



INTRODUCTION

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EVERY YEAR, THOUSANDS OF MARINES, SOLDIERS, SAILORS AND AIRMEN VOLUNTEER FOR SELECTION TRAINING IN ORDER TO JOIN THE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMUNITY.

Selection is a rigorous screening process that profiles for the mental, physical and emotional raw material necessary to be shaped into a special operator.

Just getting to the starting line is difficult. The majority of those who initially volunteer will never make it through the vetting process to *begin* selection.

Some selection classes start with well over 100 or even 200 candidates. Every single one of those candidates thinks that they've got what it takes to make it through. Most don't. Depending on the program, the particulars of the class, and the time of year, anywhere from 60 to 90% of them will not make the cut.

We have been training people for special operations selection since 2009. We've had dozens of clients start selection in special programs in every branch of the US military as well as Belgium, Germany, Canada, the UK and Austria.

Despite these odds, over 90% of our clients have been successful in their selection courses.

The method by which we do this isn't magic. We use a clear system that can be learned and applied by anyone (or, at least, anyone who is cut out for special operations).

The goal of this book is to teach that system, from the most fundamental principles by which all the pieces work to the practical details of application.

This system is the product of not just years of research, but the hard-earned lessons from each of our own personal experiences.

CRAIG

In 2002, I joined the Navy and volunteered for a special operations unit (SWCC) without knowing how to swim. I did my best to figure it out on my own before I left for boot camp, but in the middle of small-town South Dakota, the nearest pool large enough to swim laps in was about a 90-mile drive away, so I could only practice sporadically. I'd competed in various sports my whole life and trained obsessively in the gym, so I was hoping to use strength and fitness as a base and figure out swimming along the way.

During the first week of Navy boot camp, on the same day you take your basic swim test, you're shown a series of four videos about each of the special programs available to volunteers. Along with a handful of others, I raised my hand and put my name on the list.

Shortly thereafter I was sitting, shivering, on a small blue tile in a muggy, chlorine-scented locker room amongst rows of other candidates. It wasn't cold. I was shaking because I was scared. On command, we filed out of the room, holding up either one finger or two fingers to designate which pool we were to file in front of.

I was so nervous and flooded with adrenaline that I wanted to throw up. The next six years of my life depended on my ability to pass this test. We tried to space out in the crowded pool, and pushed off the wall at the whistle. Two or three laps later, choking and sputtering, I felt a hand tap me on the shoulder as I reached the wall to turn around.

"You. Out of the water. You're not going to make it. You've still got time to get into stroke development if you want to continue."

Stroke development was being led by an Explosive Ordnance Disposal Chief named Ferris. He spoke calmly but loudly, as if already exasperated with us.

"Hold your hand up over your head like this. Now bend your hand like this, and pull your arm down like this. There you just learned half of the side stroke. I can teach combat sidestroke to a monkey

in thirty minutes. Now enter the water."

He wasn't wrong. I did, in fact, learn to swim the combat side stroke as well as a monkey.

On my third and final attempt at the screen test, I passed the swim by less than ten seconds.

The rest of the test passed by in a blur. The strength-based stuff was all familiar territory. I got more than enough pushups and situps, hit 17 pullups and I was still so fatigued from the swim that I spent much of the 1.5 mile running in a sideways gait in order to vomit as I went. Regardless, I passed. Around 20 of us had started the test that day, and 2 of us finished successfully. This, I would later learn, was the average pass rate.

At this time in the Navy, special programs candidates didn't have a dedicated pipeline. They would go to a regular Navy A School (where conventional sailors learn their jobs for the fleet) and did special programs workouts in the mornings before class started. The training started promptly at 3:45 a.m.

Most of these workouts were in the gym or around the base, either on long runs or at a strip of beach where we would do calisthenics and try to avoid low-crawling through dead fish.

The exception was Wednesday. Pool day.

Occasionally, I would be encouraged by the appearance of a new trainee who swam slower than me, thus drawing the attention of the instructors and letting me relax into the relative comfort of oblivion. This was always short-lived though, because all of these people would quit within a week or two and never be seen again.

One particular morning sticks out in my mind. It was winter in Chicago and the doors outside had been opened. After the obligatory warm up in the gym, we lined up on the edge of the pool. The cold air outside air had rushed in and mixed with the warm humidity inside, creating a thick fog. Above the fog, in a lifeguard chair, was Instructor

Cassidy, a SEAL instructor. At this point, the farthest I had swum non-stop in my life was 1000 meters. I had only passed the screen test, with its 500-meter swim, a few weeks prior.

