

the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

Pre-SOF Training

Robert Ord



The operational requirements of the United States Special Operations Command (SOCOM) continue to demand an increasing number of highly motivated, skilled, educated, and trained military warriors to backfill and replace members of Special Operations Forces (SOF) on the front lines. SOCOM lays out its fundamental guiding principles for personnel in three “SOF Truths”: 1) Humans are more important than hardware, 2) Special Operations Forces cannot be mass-produced, and 3) Quality is better than quantity. Thus developing the right force is a result of selecting the right personnel and preparing them with the best training and equipment possible. That is our mission at U.S Tactical too.

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Pre-SOF Training (continued...)

U.S. Tactical is a training center and CrossFit affiliate in Encinitas, California, that acts on SOCOM'S call to duty by reaching out to prospective candidates through our unique Special Warfare/Special Operations Mentor Program. Our mission is to train, motivate, and mentor potential recruits before they enter into one of the U.S. military's elite SOF training pipelines. To accomplish this, we first fully embraced CrossFit by becoming an affiliate and opening our [Encinitas CrossFit Center](#). Then we fused much of the Navy SEAL physical training regimen with CrossFit principles to make a wickedly challenging program that builds the foundation for success at SOF training schools while broadening individuals' confidence in their capabilities. For U.S. Tactical, our mission success is directly linked to the passing rates of those who undergo our rigorous pre-SOF training.



The importance of physical preparation

While there is often friendly and spirited debate among SOF warriors from different branches of the military about whose training is the toughest, what's not in question is the fact that if you arrive at the front door of any one of them unprepared, you won't be staying long. An introductory Physical Screening Test (PST) is administered to all prospective students at BUD/S (Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL Training School) as a general assessment of the baseline fitness necessary to enter training.

Requirements and minimum scores for the SEAL PST are as follows:

- 500-yard swim (sidestroke and/or breaststroke) .. 12:30
- Rest 10 minutes
- Max push-ups in 2 minutes42
- Rest 2 minutes
- Max sit-ups in 2 minutes..... 50
- Rest 2 minutes
- Max pull-ups.....6
- Rest 10 minutes
- 1.5-mile run in boots and pants..... 11:30

A recent study at BUD/S showed that swim and run scores from the introductory Physical Screening Test (PST) directly correlated with overall passing rates. The statistics in table 1 were compiled from previous BUD/S classes and show the passing rates of students with various PST scores.

PST Run Time	% Graduated
Greater than 11:05	8.9%
10:13 - 11:05	18.7%
9:52 - 10:12	27.9%
Less than 9:51	41.5%

PST Swim Time	% Graduated
Greater than 10:52	10.2%
10:12 - 10:52	19.5%
9:43 - 10:11	25.3%
9:02 - 9:42	33.6%
Less than 9:01	43.3%

Combined Times	% Graduated
Run less than 9:33 and... swim less than 10:11	55.2%
Run less than 9:51 and... swim less than 10:11	48.6%
swim greater than 10:11	29.7%
Run 9:52 - 10:12 and... swim less than 9:57	37.8%
swim greater than 9:57	18.2%
Run 10:13 - 11:05 and... swim less than 9:57	29%
swim 9:43 - 10:52	18.1%
swim greater than 10:52	9%

Table 1. BUD/S graduation rates, by introductory PST score.

Pre-SOF Training (continued...)

From the numbers, it's obvious that physical conditioning is an important factor in what it takes to succeed at SOF training. Interestingly though, these numbers also show that, at best, physical preparation is only half the story. To be successful in any SOF training program, and to be a good operator in the field, there is a less tangible element that must be present, commonly called "heart" or "spirit." This is what differentiates true warriors from posers.

The Samurai called this element *kokoro*, loosely defined as "indomitable spirit," or the refusal to accept defeat. It represents the inner warrior, forged through intense training under masterful instruction. U.S. Tactical's mission is to build *kokoro* in pre-SOF candidates by providing elements of the Navy SEAL training regimen fused with the world-class strength and conditioning of CrossFit. The result is an extremely rewarding and challenging training program that builds fitness across all competencies while broadening candidates' confidence and maturity.

U.S. Tactical pre-SOF training overview

U.S. Tactical pre-SOF trainers are more coach and mentor than "boot camp instructor." Our goal is to help individuals to develop all the qualities of the SOF warrior. When they experience the full force of the elite training pipelines, under stressful conditions and imperious instructors, they will have experience and tools to overcome the challenges they are to face if accepted into the pipeline. Our pre-SOF training continuum is composed of two main blocks: Selection and Preparation.

