eleven Navy SEALs. Luttrell was the only surviving SEAL. After crawling seven miles while badly wounded, he was taken in by a local Pashtun village and granted *lokhay warkawal*, meaning “giving a pot.” According to ancient Pashtun law, the village had pledged to give him care and defend him down to the last child. The village was surrounded by the Taliban, and after a five day standoff, Luttrell was rescued by American forces. For their bravery, Marcus Luttrell, Danny Dietz, and Matthew Axelson were awarded the Navy Cross, America’s second highest award for valor. For risking his life to call for aid, Lieutenant Michael Murphy was awarded the Medal of Honor.¹⁵⁵

The Middle East has been a breeding ground for war and revolution for decades, and its attention has been turned against the United States. Throughout Iraq, the Horn of Africa, and Afghanistan, Navy SEALs have fought America’s enemies. They have taken part in several wars in several countries and performed valiantly in each. SEALs have

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., Martin C. Evans, “Slain Patchogue SEAL receives highest honor” *Newsday*, Oct. 12, 2007, <http://www.newsday.com/news/local/suffolk/ny-murphy-medal,0,3359909.story>.

become the tip of the sword in America's military, and stand ready to do their nation's bidding.

In the Spotlight of the American Media

“Youth is the first victim of war; the first fruit of peace.
It takes twenty years or more of peace to make a man;
it takes only twenty seconds of war to destroy him.”
Baudouin I of Belgium¹⁵⁶

Along with recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq have come increased popular culture and media attention towards Navy SEALs. Movies, television shows, and even video games have thrust the once secretive unit into the national spotlight, drawing more attention to these military personnel than any time before in their history. While the obvious explanation for this increase is the entertainment industry’s quest for the next dollar, the most interesting of these items is why this type of popular culture is generating that dollar to begin with. What is it about Navy SEALs that compel us to go to the movies about them, watch TV shows that feature them, read their books, or imitate them in video games? Could the answer be hero worship? SEALs are the best of the best. They possess talents and abilities that normal people do not have, and use them in extremely dangerous, obscure missions. They are elite and rare. SEALs are the real life representation of superhero characters that many people dream of being when they grow up.

The American media can be a fickle creature in today’s society. Those who find themselves at odds with the media can easily find themselves at odds with the American public. President George W. Bush was well thought of early in his administration, but his second term has seen his approval rating fall to among the lowest of any president.¹⁵⁷ On

¹⁵⁶ Smith, *Death in the Jungle*, 159.

¹⁵⁷ White, Deborah, *Bush Leadership, Honesty, Judgment Under Question*.
<http://usliberals.about.com/od/liberalleadership/a/CBSPollOct.htm>, October 8, 2005.

the other hand, those who find themselves on the media's good side can be portrayed as the darling of a grateful nation. Navy SEALs have seen an increased popularity in the media for completing the missions and orders handed down to them from an extremely unpopular executive branch.

Intense and heated discussions about war have been ever present in the media since the United States' directed involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq following 9/11. Terms such as "Pro-Troops" and "Anti-War" have become widely used terms in round table discussions, but is it possible to be Pro-Troops and Anti-War? Is it not contradictory to say you support the individual, but not what they do? In a general discussion, it is possible to support troops and hate war, but since 9/11 these terms have had a direct correlation. America hates the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The nation is upset at politicians who send the soldiers overseas, but they love the troops fighting these wars. Why is that? The soldiers, including Navy SEALs, are the ones firing the rifles that take lives. Soldiers set off explosives that, periodically, destroy homes and cause harm to civilians.

The fact of the matter is that soldiers, especially SEALs, are seen as heroic figures because they are putting themselves in harms way. They are risking the lives of a few, so that many more may live. A politician sitting behind a desk in Washington may influence policy that sends hundreds to their deaths, and then go home to a warm meal and king-size bed. A SEAL travels thousands of miles, deep into hostile territory where he must decide to kill or be killed. At the end of the day, that makes all the difference in the world. Politicians do the talking, and soldiers like the Navy SEALs do the walking. While politicians may have a hidden agenda, SEALs' agenda is to defend their country

and come home to their families. Edmund Burke once said, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”¹⁵⁸ Doing nothing is unacceptable to a Navy SEAL. Some people may say the road to hell is paved with good intentions, but without those good intentions that road can easily become a highway.