“Warm up! 2000 meter sidestroke! First group, enter the water!... Bust ‘em!”

This was something I was adjusting to. The phrase “warm up” was used without apparent irony to describe distances that would normally only warm up a car in January. On some days our “warm up” was a 5-mile run. I didn’t mind those, however, because they happened on land. Anything that wasn’t in the water was my happy place.

At that moment, I would have given almost anything to avoid getting in that water.

At Cassidy’s call of “Bust ‘em!” we push off the wall and start swimming. The next group enters the water behind us and follows momentarily. Shortly, the person behind me passes me in the water. It is impossible to swim smoothly with the number of people fighting to pass each other in the narrow lanes, and the water is a chaotic tangle of kicks and collisions. I soon fall to the back of the pack.

When the swim is over, I drag myself out of the water, heaving and exhausted. We are all lining up single file at the side of the pool as Instructor Cassidy explains the next portion of the workout. We are to enter the water one at a time at the far end of the pool and sprint freestyle to the end, then duck under the lap lane rope and sprint back, repeating the process until we have swam every lane. Each time we are passed, we must get out and do ten pushups, then get back in.

I swim freestyle worse than sidestroke. To say that I could even swim it at all would have been somewhat optimistic. I am passed constantly. Under the fog, the water more closely resembles a waterborne rugby scrum than a swim. I do countless pushups, and my arms and chest are nearing uselessness. I am the last one to exit the pool, and standing upright requires a good deal of effort. Somebody

does something to annoy Instructor Cassidy and we are dropped for pushups, flutter kicks and eight-counts. A trainee stops doing eight-counts to throw up in the pool drain.

Cassidy bellows from the chair, “You don’t want to put out? You don’t think you need to fucking be here? Do you people have any idea what is getting ready for you? First man, enter the water! Bust ‘em!”

The only thought I can keep in my head as I swim is that each stroke brings me closer to being done. There is no way this can continue much longer. Cassidy is in full form, yelling and threatening anyone who draws his attention. I finish again and get out of the pool, crawling before bringing myself to my feet at the back of the pack. I didn’t hear much of what Cassidy had been saying to the trainees as they formed up, but I figured it was probably the final words before the workout ended. It was about the time we’d normally finish.

“Do it again! First man, enter the water! Bust ‘em!”

By the middle of this series I could no longer swim with continuous effort. It was more of a sequence of fitful strokes punctuated by choking and sinking. Halfway down the last lap I blinked and reopened my eyes to find myself drifting a few feet under the water. I snapped back into consciousness and kicked to the surface, then struggled my way to the end of the lane. I hung on to the edge of the pool and tried unsuccessfully to lift myself out. Two guys stepped out of line to grab me by the wrists and pulled me out of the water. I slid on my belly like a beached orca, pulled my knees under myself and finally got up and staggered to the back of the line. If we had to swim again I would pass out in the water. I didn’t see any other possible conclusion.

“Get out of here.”

We were done and started filing out of the pool back into the gym. Instructor Cassidy stopped me as I walked past.

“You. You need to pick it up. You’re way behind the power curve.”

I tried to slow my breathing well enough to speak intelligibly, "Hoo Ya, Instructor Cassidy... I just learned to swim... I'll get better."

This was not the last time I would be pushed to the brink of unconsciousness by a workout in the pool. The instructors were quite inventive in their methods for bringing this about. I never blacked out more than a brief second or so, and I never told anyone when it happened. One of the first lessons one learns upon inhaling water is to cough underwater in order to conceal the sound. An instructor taught me that.

"You. If you have to cough, do it underwater, but only the exhale portion because drowning is bad. What does coughing mean in the water? It's a sign of weakness. It means you're struggling. And what does showing weakness do? It draws attention. You don't want that. So cough underwater. Always underwater. Now swim."

The early morning workouts continued after A school as I transferred into a program known as SCRUFF (Screened Candidate Reported and Undergoing Fitness Training - pronounced "scruff").

