

Pre-SOF Training

Part 3: "Assessment"

Robert Ord



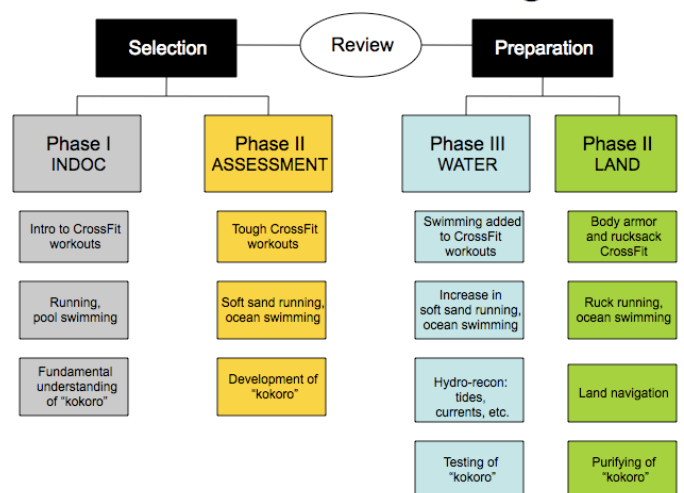
Photos from "The Only Easy Day Was Yesterday, Making Navy SEALs" by Richard Schoenberg.

Due to the increasing trend in global radical extremism, the military branches of the U.S. Armed Forces have made a long-term commitment to increasing the size of their Special Operations Forces (SOF). What this means to CrossFit affiliates is that there are an increasing number of individuals across the country who are awaiting the beginning of their training; who eat, sleep, and breathe SOF preparation; and who are hungry for anything that will prepare them for the challenges to come. This, coupled with the escalating spread of CrossFit's presence in military SOF training pipelines and in the physical training (PT) programs of operational units, means there are, and will be, an increasing number of "pre-SOF" trainees at many CrossFit affiliates in the United States.

Review of phase I, "Indoc"

This is the third in a series of articles on pre-SOF training that are designed to provide affiliates with a template for operating a training program for hopeful SOF fighters, as well as anyone else eager to take on full-fledged warrior preparation.

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The first four weeks of the Selection component of the program, called “Indoc” (described in detail in the January 2008 issue of the *CrossFit Journal*) should have met the following training objectives:

1. Introduction to CrossFit movements and stimulus.
2. Introduction to conditioning exercises, such as calisthenics and long slow distance (LSD) running and swimming.
3. Establishment of a cohesive unit, led by an appointed team leader.
4. Development of “brass ring vision,” our first step in developing the warrior spirit.

If everything has gone according to plan, trainees who did not know each other before are now like family, bound by a common goal. They train together and assist each other in areas where one individual might be weak. Like a slight uphill grade, intensity has increased steadily since the beginning of the first week of Indoc, and ample time has been devoted to nutrition, hydration, and recovery. Trainees have been provided a framework for developing the physical and mental toughness that will be required to get them through the next four-week phase, Assessment, where the slight uphill grade meets the base of the mountain.

Phase II, “Assessment”

The objective of pre-SOF training extends beyond physical preparation to a larger goal that also includes broadening an individual’s self-confidence, awareness, and ability to withstand discomfort and pressure. This is accomplished, at least in part, by providing a framework for growth and presenting the challenges that elicit that growth. I describe this to my clients and trainees as the “stimulus and response principle,” which is to say that the appropriate stimulus will elicit an appropriate response.

Of course, as with any other coaching situation, each individual is at his own stage of development and therefore the stimulus to required to elicit the desired response can vary from person to person. In pre-SOF training, the principles that Coach Glassman wrote about in the *CrossFit Journal* article “[Fundamentals, Virtuosity, and Mastery](#)” apply just as they do for any other group of clients.

⇒ I say this before describing the principles and programming of the Assessment phase to ensure that coaches and trainers do not lose sight of the objective of *coaching and developing* pre-SOF trainees just as you would other clients, even though the ends and, to some extent, the means for the training might be different.