When the SEALs were initially formed, they were so secret the men themselves did not know for what they were volunteering.¹⁵⁹ No one wrote books about them, and there were not video games around that let boys pretend to be these special soldiers, and there certainly were not any Hollywood feature films about Navy SEALs. Today, people can pretend to be SEALs by playing as them in video games. The military history shelves of local bookstores are overflowing with novels and autobiographies about SEALs and other Special Forces soldiers. An award winning actor, Bruce Willis, has even starred in a Hollywood feature film about Navy SEALs, *Tears of the Sun*, as a SEAL platoon commanding officer.

In the film directed by Antoine Fuqua, Willis’ character, Lieutenant Waters, leads a team of SEALs into the war-torn African nation of Nigeria. An American doctor serving at a mission becomes threatened when rebel soldiers swarm over the countryside in an ethnic cleansing spree. Waters and his men are sent in to bring the doctor home. During the mission, the SEALs are moved by the plight of the refugees and decide to try and get them all to safety. In the process, eight SEALs become engaged in a battle against hundreds of Nigerian soldiers. Four of the SEALs are killed, but the rebels are defeated and the doctor and refugees saved.

¹⁵⁸ *Tears of the Sun*. Dir. Antoine Fuqua. Bruce Willis, Monica Belluci. Cheyenne Enterprises, 2003.

¹⁵⁹ Boehm, 151.

The movie was shot on location in Hawaii to simulate the African jungles. Mock villages were constructed and movie extras were flown in from Africa to help create as realistic an atmosphere as possible. The actors who would be playing the role of SEALs were put through a boot camp by Harry Humphries, who is a highly sought after military and technical advisor.¹⁶⁰

Humphries is a founder of Global Study Group Inc. and has worked on a number of Hollywood films, including *G.I. Jane*, *Black Hawk Down*, *Pearl Harbor*, and many others as an action and technical consultant. Humphries' film credits followed a highly decorated career as a Navy SEAL. During the Tet Offensive, he took part in the rescue of an American nurse, for which he was awarded the Silver Star¹⁶¹.

Chuck Pfarrer is a former Navy SEAL who was a technical advisor and co-writer of the movie *Navy SEALs*, which premiered in 1990. The film, which stars Charlie Scheen and Michael Biehn, and was directed by Lewis Teague, tells the story of a SEAL team as it battles terrorists in possession of stinger missiles.

The setting for the battle scenes takes place in Beirut, Lebanon; the same Beirut where the United States military suffered one of the biggest losses of life in its history when the Marine barracks were bombed killing over 240 American servicemen. That bombing took place in 1983, which, coincidentally, was the same time Pfarrer was serving as a platoon officer for SEAL Team Four in Beirut. Pfarrer and his team spent days searching through rubble to retrieve remains of fallen American servicemen.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ *Tears of the Sun*. Dir. Antuane Fuqua. Bruce Willis, Monica Belluci. Cheyenne Enterprises, 2003.

¹⁶¹ Marcinko; 163, 280.

¹⁶² Pfarrer, 189-194.

Navy SEALs have been the lead characters and inspiration in the aforementioned films, as well as others like *G.I. Jane*, and *Under Siege*. In the opening scenes of *Saving Private Ryan*, Tom Hanks' character has an encounter with an NCDU swimmer who is destroying obstacles for the invasion force. In each case the characters are portrayed as very fit and extremely intelligent. Technical advisors are usually employed to help the actors' portrayal and more often than not they are retired SEALs or Special Forces operators.

Great care and attention to detail is taken into making the film as accurate as possible. However, in the end, the films are fiction and their goal is to make money. Portraying factual events is important, but secondary to bringing in large revenue. That is how a film with accurate details can turn into an unrealistic war film with a superior killing machine like Rambo.

The same artistic liberty taken in films has been applied to novels and other forms of media, as well. Tom Clancy authored a series of fiction novels about a former U.D.T. and Navy SEAL John Kelly a.k.a. John Clark.