Our job here was to help administer the screen tests and paperwork for new guys, do the morning workouts with them, and then do a series of additional physical training sessions for the rest of the day. The intensity of the 3 a.m. workouts just continued in various forms for an entire day, punctuated by paperwork. It's sort of like purgatory for Navy SOF candidates, with an element of mentorship from the instructors. I spent six months there before moving to Coronado to begin selection, in December of 2003.

There is an event in the early portion of SWCC selection euphemistically called "water safety" in which you step off a diving platform, do an underwater swim and then "buddy tow" a partially-combatative instructor/victim across the pool while wearing boots and a full uniform.

By some miracle, I passed the test. Many others had not and we all had to repeat the event the following week. For those who hadn't passed the first time, it was their last shot. For the rest of us, it was just a bonus round.

My turn came and I jumped into the pool. I did the underwater swim and lined up in front of the instructor, waiting for the go signal.

"Swimmers, make your approach!"

He jumped me and I ducked and spun him, grabbing him with my left hand by the back of the collar and planing him out flat in the water. Once he was horizontal, I pulled him towards me and shifted my hold, throwing my right arm over his chest and grabbing his belt. I noticed immediately that my kicks were fruitless. Something was not right. I could see the outlines of everyone else in the pool doing the same thing, and passing me by. I had the instructor balanced on my hip, trying to keep him flat in the water so I could move him. He started to drag me down. I kicked as hard as I could to keep his head above water and pushed my own head and torso further under to lever him up with my hip. We were making very slow progress across the pool.

A normal buddy tow takes about three minutes and is exhausting. A really slow, painful one takes around four. Ten minutes later, I was still kicking my way across the pool. Almost all forward movement had stopped, and the sole purpose of my kicks was to get the instructors head above water and occasionally get some oxygen of my own. Finally, I was about two feet from the wall, straining my arm out to reach it, and the crowd of instructors that had gathered to watch the spectacle told me I was close enough, and to just finish the last part of the swim.

I was so hypoxic that I no longer cared about breathing or where I was going. I was swimming peacefully about three feet under the water, drifting toward the bottom and heading in the wrong direction. An instructor pulled me out before I drowned. He told me afterwards that this was the worst anyone had ever done without quitting.

Since I had already passed that event once, I stayed in the course.

I was two weeks away from graduating Class 47's Basic Crewman Training (the physical portion of SWCC selection) when my swim buddy and I failed a timed swim. We were rolled out of the course. The 13 of the original 50 who started the class

graduated shortly after, and we were placed in the Brownshirt Program.

We were lucky to be transferred into the Brownshirts. It's a BUD/S program, normally only open to students in the SEAL pipeline who are rolled after they have passed Hell Week. My swim buddy, Doug, and I were the first SWCC students crossed into the program.

We spent four months in Brownshirtland. Each day, we had a schedule of every physical evolution that any BUD/S class was doing, with extra events added by the instructors.

Our performances were tracked for every timed event, and we were expected to improve on each of them from week to week. Failure to do so could result in being dropped from the course and sent to the fleet.

We were in the water every day. If we weren't swimming in the ocean, we were busting out sprints in the pool. Always around two miles per day either way. The rest of the day could be filled out with soft sand runs, sprints up and down sand berms, the obstacle course, pullup-dip-rope climb sessions, circuits on Hammer Strength equipment or various calisthenic torture sessions on the beach involving "buddy drags" devised by our instructors.

The pool workouts were supervised by a man named Instructor Geisel. He was a genius at coaching swim technique, and after watching Doug and I swim on our first day in the program, was able to pick apart our stroke and give us a number of specific things to improve on. This was a significant change from the technical advice on swimming I had received from instructors in the past, which could all be summed up with the words "Just put out more."

One of Geisel's favorite workouts was to swim ten 100-meter sprints on time intervals. He started with two-minute intervals. This meant that if you swam the 100 in 1:45, you would get fifteen seconds rest before you had to take off for the next hundred. If you swam slower, you got less rest, and left at the same time. The fastest guys swam it in about 1:35 and had plenty of rest time. It was still a tough workout for them.

My first lap the first time I did it, I swam it in 1:58. Two seconds rest. Next lap, I was more fatigued. I came in at 2:00 flat. No breathing, just turn and sprint back. The entire set, I sprinted every lap and hit the wall just as everyone else was leaving for the next lap. It was a 1000 meter sprint. Geisel said to me afterwards that the only good thing he could say was that I never quit swimming or putting out. The technique, he assured me, would come.

