

the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

A Day in the Life

Preparing for SOF Conditioning

Robert Ord



For the warrior, the objective of training is to prepare for the known and the unknown. In the case of Naval Special Operations hopefuls, the first official step is passing Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL (BUD/S) training. The preparation required to successfully complete this, or any of the other Special Operations Forces (SOF) training pipelines, is the subject of this article.

A picture is worth a thousand words

In the book [The Only Easy Day Was Yesterday: Making Navy SEALs](#), photojournalist [Richard Schoenberg](#), whose photos are featured here and in my previous Pre-SOF Training articles for the CrossFit Journal, successfully captures the magnitude of the physical and mental undertaking that is BUD/S. Those images paint the total picture that the content of this series of articles could not express in words alone. For any of you serious about



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preparing yourselves, or others, for such a challenge, *The Only Easy Day Was Yesterday* is an amazing educational, inspirational, and motivational resource. I always recommended it to my own pre-SOF trainees to help them build the “[brass ring vision](#)” that is an integral part of our program.



Tomorrow will not be easier

To get an appreciation for what it means to “prepare for the known” in pre-SOF training, let’s look at a day in the life of a first-phase BUD/S student. Note that this is not an unusually hard day; it’s not a day in hell week; it’s simply an ordinary day at BUD/S.

A look at the schedule below provides insight into the kind of fitness required to be successful at BUD/S. Work in all of CrossFit’s ten general physical skills is present, but it’s obvious that it takes an inordinate amount of cardiorespiratory endurance and general stamina to make it through not only this day, but the next one, and the next one, and the next one. This is not to say that it pays to specialize, however, because without a good deal of strength, flexibility, accuracy, agility, balance, and coordination, as well as power and speed, of course, the obstacle course, among other things, could never be mastered. It is also apparent that trainees must be fit across all three metabolic pathways, particularly the glycolytic and oxidative systems.



Time	Event	Notes
0430	Class muster	Class musters together and runs to the BUD/S compound.
0445	Grinder PT	Morning PT on blacktop, led by instructor(s).
0600	Chow (breakfast)	Class runs to and from chow together (1.5 miles round trip).
0715	Conditioning run	Run 4-5 miles fast. Slow runners get “gooned.”*
0800	Classroom training	Academic training often includes ample amounts of remediation PT.
0945	Surf torture	PT and other fun games in and out of the surf zone.
1130	Chow (lunch)	Class runs to and from chow together (1.5 miles round trip).
1230	Classroom training	Continuation of morning session. Typically includes ample amounts of remediation PT.
1345	Obstacle course	Repeated timed runs through the O-course.
1500	Water work at pool	Stroke development and timed intervals above and beneath the surface.
1700	Secure from training	After returning from the pool, class is secured for the day.

*Being “gooned” occurs when a group of the slower runners break from the main pack. An instructor will, at his discretion, form up a “goon squad” and dispense remediation for running too slowly, in the form of all sorts of unpleasant PT (physical training).

Running

What may not be readily apparent from the schedule above is the true amount of running involved. Running to and from each event, coupled with running during events, on a day like this can log up to—and sometimes over—twenty miles. In BUD/S you're always running. The constant pounding takes its toll on every student, especially those not accustomed to running this much. For this reason, preparing for the “known” means that running must be a staple of pre-SOF conditioning. There are three main categories of running in pre-SOF conditioning:

1. Long slow distance of 10 to 15 kilometers below anaerobic threshold.
2. Medium and short distance intervals of 100 to 5000 meters at or above anaerobic threshold.
3. Rucksack runs with a weighted backpack (approximately 25 pounds) for 5-10 kilometers.

Swimming

Like running, swimming is a regular element of daily life at BUD/S. Pool swims with and without fins, as well as open-water ocean and bay swims, are daily events. Comfort in the water comes only from time in the water. Therefore, swimming also must be a significant element in a pre-SOF conditioning program. As with running, working across both long-slow-distance and medium- and short-distance intervals is key to proper preparation.

PT

The basic elements of PT (physical training) consist primarily of pull-ups, push-ups, sit-ups, squats, flutter kicks, leg levers, and presses (often of logs and boats). In our pre-SOF conditioning program, these are a big part of the CrossFit WODs, but they should also be executed throughout the day for proficiency and familiarity.

Sample BUD/S-prep workouts

The following sample workout is a great supplement to CrossFit programming, and the combination of the two makes for a superb pre-SOF conditioning program. Follow the frequency guidelines below, and ensure that you leave about six hours between your CrossFit WOD and the BUD/S prep workouts in the table below. (For a more comprehensive and individualized pre-SOF program, see NavySeals.com.)

Getting started

The following sections provide some additional information and suggestions on integrating pre-SOF conditioning with your CrossFit training.

Frequency

NavySEALs.com posts workouts six days a week, Monday through Saturday. This is not because we want everyone to train six days a week, but because we know that there are so many individuals out there with different training schedules that no “one size fits all” approach will work. Offering workouts six days a week ensures that training can fit into most people's busy schedules.