Kelly is a decorated Vietnam veteran who becomes a recluse after losing his wife in an automobile accident. He slowly, begins to put his life back together working as a civilian contractor for government agencies and finds solice with a significant other. However, when his girlfriend is killed by drug dealers, Kelly wages a one-man war on the local cartel. After several murders, the police begin to close in on Kelly. At that time, the CIA steps in and covers up for Kelly, while recruiting the former SEAL into its counter terrorist command. Subsequent books detail missions and stories of an impressive career that spans decades and visits countless nations across the globe.

Many aspects of the series are accurate. Tom Clancy is a respected military historian. He has written dozens of novels and non-fiction accounts, so his portrayal of a SEAL is accurate. Kelly is an extremely fit, intelligent, and analytical individual. His superior physical fitness helps him survive numerous wounds that would probably claim the life of an average person. He is highly disciplined and uses his experience fighting the North Vietnamese and adapted those tactics towards targeting the drug trade. In the end, those experiences provide him the training and background to pursue a career in the intelligence community, which many former SEALs have done. Several of the sources used in this project were written by former SEALs, Dick Couch and Roy Boehm, who worked with the CIA during or after their military service.

The story itself is fiction. In mere paragraphs, a character can receive life threatening injuries, recover almost instantly, and jump right back into the climax of the novel. However, the details of the characters are accurate and the story itself, while written to entertain, could not be immediately discarded as impossible or inaccurate. The portrayal of Navy SEALs in popular culture has grown more prominent and realistic, yet those realisms still take a back seat when it comes to providing an entertaining and profitable story.

Darrell Whitcomb's book, *The Rescue of Bat 21*, records the events of the spring of 1972 in Vietnam when Navy SEAL Lieutenant Tom Norris and a Vietnamese SEAL went behind enemy lines to recover a downed fighter pilot. Norris would be awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions,¹⁶³ and the event was the inspiration for the movie *BAT 21*, starring Gene Hackman and Danny Glover.

¹⁶³ Dockery, *Navy SEALs: The Vietnam Years*, 158-161.

SEALs as feature characters are seen in almost every form of media entertainment. The CBS television show JAG, starring David James Elliott and Catherine Bell, has run several episodes with SEALs as the focus characters. Playstation features a video game titled S.O.C.O.M, named after the Special Operations Command, which uses SEALs as the primary characters. Navy recruitment commercials highlight jobs performed by SEALs. You can even see commercials on ESPN for equipment that will help you perform the perfect push-up or pull-up. Part of the marketing attraction is that it was, “designed and perfected by a U.S. Navy SEAL.” In 2006 the Discovery Channel ran a six-part documentary on a class going through BUD/S.

It is easy to see that the military, specifically Navy SEALs, has seen an increased presence in the media, but why is that? The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, combined with increasing technological capabilities, have cast a large spotlight on SEALs and the jobs they perform, but why are we so intrigued by them? The rise of the SEALs’ popularity is closely mirrored by the renewed interest in classic superheroes. Films about Superman and Batman are returning to the forefront of American interests. Could it be that we as a society have transposed the heroic qualities to a real-life surrogate in the SEALs?

Films, television shows, and video games are only a few avenues that have taken advantage of the Navy SEALs’ mystique to market products, but they have done so because SEALs are attractive personalities. They are elite and special, but more importantly they are rare. That is why they are appealing. They are among the best of the best. They are the hero without a face. Whether it is Superman, Batman, or a Navy SEAL, these super hero figures are an escape for everyone. They are a symbol of good that will never stop fighting evil, no matter the cost. Public acclaim and fame are not their

motivators. They are willing to sacrifice themselves to help others, out of a sense of good, and an inherent nobility that has become increasingly rare in the world today. They are modern-day knights that are always ready to stand against oppression.

Conclusion

“War is an unmitigated evil. But it certainly does one good thing. It drives away fear and brings bravery to the surface.”

Mohandas K. Gandhi¹⁶⁴

Since the founding of the United States, not one generation has come and gone without having a war to fight. The last three generations have seen the foundation, formation, and ascension of one of the most capable fighting units in military history. Navy SEALs trace their lineage back to the Naval Combat Demolition Units and Underwater Demolition Teams of World War II and in one way or another have taken part in every military conflict since that time.¹⁶⁵

The slaughter of the United States Marines at the Tarawa Atoll was the first step in the birth and evolution of the Navy frogman. After hundreds of Marines either drowned or were killed trying to wade hundreds of yards to shore, after their crafts became lodged on coral reef, the government tasked Draper Kauffman to create maritime commandoes to clear invasion harbors and beaches of enemy obstacles. Those first UDTs and NCDUs were formed at a crucial stage in the war and faced a baptism through fire that allowed the Allies to gain a foothold in Europe at the beaches of Normandy, and proceed with the island-hopping campaign that would lead to the eventual surrender of Japan.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Smith, *Death in the Jungle*, 276.