And it did. Within two months I cut eleven minutes off the swim that Doug and I had failed by one minute and two seconds. I was finally gaining mastery over something that at that point I had been struggling with every day for two years. Soon I was holding to 1:45 intervals on the sprint repeats.

Finally, we classed back up with the next SWCC class. This time around, the timed swims were all manageable.

I finished the water safety test and this time it felt... pretty easy. The instructor I had towed pulled me aside afterward because of the dramatic improvement I'd made in the water. "Night and day. That entire thing was a night and day difference from last time."

The focus on skill development in Brownshirtland had changed everything for me. Fitness isn't enough without technique.

Lateral knee pain is common in selection courses and by the middle of the course I finally developed pretty bad knee problems. On some days, I could no longer bend my right knee by more than a few degrees. In order to make the run times, I would run by swinging my leg around to the side in a sort of loping gait.

Despite running like a pirate with a peg leg for the last few months, I graduated with SWCC Class 48, two and a half years after failing that first screen test in boot camp.

Two and a half years is a long time in a selection pipeline. Through various twists of fate - a longer-than-normal A school, six months of SCRUFF duty, four months in the Brownshirts after rolling out of my first SWCC class before graduating with my second - I saw more of the selection process as a student than anyone would ever want to.

Since age 13 when I first found my way into a weight room I had always been interested in the concept of strength. It was a big part of my motivation for joining the military - to test out what that word really meant. This led me to study the physical, mental and emotional aspects of performance - a subject I was reading about even as a student in selection during my rare moments of downtime.

During this time in selection I saw classes come and go. I saw hundreds of students in various points of the pipeline trying, struggling, failing and succeeding. Every morning as a SCRUFFT, I watched an average of 90% of the volunteers fail the screen test as I once had. Later on in SWCC selection and as a Brownshirt I saw countless other students fail or quit, while others made it through to the end.

The fascinating thing is how hard it can be to predict when you first start to observe. Being a top physical performer only increases your odds slightly. I watched D1 collegiate athletes and competitive triathletes utter "It just wasn't for me" as they quit and walked away. Many of the unathletic guys and self-described fat kids were still grinding along well after the physical all-stars had given up and gone away.

Clearly, if raw physical talent were all it took, I'd have never made it past the first day. I never saw anyone who swam *worse* than me make it further than a few days, but I saw hundreds who swam much better than me drop from the course.

I wondered:

What are the mental factors that makes someone "just keep going" when so many others can't or won't?

What's the emotional makeup of a successful SOF candidate?

How do you keep people from breaking down physically in this process, with injuries like the knee problem I had encountered?

What does optimal physical preparation for selection really look like?

How can you develop skill and fitness at the

same time?

I started poring through research, trying to understand what makes a special operator, and how to build one.

As an active duty SWCC, many of my deployments involved training people. In some cases, we would help to run the selection courses for other countries. Of course, our own SOF units always kept physical readiness as a high priority. I often found myself in a coaching position here - helping guys with program design, assessments and technical feedback. In many cases I'd also find myself downrange somewhere working with a foreign SOF unit and helping to design and oversee their physical training regimens. I had a large, well-qualified group of motivated lab rats to experiment with as I studied the factors that drove physical performance.

After I got out of the Navy in 2008, I started a fitness business and began coaching people using what I'd learned. I continued to comb through research and when I got through enough of an expert's published work not to make a fool of myself, I would get in touch with them to ask further questions.

Not long after this, I met Jonathan Pope and we began working together to build a coaching model. We began working with special operations candidates, coaching them through the preparation process.

Early in this process, I was doing private security work, first in East Africa and then in Baghdad. We were roughly twelve hours apart in time zones, so I would study and write during the day and go to sleep around the time Jon was waking up in Denver. The next day, I'd open my laptop and find a new series of notes and programming ideas from Jon.

With this alternating exchange each day and a roster of clients in various branches of the US military and several other countries, we rapidly refined and proved our system. Our clients were consistently graduating, uninjured and successful.

This book contains the answers to those questions I was wondering, and the rest of the model that Jon and I have spent most of the last decade developing.





JON

My story is nothing like Craig's.

At all.

I never even *considered* enlisting. So, how did I end training people at the highest operational level in the military?

I grew up like most kids, playing a lot of different sports anytime I wasn't stuck in school or doing homework. By high school I was far better at baseball than any other sport and focused all my energy on that.

