

# the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

## Pre-SOF Training Part 5: “Land” Phase

Robert Ord



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By the time trainees enter the fourth and final phase of our pre-SOF training program, they have been subjected to a steadily increasing regimen designed to provide a sample of the physical and mental challenges they will encounter in military special operations training pipelines. Like a vaccine, this stimulus is strategically designed to elicit physical and neurological responses and adaptations that will aid them when faced with the reality of what it takes

to become a member of the elite United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). The “Land” phase is the culmination of our program, and it is by far the most rigorous of the four phases.

### **Special considerations**

#### **Rucksacks**

In the field, when it comes to moving gear and equipment over long distances on foot, the preferred means is the rucksack (backpack). There are literally dozens of

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different manufacturers and, for the purposes of combat, the design, usefulness, and durability of the rucksack is paramount. In training, however, the most important element in choosing one is not how battle-ready it is, but how comfortable it feels. In training, rucksacks are loaded with everything from sand bags to bumper plates, and the weight can vary from 25 to 70 pounds. In our pre-SOF training, trainees are required to provide their own rucksacks. The following provide helpful instructions on how to properly fit a rucksack.

- 1) Get the hip belt in the right place. The majority of the weight from a rucksack should be transmitted through the hip belt straight onto your hips.
- 2) Adjust the shoulder straps. Once the hip belt is comfortably sitting on your hips, the next step is to tighten the shoulder straps (having first ensured that any load adjusters are fully loosened); don't overtighten them, though, or you may lift the hip belt off your hips.
- 3) Adjust the back length. Many rucksacks (especially larger ones) have adjustable back systems on them; you may need to alter the back length to achieve a precise fit. As a rough guide, when the back is set to the correct length, the angle described between the pack and the shoulder straps should be about 30 degrees.
- 4) Tighten the load adjusters. These should be taut (to stabilize the top of the pack) but not tight; if they are too tight, they tend to lift the shoulder straps off your shoulders.
- 5) Tension any other load stabilizing straps.
- 6) Adjust the chest strap.

### Foot Care and Boot Fitting

One of the most common maladies faced in SOF pipelines by those who are otherwise "good to go" is foot and leg problems (many of the leg problems start as foot problems that get worse). Properly caring for

the feet starts long before SOF training. The following information on foot care and proper fitting of boots comes from the U.S. Army Special Forces Recruiting Program USAREC Pamphlet 601-25.

#### Feet

It's never too early to start.

- 1) Wash and dry the feet daily if possible.
- 2) During the winter, spray the feet daily with an aluminum chlorohydrate antiperspirant. Do this two or three times a day for a week and then once a day for the rest of the winter. If fissures or cracks occur in the feet, discontinue spraying until healed and then use less frequently to control sweating. This process will stop approximately 70 percent of the sweating in your feet. Discontinue spraying during the summer months.
- 3) Massage the feet daily, especially after marching. Use talc or antifungal powder.
- 4) Keep nails trimmed but not too short. Long nails will wear out socks; short nails don't provide proper support for the ends of the toes.
- 5) Care of blisters: Clean with Betadine and let dry for five minutes. Release fluid from the side of a blister with clean, sterile needle. Gently press the fluid out, leaving the surface intact. Make a doughnut of moleskin to go around the blister and apply it to intact skin. Wrap the entire toe or just over the top of the moleskin with a loose wrap of adhesive tape.
- 6) A good sock is dense enough to prevent abrasion of the foot at areas of high compression. The best type is densely woven and does not separate under high compression. Socks should be uniform in thickness over the entire foot. The best issue sock is the tan ski mountain sock, 75 percent wool and 25 percent nylon. The nap should face out away from the foot. The best commercial socks are those which are densely woven with a non-cushioned sole and made of wool.

### Socks

Good socks provide a variety of protection:

- They insulate the foot from cold, heat, and fire.
- They protect the foot from abrasion by the inside of the boot.
- They provide cushioning from shock to the soles of the feet.
- They aid moisture transfer from the skin to the boot surface.
- They allow for swelling and expansion of the foot during heavy marching.

### Fitting of Boots

There is a boot to fit every width foot. Great care must be taken to ensure that boots are fitted properly for the planned use of your feet. The boot you mill around in on post is not the best one for road marching. Your foot will lengthen, widen, and generally swell during a march from the load you carry and the pounding that occurs.

### The austere environment

There has been a wealth of information written on functional training in the combat environment by both military and civil law enforcement entities. Two of the threads that run through most of them emphasize the importance of 1) the use of the tools and implements at hand (as opposed to those found in a gym), and 2) the use of realistic functional training as a means of developing elite combat conditioning. (For a complete nine-week Austere Operators Fitness Program, see the

 [AOFP/CrossFit Austere Program.](#))

In the Land phase of our pre-SOF training, all CrossFit workouts are conducted in the “austere” environment, which consists primarily of the beautiful cliff-lined beaches of Encinitas, California, where many people come to surf and sunbathe. Common training equipment includes ammo cans filled with sand, sand bags, large and small rocks and, of course, heavily laden rucksacks. Trainees are also often wet and sandy, which adds weight and discomfort.