¹⁶⁵ Kelly, *Brave Men Dark Waters*, 16.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 5-7; Boehm, 77.

Twenty years later, when tensions began to rise in Vietnam, those combat swimmers developed land-warfare skills and became the first Navy SEALs. Constructed from the orders of President Kennedy; Sea, Air, Land commandos hunted the Viet Cong in their own backyard. SEALs' ability to attack the enemy in their safe zones made them the most feared adversary of the North Vietnamese. Many SEALs served multiple tours and despite serving in the most dangerous environments SEALs lost fewer than twenty men to enemy action through the duration of the war. Yet they accounted for three Medals of Honor, two Navy Crosses, forty two Silver Stars, 402 Bronze Stars, and hundreds of Purple Hearts.¹⁶⁷

Following Vietnam, SEALs like the rest of the military suffered greatly from funding cutbacks, until they were introduced to a foe they would be facing for the next thirty years: terrorism. They have adapted from the jungle fighters from which they began to become multi-faceted warriors. Since 1980, SEALs have fought throughout the Caribbean, Mediterranean, and the Middle East. General Franks organized CENTCOM's war-fighting strategy using SEALs and other Special Forces groups as the tip of the sword.¹⁶⁸

All of that was made possible by SEALs intense selection and training methods. BUD/S is considered one of the toughest military training courses in the world with a failure rate over seventy percent. In Vietnam, a SEAL could be serving overseas only a few months after beginning training. In today's Navy, if an individual started training at BUD/S today, it would be nearly three years before he would be considered ready for a

¹⁶⁷ Dockery, *Navy SEALs: A History of the Early Years*; 152-154, 182, 274; Young, xxiv; Fawcett, 24; Gormly, 180; Dockery, *Navy SEALs: The Vietnam Years*; 34, 297.

¹⁶⁸ Pfarrer, 236-249; Franks, 257-262.

six-month tour overseas, and even then he would still be a “new guy” in the warrior trade.¹⁶⁹

Widespread publicity of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq has turned a greater national spotlight on the SEALs and what they do. Technology that has revolutionized the domestic frontier has had a similar affect on the military. SEALs are the tip of the sword. A team of four to eight individuals is now capable of completing missions that, in previous conflicts, would have required platoons, if they could be completed at all. A multi-faceted media has propelled these once secretive units onto a much grander scale. SEALs have come a long way from a clandestine group of men that no one knew about, to the feature role in films, novels, and video games. A government that denied their existence is now increasing its recruiting efforts to find and train more of these maritime commandos.¹⁷⁰

The world has changed greatly in the last century, and no institution has changed more than militaries throughout the world. Since the close of the Cold War, the threat of a full-scale war between two super powers has reached an all-time low. However, that has opened the door for unconventional conflicts in the war on terror. Terrorists are not nation states with a core set of ideals and principals. They will attack the military, but they will also target civilians. Neither man, woman, nor child is safe from their attention. Terrorists are like rabid dogs. Either you put them down, or they will bring you down. The men and women of the United States military are working hard to prevent the latter from occurring, and some of the men who are standing in the forefront of that fight are United States Navy SEALs. Since their formation, SEALs have fought in every

¹⁶⁹ Couch, *Down Range*, 5; Couch, *The Finishing School*, 7.

¹⁷⁰ Boehm, 151; Robinson, 48-50; Liewer, *San Diego Union-Tribune* 29 July 2006.

American conflict and on every continent on earth. More often than not, their participation has been oblivious to the American public they defend. Plato said, “Only the dead have seen the end of war.” It has been that way since creation, and will not change until the rapture. Until that day comes, the innocent will need people to protect them from the dissolute. Navy SEALs are some of those people, and they will spearhead the fight to keep this country safe.

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