I was 155 pounds soaking wet, but I could throw a 90 mph fastball and was one of the best ballplayers in the state. I had been playing 150+ games per year since I was 12 years old, traveling all over the US along the way. Everyone told me I was going to be in the majors, and I believed them.

At the age of 15, I ruptured my spleen in a freak accident and had to spend the next four months laid out. I took the opportunity to sleep about 16 hours per day, eat copious food, and hit the gym at least once per day and often twice. Over that summer I gained about 30 pounds and a ton of strength.

However, something odd happened.

Despite all the increased strength, I wasn't any faster and didn't throw any harder. In fact, previously occasional physical issues started becoming more common - and more serious. My first surgery came after my junior year in high school and prevented me from playing in the field or pitching my senior year, which led to very few prospects to continue playing in college. Undeterred by having to play at a Division 3 school, I figured I'd bounce back and would soon have Division 1 schools chasing after me.

During my freshman year in college I remember walking to the training room after every not-very-hard strength and conditioning session and practice to get ice on both my knees, elbow, and shoulder. I was like the glass man, and it was

embarrassing. I seemingly couldn't do anything without breaking down.

I thought maybe I just was soft and that these other guys just wanted it more than me. I reasoned that more and harder work was the solution. So, I started volunteering in the athletic training room to learn from the coaches, and I worked with the strength and conditioning coach to do extra work. When all that failed I did everything the surgeons and PTs told me to do and then some.

My daily exercise routine meant I had to show up to practice an hour early to do various stretches and band 'stability' and strengthening' exercises. After that, I'd strap myself into some ridiculous machine that would move at a set speed while I resisted as hard as possible while it slowly moved through a set range of motion. After a two or three hour practice I'd spend another thirty minutes wrapped in ice as my limbs went numb to help with 'recovery'.

None of it did a goddamned thing.

At this point, I couldn't even make it through a practice without feeling like I had been hit in the arm with a sledgehammer and then my knees. A two-mile run would leave me struggling to walk down the stairs in my dorm. Finally, after my freshman year, I had to have my elbow re-built. The surgeon said that it 'looked like a grenade had gone off inside my elbow', and 'your elbow looks like you should be at the end of a long professional career; not 19 years old'.

Physically, I was 19 going on 50. That was the turning point. I knew there was a better way and I had to find it.

I wasn't sure where to start, though, so I settled for studying *everything*: pre-med, exercise physiology, nutrition, and strength and conditioning. I did internships with physical therapists and strength coaches. I started helping PhD students work on their biomechanics and exercise physiology research. At the same time, I

experimented with everything I found on myself, and started training others.

Every moment I wasn't working, in class, or at the gym I was reading a blog or a book. I was the annoying guy who was friends with all his professors - not to get better grades, but to learn more. I helped many of them with their research or personal projects on the side so I could mine as much practical information as possible.

During my senior year, a PhD student named Kimi Sato became a mentor. Up to that point I had been throwing shit at the wall, hoping it would stick. He introduced me to a completely different way of looking at performance and health, and helped give me a framework to evolve my knowledge and coaching ability. Instead of telling me to focus on one thing and narrowing my academic focus, he showed me how technology, biomechanics, strength and conditioning, physical therapy, and physiology could be melded into a model that was far more effective than any field on its own. Meeting Kimi was an accident but I was lucky enough to stumble across the exact person I needed to combine everything I'd learned so far.

I'd stumbled across some of Craig Weller's writing during my senior year. We were about the same age and from very different backgrounds, but it seemed like we had a shared perspective on training and human performance.

Shortly after graduating college, I learned that Craig had moved to Denver not far from where I lived. I reached out to ask him some questions about how he'd started his first fitness business.

He responded that his usual training partner was out of town for a few weeks. Did I want to come by the gym and work out with him?

My training style at the time was based on what I'd learned in my university strength and conditioning education. I was an NSCA CSCS poster child. Barbell squats, bench presses, five sets of five.

Craig's approach to training was like a boy raised by wolves started a gym. Westside style powerlifting was mixed in with stuff he'd figured out when all he had to train with was a pile of rocks on an East African beach.

One Saturday, I showed up and a friend of his, a Marine Scout Sniper with .308 rounds and the words "This Too Shall Pass" tattooed across the upper portion of his chest, was loading weight onto a safety squat bar. He pointed to a scale.