Assessment: Finding the warrior within

There are a number of noticeable differences between Indoc and Assessment, the most obvious of which is that shorts and running shoes are replaced with camouflage pants and jungle boots. From here on out, every workout in pre-SOF training, be it “Murph,” “Fran” or running on the beach, is done in pants and boots, no exceptions. This change in uniform adds an obvious element of hardship, since pants and boots are heavier and more

cumbersome than shorts and athletic shoes, especially when wet. What is also evident, and every bit as important, is the perceptible psychological change in the level of motivation and aggressiveness in the trainees that occurs with the change of attire.

Another significant change is that the preparation and planning for each progression in training is largely transferred from the trainer to the trainees. During Indoc, the trainer points and yells, and trainees jump and fetch, until everything is as it should be. In Assessment, instead of continuing to employ the “gofer” tactic (go fer this, go fer that), a seemingly random individual is selected to communicate and oversee the work required to accomplish a specific mission. The trainer provides the task, which may be as easy as “set up four 95-pound bars” or as complicated as “hump [carry] four tires, four kettlebells, and four PVC sticks to the beach a mile away.” The trainee who is chosen to lead the task is allowed freedom in accomplishing the task but is observed by the trainer. Every task has a challenging time constraint, with the decree that failure to accomplish the task completely, accurately, or within the time allotted, will result in additional conditioning for the entire group. The time constraints could be something like “Set up four 95-pound bars. You have 1 minute, 30 seconds. GO!” or “Take the four tires, kettlebells, and PVC sticks to the beach. You have 12 minutes. GO!”

Trainees are assessed on their composure and their ability to communicate a mission under pressure. The act of conceiving a plan and communicating it under the pressure of a tight time window, with the knowledge that the result of failure is everyone’s discomfort, is extremely stressful. This may very well be the first time some of the trainees have been in this uncomfortable position, and even those who excel as athletes can completely break down under the pressure. From the trainer’s perspective, the selection of the trainee to lead the task is not random, of course, but a planned part of the overall training agenda. Those who are exhibit leadership qualities can be challenged with more complex tasks, leaving the simpler tasks to challenge the younger, greener trainees. In most cases, the assigned timelines are achievable only under near-perfect conditions, which provides ample opportunity for additional physical conditioning.

CrossFit workouts for each of the four sessions are the same as those in the previous four weeks; however, there are now pass/fail metrics that must be met (see session agendas, below). Trainees are made aware of the standards—time limits or minimum required rounds or scores—before beginning the workout, and they are provided time checks at regular intervals during it. Trainees who fall short of metrics by either failing to meet the minimums or by improperly performing the exercises are generally allowed to continue training through the end of Assessment and then given opportunities to retake the “test.” If they are unable to successfully meet the standards even on retest, they are not allowed to continue on to the “Preparation” block of training (which comprises the last two of the four phases).

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Session I

The leader role

In Special Operations, all members of a team can find themselves in positions of leadership. SOF warriors often need to lead members of their own team or other military units or civilians under stressful and dangerous conditions. The goal of “ready to lead, ready to follow, never quit” in pre-SOF training is to begin to develop the skills required for leadership under pressure.

Become your vision

In the earlier Indoc phase, the theory of the “Brass Ring Vision” was introduced as a means for developing the foundation of *kokoro*, or the warrior spirit. Now, in Assessment, as training becomes more difficult, trainees are instructed in actively making their vision a reality by assimilating the qualities and characteristics of how they see themselves in their minds into their current daily lives.

Photos from “The Only Easy Day Was Yesterday, Making Navy SEALs” by Richard Schoenberg.



Session I

Agenda		Instructor Remarks	
Brief	Welcome to “Assessment”	Set the stage for next 4 weeks	20 minutes
	Phase training schedule	Provide Trainees the “Agenda” section only	
	“Ready to lead, ready to follow, never quit”	Explain the role of the leader (see below)	
Timed Run	Easy 1-mile run and stretch	Team leader leads warm-up	40 minutes
	3-mile timed beach run	Time limit: 24 minutes	
CrossFit	“Angie” For time, complete all exercises, in order: 100 pull-ups 100 push-ups 100 sit-ups 100 squats	Demonstrate proper form and explain rules of the workout. Allow 25 minutes for completion.	40 minutes
Kokoro	Become your vision	(See explanation below.)	15 minutes
Debrief	Running times and “Angie” scores	Present pass and fail statistics	5 minutes
	Homework: Research your training pipeline	Use Internet, library, or bookstore.	