Selection

The first phase of the Selection block consists of indoctrination into the primary elements of the training to come, specifically difficult CrossFit workouts and long runs and swims, as well as some of the preliminary elements of *kokoro*. For some, the indoctrination phase is a shock, while for those who have been doing CrossFit, it often means simply shifting training focus somewhat.

In the second phase of Selection, the main objective is to reveal the warrior within by pushing training to the limit and requiring more out of trainees than they ever thought they were capable of. This requires more than just difficult workouts, although these are in no



short supply. It also includes memorization and strict adherence to the Navy SEAL [warrior ethos](#), as well as homework assignments that develop an understanding of some of history's greatest warriors. Trainees are evaluated at all times and are pushed hard to reach deep within. Regardless of athletic or academic ability, by regulating volume and scaling in the physical training while adding mental challenges and requiring an in-depth understanding of what it means to be a warrior through study and introspection, candidates are transformed in body, mind, and spirit.

At the conclusion of the second phase of Selection, depending on how a trainee has done, he may face a panel of BTDT (been there done that) professionals who evaluate his training record and interview the candidate. Following a favorable review, the candidate can continue on to the next segment of our training. Candidates who do not get the go-ahead may be invited to repeat Selection or asked to leave. (More specific information on this will appear in later *CrossFit Journal* articles.)



Pre-SOF Training (continued...)

Preparation

In the first phase of Preparation the tempo that was held during Selection is increased by adding the element of focused in-water training, in both the pool and the ocean. Our CrossFit workouts in this phase frequently incorporate swimming, and long ocean swims with fins are a norm. Trainees master the combat swimmer sidestroke and are introduced to elements of hydrographic reconnaissance, tides and currents, and breath-holding.

In the second phase of Preparation, the time and energy that went to the water are taken to the land. Specialized training in this phase focuses primarily on developing competency in running short and long distances fast, although there is also time devoted to humping with rucksacks and land navigation. As with all phases of training, varied, high-intensity CrossFit workouts still figure into our programming on a regular basis.

The stamp of approval

At U.S. Tactical, a candidate who makes it through Pre-SOF Selection to Preparation, probably has what it takes to make it through BUD/S or one of the other SOF pipelines. Candidates who complete Preparation receive the U.S. Tactical “stamp of approval.” Our first two trainees both received the stamp of approval and are now pursuing their dream to become SEALs. These pioneers of our pre-SOF training program contributed significantly (and often unwillingly) to the development of what is now the most comprehensive pre-SOF training available.

In the case of these two trainees, both arrived to the program in decent shape as a result of a long history of exposure to CrossFit and Olympic weightlifting. However, by every measure, both candidates increased their output significantly by dropping considerable time on both the swim and the run portions of the PST and making marked improvement in their strength and

stamina in all other areas, including push-ups, sit-ups, and pull-ups.

More important than PST scores, however, was their discovery of the kokoro required to meet the challenges of the program, which will continue to mature as they develop as individuals and warriors.

The way forward

It is clear to U.S. Tactical that there is a growing need for a comprehensive pre-SOF training program at many CrossFit facilities across the U.S. and Canada. U.S. Tactical is committed to the success of these individuals and to helping the CrossFit community send these men to their fate prepared. Harbor City CrossFit in Melbourne, Florida, is slated to be the first official East Coast training location for U.S. Tactical Pre-SOF program. In future issues of the *CrossFit Journal*, we will provide information on the specifics of our training.



Robert Ord is the Director of Training at the U.S. Tactical CrossFit Training Center in Encinitas, California, where he oversees all CrossFit training at the center as well as the online training and mentoring provided by NavySEALs.com. Initially trained by the Navy as a corpsman and deep sea diver, Rob chose the path of Special Operations by volunteering for duty with SEAL Delivery Vehicle Team One, where he worked as a diving medical technician in numerous platoons and other capacities. He is still a member of the Naval Reserves at the Naval Special Warfare Command but has also had the opportunity to work with the Special Boat Teams, Explosive Ordnance Disposal Detachments, Marine Corps Units, and Deep Sea Diving Commands. He worked as a consultant and contractor with the Navy in its efforts to find and effectively prepare future SEALs, Special Warfare combat crewmen, explosive ordnance disposal technicians, and Navy divers before devoting his full time to the U.S. Tactical CrossFit Training Center.

Kokoro

Fast as the wind, quiet as the forest,
aggressive as fire,
and immovable as a mountain.

- Samurai battle banner