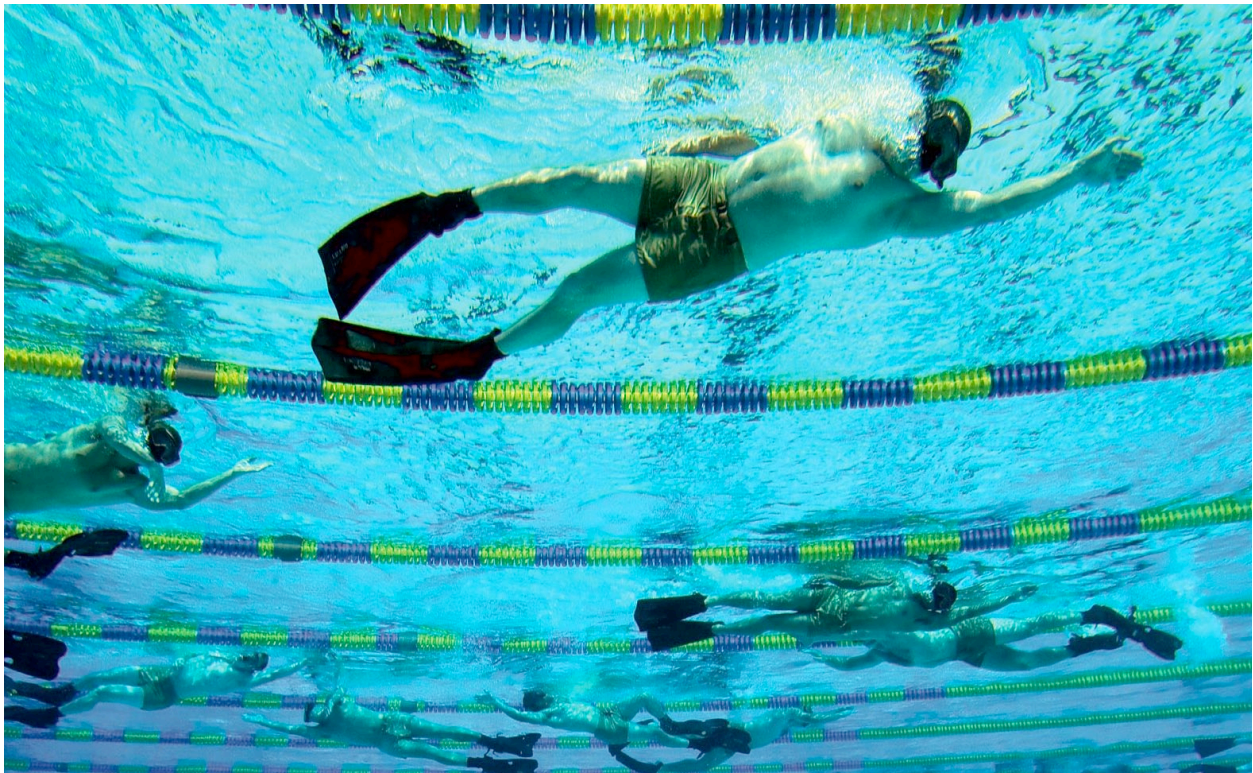


# the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

## **Pre-SOF Training**

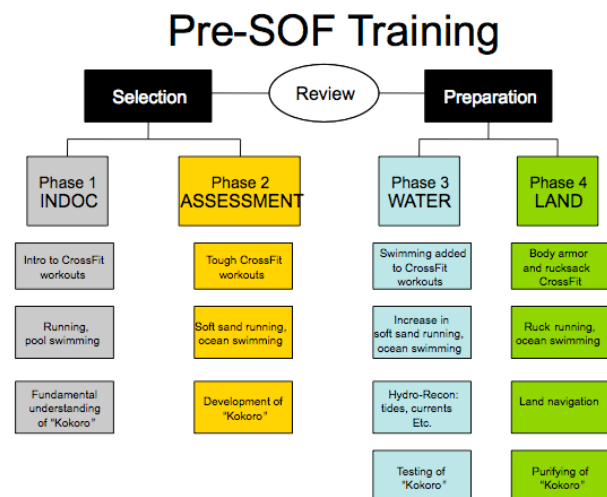
### Part 4: “Water” Phase

Robert Ord



In the first block of our pre-SOF (Special Operations Forces) training program, known as Selection, trainees were introduced to the rigors of CrossFit combined with SOF-style training. During the “Indoc” phase, the slow and gradual ramping up of intensity allowed for bodies and minds to safely become accustomed to physical work efforts with short bursts of extreme workloads. In the second phase, “Assessment,” the intensity was ratcheted up significantly and minimum standards were put in place to ensure that the trainees who were allowed to continue on in training were strong enough to move into the more SOF-skills-oriented training of our second block, which we call Preparation.