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Photos from "The Only Easy Day Was Yesterday, Making Navy SEALs" by Richard Schoenberg.

Session 2

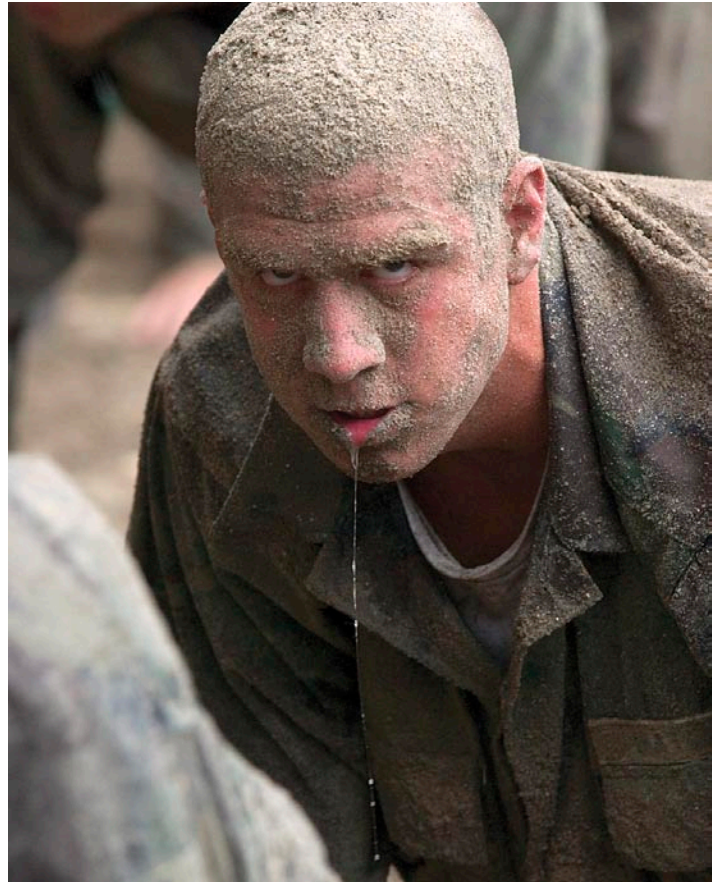
Tire PT

The following is an example of pre-SOF conditioning using regular pick-up truck tires (one tire for every pair of trainees), tubular nylon, and 1½-inch PVC pipe.

Pick a trainee to lead the evolution and then provide the following instructions for all to hear:

- Take tires, harnesses (10-foot lengths of 1-inch tubular nylon), and four PVC sticks to the beach.
- Set up PVC sticks in the sand in a large rectangle measuring 10 yards by 100 yards.
- Set up the tires at one end of the rectangle, two trainees per tire.
- Five minutes will be allotted to gather personal and workout gear. After five minutes, each additional minute will result in one round of:
 - Man 1 - 50 Overhead presses with tire
 - Man 2 - Tire drag to far side of rectangle
 - Man 2 - 50 overhead presses with tire
 - Man 1 - Tire drag to starting point

(Look to future CrossFit Journal articles for more specific pre-SOF conditioning workouts.)



Session 2

Agenda		Instructor Remarks	
Brief	Team leader collects PT logs	Review PT logs	10 minutes
	Team leader brief	Lead, follow, never quit	
	Training pipeline presentations	Pick trainees at random	
CrossFit	1-mile warm-up stretch and run	Warm-up stretch and run led by trainee. Allow 10 minutes.	30 minutes
	"Cindy" Complete maximum number of rounds in 20 minutes: 5 pull-ups 10 push-ups 15 squats	Minimum requirement: 20 rounds.	
	Tire PT (see below)	Carry tires, harnesses, and PVC to beach for SOF-style conditioning.	60 minutes
Kokoro	"Victory is reserved for those willing to pay its price" -Sun Tzu	Discuss meaning of quote and relevance to self-awareness.	10 minutes
Debrief	Individual performance	CrossFit and conditioning performance notes	10 minutes
	Assignment: Research history of your SOF unit	Use Internet, library, or bookstore.	