### Land phase: Moving large loads long distances quickly

Functional movement is, as Coach Glassman puts it, the means for “moving large loads over long distances quickly.” For SOF personnel, that is precisely the functional application of training. The core exercises of CrossFit not only produce a broad and general fitness that is applicable across a wide spectrum of physical demands, they also teach movement patterns that are directly relevant to the tasks required in the field. Medicine ball cleans, for example, prepare the individual to pick up anything that has to go overhead or be moved, as when clearing an area of large rocks and debris prior to a helicopter landing. The push press or jerk is efficient for pushing anything heavy overhead, such as loading a stake bed truck or passing equipment up out of a hole or bunker. The deadlift teaches safe lifting of anything, heavy or light. Because CrossFit is composed of functional movements, the list could go on endlessly. Suffice it to say that functional efficiency in moving large loads over long distances quickly is in the SOF job description.



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

## Training agenda

### Session I

Agenda		Instructor Remarks	
<b>Brief</b>	Welcome to the Land phase.	Set the stage for next 4 weeks.	10 minutes
	Rucksack inspection.	Put 4 empty sandbags into each ruck.	
<b>Warm-up</b>	Mile run with rucksacks to beach.	Group stays together in formation.	15 minutes
<b>Austere CrossFit</b>	Fill two sandbags and stand by for start.	Fill sandbags all the way.	25 minutes
	5 rounds for time of: 25 Sandbag cleans 50 Squats Run 400 meters	Workout is done without rucksacks.	
<b>Land</b>	5-mile march with heavy rucksack.	Trainees march in formation in both hard and soft sand. Empty sand bags at end.	50 minutes
<b>Debrief</b>	Assessment of each individual's performance.	Hold no punches.	10 minutes
	Assignment.	Read "Foot Care and Boot Fitting."	



**Session 2**

Agenda		Instructor Remarks	
<b>Brief</b>	Line up and check gear.	Everything should be marked and in good order.	10 minutes
<b>Warm-up</b>	Run to beach and fill two sand bags	Fill sandbags all the way and place one of them into rucksack. Workout is done with rucksacks.	20 minutes
	3 rounds of: 10 burpees 20 push-ups 30 squats		
<b>Land</b>	Work as a two-man team. Double-time together to fixed 800-meter distance and back for time.	First time: 1 sandbag each. Second time: 2 sandbags on one partner. Third time: 2 sandbags each. Fourth time: Remove 1 from first trainee. Fifth time: Remove 1 from second trainee.	60 minutes
<b>Skills</b>	Proper care of feet.	Explained by team leader.	10 minutes
<b>Debrief</b>	Assessment of each individual's performance.	Hold no punches.	20 minutes
	Assignment.	Land navigation basics.	



**Session 3**

Agenda		Instructor Remarks	
<b>Brief</b>	Gear check	Everything marked and in good order.	15 minutes
	Map and Compass 101.	Use topo map to demonstrate.	
<b>Warm-up</b>	Mile run with rucksacks and ammo boxes to beach.	Each trainee gets one ammo box.	15 minutes
<b>Land</b>	Platoon march of unknown distance with two full sandbags and an ammo can filled with sand.	With trainees in ranks, begin a fast-paced march. When an individual begins to drop back, stop and ask for a volunteer to take his "burden" (first time, the ammo can; second time, one sand bag; third time, the other sand bag).	80 minutes
<b>Debrief</b>	Finishing lighter than you started is wrong!	Pay with PT.	10 minutes
	Foot inspection.	Blister check.	



**Session 4**

<b>Agenda</b>		<b>Instructor Remarks</b>	
<b>Brief</b>	Gear check.	Everything marked and in good order.	15 minutes
	Foot and boot inspection.	Review boot fitting instructions.	
<b>Austere CrossFit</b>	Max rounds in 30 minutes of: 10 sandbag thrusters (single) 20 overhead squats 10 sandbag overhead presses 20 sandbag deadlifts (single)	Set up stations so that each trainee has his own equipment. Mark each round in the sand.	45 minutes
<b>Land</b>	Double-time with varying weight and drop drills.	Double-time with a 2-sandbag ruck for 2 minutes and post PVC in the sand. Remove rucksack and sprint to the start and back.  Repeat.  Drop drills consist of push-ups when the coach says "Drop!" Double-time resumes when the coach says "recover."	40 minutes
<b>De-brief</b>	Wrap-up of training.	Q & A.	20 minutes



## Conclusion

Throughout the phases of pre-SOF training, trainees have been exposed to mental and physical trials. They have repeatedly challenged and redefined their boundaries of comfortable output. They have cultivated and tested their ability to lead and to follow. They have experienced, and survived, uncontrollable shaking and sweating provoked by uncomfortable cold in the water and harsh heat on land. Trainees have had to sink or swim together, accomplishing—as individuals and as a team—what they had thought impossible. At times, some have carried the burdens of others who were not able to do it themselves.

One of the most effective processes for bolstering the body's defenses against an incoming invader is the vaccine. An inert strain of a virus is introduced into a healthy system. The system recognizes the foreign substance and develops strategies and systems to combat the invader under controlled circumstances that continue to do the job when tested by a live virus. In a similar way, the pre-SOF pipeline introduces, under the tutelage of a coach, many of the elements necessary to "immunize" an individual against the natural reaction to lose composure in the face of great adversity. It is this immunization process that helps successful pre-SOF candidates to navigate the near superhuman challenges that lie before them.

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