1 of 7



Test	Time Limit
50-meter underwater swim	Pass/Fail
Underwater knot tying	Pass/Fail
Drownproofing	Pass/Fail
Basic life saving (in water)	Pass/Fail
1200-meter pool swim with fins	45 minutes
1-mile bay swim with fins	50 minutes
1-mile ocean swim with fins	50 minutes
1.5-mile ocean swim with fins	70 minutes
2-mile ocean swim with fins	95 minutes
Obstacle course	15 minutes
4-mile timed run	32 minutes
HELL WEEK	

## Introduction to Preparation

The pre-SOF Preparation block consists of two main skills training components. The first, which will be covered in this article, involves everything that has to do with water. Composed primarily of training in efficient swimming technique with and without fins, training sessions and workouts are designed to be conducted both in the pool and in open water. There is also training in life saving, knot tying, tides and currents, as well as safe training practices for dryland breath holding. The second phase of Preparation, which will be covered in a later article, addresses training for effectively moving over the land.

## Water phase training

The Water phase of pre-SOF training is based on what many believe to be the toughest amphibious military training in the world: Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL (BUD/S) training. Upon arriving at BUD/S, trainees are faced with a number of obstacles to overcome even before the dreaded “Hell Week.” The first is the unrelenting pace of training in and out of the water, which claims a good deal of “victims” (dropouts). The second is the series of difficult pass/fail tests in the water and on land that a trainee must pass in order to proceed. The previous table lists all of these tests that occur within the first 4 weeks of the 6 month training.

As you can see, most of these tests take place in the water; hence the need to be a very proficient swimmer.

## Combat swimmer sidestroke

In Special Operations, when it comes to swimming, the stroke of choice is the combat swimmer sidestroke (CSS). This hybrid stroke merges elements of the simple sidestroke, breast stroke, and crawl to create a fast and efficient stroke that is also very low profile. These features translate into speed and stealth over a long distance. Like the Olympic lifts or any other complex movement pattern that requires the development of quite specific neuromuscular pathways, mastering the CSS can take some time and effort. There is an extremely effective training progression DVD on the CSS created by Don Walsh. For those that are interested in improving their CSS competency, or are looking for an excellent model of how to train others at it, this tool is a great investment.



## Pre-SOF Training Part 4 (continued...)

### Pool workouts

Individuals in pre-SOF training are expected to be following a precise weekly workout regimen that includes the daily [NavySEALs.com](http://NavySEALs.com) CrossFit workout and, in some cases, other special training, depending on areas of weakness that need attention. During the four weeks of the Water phase, however, all trainees are required to continue the CrossFit workout as well as the pool swimming workouts listed in the following table.

As a point of reference, the slow, medium, and fast times correlate to 11-minute, 9-minute, and 7-minute 500-yard swims. All the distances in the table are in yards.

### Pre-SOF session open water workouts

The length of the sessions in the Water phase continues to be two hours. The five essential factors for session

planning change somewhat from the earlier phases, but they are still in effect. The regular agenda is as follows:

1. Pre-training brief
2. Conditioning run and stretch
3. CrossFit workout incorporating open ocean swimming
4. Skills/safety training
5. Post-training debrief and assignments

At the beginning of the first session, trainees are assigned a swim buddy. If there are an odd number of trainees, there may be three in a group. When each session begins, swim buddies are expected to be together. If a swim breaks apart because they are not working as a team, everyone pays the price. When candidates are in the water, the swim buddy rule can mean the difference between life and death, and therefore is taken very seriously.

		Slow	Medium	Fast
Monday	6 x 50 warm-up 200 in less than 400 in less than 600 in less than  2 x 100	Tech drills 4:24 8:48 13:12  Warm down	Tech drills 3:36 7:12 10:48  Warm down	Tech drills 2:48 5:36 8:24  Warm down
Tuesday	20-40 minutes of continuous pool swim with fins			
Wednesday	6 x 50 warm-up Intervals 4 x 100 on: Intervals 4 x 50 on: Intervals 10 x 25 on:  2 x 100	Tech drills  2:25  1:12  0:36  Warm down	Tech drills  1:58  0:59  0:29  Warm down	Tech drills  1:32  0:46  0:23  Warm down
Thursday	20-40 minutes of continuous pool swim with fins			
Friday	Pre-SOF training			





## Pre-SOF Training Part 4 (continued...)

### Session I

Breath holding underwater at a pool or in the ocean is extremely dangerous, and should not be practiced even when there are lifeguards present. Practicing breath holding out of the water when doing abdominal exercises, push-ups, and squats, however, is a great way to increase the body's ability to perform in a hypoxic state. Avoid exercises where lightheadedness or loss of consciousness could result in injury (i.e., pull-ups).