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	Swim		Push-Ups		Sit-Ups		Pull-Ups		Run	
Day 1	6x50 Warm up	Tech Drills	Regular	100	Flutter kicks	(1x)				
	200	3:19	Diamond	40	Sit-ups	(1x)				
	300	5:15	Wide	60	Leg Levers	(1x)				
	400	7:42	Triceps	20	Pyramid to:	11				
	2x100	Cool down	Stretch		Stretch					
Day 2					Sit-ups (4 sets)	27	4 Sets	10	Warm up	15:00
					Sit-ups (2 sets)	40	2 Sets	20	1200 (.75 mi)	3:56
					Sit-ups (4 sets)	27	4 Sets	10	2400 (1.5 mi)	8:45
					Stretch		Stretch		4800 (3 mi)	18:48
									Cool down	5:00
Day 3	6x50 Warm up	Tech Drills	Regular (4 sets)	32	Sit-ups (4 sets)	32				
	Intervals 4x100	1:55	Triceps (2 sets)	32	Flutter kicks (2 sets)	40				
	Intervals 4x50	0:57	Regular (4 sets)	32	Sit-ups (4 sets)	32				
	Intervals 10x25	0:28	Wide (2 sets)	32	Flutter kicks (2 sets)	40				
	2x100	Cool down	Stretch		Stretch					
Day 4					Flutter kicks	(1x)	Pyramid to: 13		Warm up	15:00
					Sit-ups	(1x)			8x200 on:	1:05
					Leg Levers	(1x)	Strict form		10x400 on:	2:11
					Pyramid to:	11	Rapid fire		4x200 on:	1:05
					Stretch				Cool down	5:00
Day 5	6x50 Warm up	Tech Drills	Regular (4 sets)	27	Sit-ups (4 sets)	27				
	200	3:30	Regular (2 sets)	40	Sit-ups (2 sets)	40				
	400	7:00	Regular (2 sets)	27	Sit-ups (2 sets)	27				
	600	10:30	Stretch		Stretch					
	2x100	Cool down								
Day 6					Flutter kicks (1 set)	80	2 sets	25	Warm up	15:00
					Sit-ups (1 set)	80	2 sets	24	4x400 on:	1:36
					Flutter kicks (2 sets)	60	2 sets	22	4x800 on:	3:38
					Sit-ups (2 sets)	60			4x1200 on:	6:33
					Stretch				Cool down	5:00





In addition to the day off on Sunday, I recommend you take another day off during the week, but not the same day every week. In week one, take off Sunday and Monday, in week two, take off Sunday and Tuesday, in week three, Sunday and Wednesday, week four, Sunday and Thursday, and so on. Then go through one full six-day training week where you only take off Sunday. Then start the process over.

Programming

In a pre-SOF conditioning program, the choice of WODs should not be arbitrary. When I select or create a workout for NavySEALs.com, I focus on the skills necessary for optimal performance and train accordingly. It may seem that some weeks are hard on the legs with lots of running, squats, thrusters, plyometrics, etc., while other weeks focus more on swimming and other PT. This is by design, in order to develop performance to a far higher level, over time, than any repetitive program ever could.

CrossFit is world-class training. If you're an athlete who competes or has competed at a high level, you are likely familiar with many of the exercises prescribed in the WODs because they are what are used in good top-tier strength and conditioning athletic training programs.

Scaling

Most WODs generally prescribe the weight that should be lifted, the number of reps and, with the case of a NavySEALs.com pre-SOF conditioning program, any additional work for a second workout.

Our scheme of weight, reps and additional work is designed for a hypothetical very fit mid-size (i.e., about 175 pounds) male who has been trained in CrossFit exercises. If this does not describe you, then your weight, reps, and additional work may need to be scaled down (or up) to a level that is both safe and effective for you. The rule on this is to go down a little lower than you

think you need to at first; if it's too easy, you can come back up in small progressive steps.

Conclusion

When preparing for any event or undertaking, it's important to have a detailed understanding of how to train to best succeed. Pre-SOF conditioning is no exception. Preparing for the known elements encountered in BUD/S or any other SOF pipeline requires that additional running, swimming, and PT be a part of the training regimen. And also implementing more varied, broader CrossFit programming is an important part of preparing for the unknown as well.

Define your objective

In short, when you put together your training program or evaluate one created by someone else for your use, you must define your objective, train for it, and be smart about it. If you're training for BUD/S or another SOF pipeline with the expectation of making it through, there are a few things that are important to have under your belt before you actually begin:

The ability to run fast...for a long time.

The ability to swim fast, with and without fins...for a long time.

The strength to move your body and some additional weight around...for a long time.

The experience of pushing your body and mind to their limits often enough that it is not a new feeling.

It has been said that he who has no goal will certainly achieve it. Set your sights high, learn everything you can, and then, like a tactician, train with intelligence to achieve your goal by preparing for all the known challenges and obstacles and gaining the ability to face and conquer the unknown ones as well.



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Photo credits Richard Schoenberg