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Session 3

Merging Conditioning and Kokoro

The conditioning exercises are performed as a group. If a trainee puts his feet down or fails in some other way to perform the exercises correctly, the trainer should stop the set for everyone, point out the offense, and start the set over again from the beginning. After it is obvious that all trainees are suffering together, the trainer should begin to describe the role of employing mental

strength in meeting and overcoming adversity. Muscle fatigue and failure are a foregone conclusion, so it is expected that trainees will experience involuntary muscle failure. When this happens, the evolution becomes more of a mental training exercise, where trainees are expected to “steel their minds” to push past the barrier of what is comfortable. Trainers should watch for signs of mental weakness (whimpering, crying, and other obvious forms of giving up), and provide whatever motivation is necessary.



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Session 3

Agenda		Instructor Remarks	
Brief	Team leader collects PT logs	Review PT logs	20 minutes
	SOF unit history presentations (last session's homework assignment)	Pick trainees at random	
CrossFit	<p>“Murph”</p> <p>For time, complete all exercises:</p> <p>Run 1 mile 100 pull-ups 200 push-ups 300 squats Run 1 mile</p>	Break up calisthenics sets as needed—i.e. 10 sets of 10 pull-ups, 20 push-ups, 30 squats.	45 minutes
	Flutter kicks Sit-ups Leg levers	25 of each, then 20, then 15, then 10, then 5, and then back up, from 5 to 25. Done as a group. (See description below.)	50 minutes
Kokoro	The role of mental strength in physical endurance	Done in conjunction with conditioning. Performed while feet are 6 inches off the floor.	
Debrief	Individual performance	Hold no punches	5 minutes
	Assignment: Memorize SEAL code	Provide handout	

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Session 4

"Attack the Hill"

This workout uses a number of tall wooden staircases that lead from the Encinitas beach up to the Pacific Coast Highway, across the cliff.

Trainees assemble on the beach, at the base of the stairs, where they will follow the trainers' lead to perform push-ups, sit-ups, flutter kicks, mountain climbers, and a number of other exercises. At the command "Attack the hill!" trainees go up and down the stairs as fast as they can, enter the ocean until they are completely wet, and return to the trainer for more instruction. PT resumes when everyone is back, which provides the fastest trainees a little rest before the next round (drawing on the adage "it pays to be a winner").

The warrior within

Individuals can never complete training their inner warriors. It is a lifelong process that consists of inwardly searching the heart and mind for flaws and weaknesses and outwardly searching for information and guidance that can be manifested through skill and discipline.

Photos from "The Only Easy Day Was Yesterday" by Richard Schoenberg.



Session 4

Agenda		Instructor Remarks	
Brief	Team leader collects PT logs	Review PT logs	20 minutes
	Recite SEAL code	Group recites from the lean & rest position (plank hold in the push-up position). Each individual recites alone to recover.	
CrossFit	"Fran" Three rounds, at 21, 15, and 9 reps, respectively: 95-pound thrusters Pull-ups	Weight as prescribed. Time limit is 10 minutes.	30 minutes
Conditioning	Beach workout "Attack the Hill"	(See below.)	60 minutes
Kokoro	The warrior within	(See below.)	10 minutes
Debrief	Individual performance	Hold no punches	10 minutes
	Expectations of next phase, "Water Preparation"	Provide agenda	

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Conclusion

The increasing need for Special Operations Forces personnel around the world has created a rise in the number of individuals preparing for the grueling training. The serious ones are looking to CrossFit, based on its efficacy and its use in the training pipelines that they are heading toward. Physical preparation alone, however, is incomplete, as a large part of the pressure that SOF trainees

encounter is mental. The pre-SOF training template that I describe in this series of articles is designed as a means of introducing trainees to the kinds of stress they will face and as a means of eliciting the first stages of the development of the warrior spirit that they will require for success.

The objective of pre-SOF training extends beyond physical preparation to a larger goal that also includes broadening an individual's self-confidence, awareness, and ability to withstand discomfort and pressure.



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.

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