Agenda		Instructor Remarks	
Brief	Swim buddy assignments	Assignments are intended to pair trainees of similar skill levels together. Assignments can be changed only by the coach.	10 minutes
	Phase training schedule	Provide Trainees the "Agenda" section only	
Warm-up	3-mile group run with intermittent PT	PT = pushups, sit-ups, squats, etc.	30 minutes
Ocean CrossFit	Swim parallel to shore for 5 minutes On beach do warm-up PT Swim parallel to shore for 5 minutes (same direction) On beach do warm-up PT Return via same routine	Time starts when everyone is out past the breakers. Swim is with fins. Warm-up PT is anything and everything that gets the body heated up (also known as "a beat down").	50 minutes
Skills	Dry land breath holding	See above.	10 minutes
Debrief	Assessment of each individual's performance	Hold no punches.	20 minutes
	Assignment: pool swimming schedule	Provide schedule and explain	



## Pre-SOF Training Part 4 (continued...)

### Session 2

Agenda		Instructor Remarks	
Brief	Line up and check gear	Everything should be marked and in good order	10 minutes
Warm-up	“Angie” For time, complete all exercises, in order: 100 pull-ups 100 push-ups 100 sit-ups 100 squats	Angie time limit is 28 minutes.	45 minutes
	Run to beach	Beach is approximately 1 mile from training center.	
Ocean Swimt	Swim (with fins) parallel to shore for 15 minutes and turn around. Swim in to shore for warm-up PT as needed.	Time starts when everyone is out past the breakers. Swim is with fins. Warm-up PT is anything and everything that gets the body heated up (also known as “a beat down”).	35 minutes
Skills	Tides and currents basics	Explain the workings of tides and currents.	10 minutes
Debrief	Assessment of each individual’s performance	Hold no punches.	20 minutes
	Assignment: History of the UDT	Use Internet, bookstores, and library.	



## Pre-SOF Training Part 4 (continued...)

### Session 3

The maritime environment is extremely harsh on equipment. It is important to practice preventive maintenance on anything and everything that you rely on to accomplish your mission—this includes you. After being in the ocean, wash down everything with fresh

water and allow drying. Shower off your body with fresh water, ensuring that you flush out your ears. After toweling off, it's wise to rinse the ears out with a 50/50 solution of hydrogen peroxide and vinegar to avoid “swimmer’s ear,” an infection in the outer ear canal.

Agenda		Instructor Remarks	
Brief	Line up and check gear	Everything should be marked and in good order	10 minutes
Warm-up	Run to beach	Beach is approximately 1 mile from training center.	45 minutes
	3 rounds: 20 push-ups 30 sit-ups 40 squats		
Ocean Swim & Run Loop	Swim with fins to buoy about 250 yards out. Return and run approx. 1 mile. Repeat for max rounds in 45 minutes	Count rounds of each swim pair. Provide warm-up PT as required.	60 minutes
Skills	Proper care of your equipment and you.	See above.	10 minutes
Debrief	Assessment of each individual's performance	Hold no punches.	20 minutes
	Assignment	Chart the tide schedule for next session.	

### Session 4

Of course, the first “dangerous marine life” that comes to mind for most people is the shark, but actually the marine injuries that cause the most problems come from things like coral, mussels, and stingrays. In the case of the first two, the injuries occur due to abrasions from scraping skin across them. These can sometimes get infected and require antibiotics. In the case of the stingray, the best way to avoid getting a barb in the foot when entering the water is to shuffle your feet enough so that they can sense you coming. Of course that can be a problem when your swim buddy is ahead of you and the coach is yelling “Hurry up!”





## Pre-SOF Training Part 4 (continued...)

Agenda		Instructor Remarks	
Brief	Gear check	Everything stenciled and in good order. Check tide charts.	15 minutes
	History of the UDT	Team leader provides	
Warm-up	3 mile group run with occasional PT	PT = Push ups, sit ups, squats, etc.	30 minutes
Ocean CrossFit	Swim parallel to shore for 5 minutes On beach do warm-up PT Swim parallel to shore for 5 minutes (same direction) On beach do warm-up PT Return via same routine	Time starts on swim when everyone is out past the breakers. Warm-up PT is anything and everything that gets the body heated up. Mark halfway location and compare to session 1.	50 minutes
Skills	Avoiding dangerous marine life.	See above.	10 minutes
Debrief	Assessment of each individual's performance	Q&A session.	20 minutes
	Provide gear list for "Land" phase		

### Conclusion

Photos by [Richard Schoenberg](#) at BUD/S.

Individuals who move on to the Water phase of the Preparation block have proven themselves by meeting the high standards set in the Assessment phase. Water has a way of testing the heart and soul of anyone brave enough to enter into it. For this reason, the current BUD/S curriculum utilizes water challenges that fully test a trainee's comfort level in nine out of the eleven pass/fail tests in the first four weeks.

Instituting pool and open water training in a pre-SOF program that utilizes CrossFit workouts is the best way to prepare the body and the mind for BUD/S and other SOF pipelines. Comfort and efficiency in the water are a must, which is why long group swims in cold water under the heavy hand of a coach are necessary preparation.

In the next article we'll dry off and go over the Land phase of our pre-SOF 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 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.