"Weigh yourself."

I ticked the little weights on the scale's balance beam around. "205."

"Ok. So we're each going to load our bodyweight on this bar, unrack it, walk through the door and carry it up and down the road."

"How far is that?"

"One mile. Now let's see who goes first."

The three of us played a heated round of rock-paper-scissors and Craig lost. He put in his headphones and started off down the road with Marshall and I walking alongside, just in case he started to collapse and we needed to pull the bar off him.

My turn was next. I was strong in the gym. I could deadlift over 500 pounds and my other lifts were solid. I had some postural issues that I hadn't been able to address yet, but so far they hadn't held me back much.

For the first few steps the weight seemed ok. I squatted way more than this in most workouts. Then I realized how far a mile can be. Within a hundred yards every step was breaking me down a little more. My heart was hammering uncontrollably and I couldn't control my breathing.

At the quarter mile mark, I called for Craig and Marshall to help me unload the weight and set it

on the ground while I took a rest and collected my thoughts. Cars rolled by while the drivers peered at us curiously.

They grabbed either end of the bar to lift it back up for me to get it back on my shoulders.

Through my daze I heard one of them say “Ready.”

I was still hunched over, trying to breathe, my hands on my knees. I held up a finger. “Just give me a sec-”

The bar went up. “It’s not a question, it’s a preparatory command.”

There is a moment during some workouts and some physical endeavors where you realize that the only thing that will make the suffering stop is to keep going.

My vision blurred, scintillated, and tunneled. I pulled in smoke and exhaled ashes. I rounded the final corner, crossed the finish line and gasped “Take” as the bar was lifted from my shoulders.

I sat for a while on the curb, far enough away from where I’d initially landed that I was out of range of the splatters of my vomit, and considered how this fit into my training and my performance. The physical test I’d just taken was an insight into my mind.

I had some vulnerabilities that my conventional gym training had left open, but more than that I’d just found a side of training that I’d never really thought about. I had some of the puzzle pieces necessary to handle this kind of thing, and I was missing others. I also saw that I was able to build those components. Nobody else in that workout was really physically gifted - they’d just spent time training capacities that I hadn’t.

Craig and I continued working and training together. Our widely different backgrounds meshed perfectly and converged on a handful of core principles.

Everything we did in those early years was part of an R&D process. We traded piles of books, tested new concepts, added and discarded. A system began to take shape. This is the system outlined in this book, ten years later.

As this framework took shape, we began training SOF candidates. These candidates got the programs we’d been testing and refining on ourselves.

It was working. One after another, candidates spent anywhere from six months to several years working with us, went into selection programs, disappeared for a while and reported back successful. Our aspiring special operators became newly minted Green Berets, Rangers and SEALs.

This training system wasn’t just for SOF candidates, though. It was designed for *me*. Over seven years, I had five surgeries on the various joints I had blown up. I knew that if our model was as robust as we thought it was, then I should be able to re-build myself as well.

It wasn’t simple. I looked like Mr. Burns from The Simpsons. So much so that Craig referred to my posture as the ‘Mighty Hump’ because despite my terrible posture I managed to keep up with him in his daily training. And beyond lifting heavy things with good barbell form, and a willingness to crush myself, my conditioning was awful. Any continuous activity beyond fifteen minutes was considered extremely long-duration cardio to me.

Strength isn’t very useful if you can’t sustain it. A willingness to train hard is only productive if you don’t break down in the process.

Long story short, I had a long way to go.

My training has continued to evolve as Craig and I have developed our systems, and I am now in a very different place.

Last year, that place was on top of North Maroon Peak in Colorado waiting to descend the North face. As I laid on the summit watching the sunrise break over the peaks across the valley, I reflected and took stock of how much things had changed in the past ten years or so since Craig and I started working together.

I had started climbing up and snowboarding down all the 14,000-foot peaks in Colorado the year before. Being one of the toughest and most aesthetic lines in North America, North Maroon had been on my radar. The fifty plus degree

slopes on the North face are skiable only a few days per year, and while checking conditions for the weekend I realized the weather and snow conditions were perfect for an attempt. I had to go. After work I got my gear together and made the five hour drive to the trailhead just in time to catch about two hours of sleep before I had to leave.

Halfway up the face, I stopped for a drink and stupidly set my water bottle down to check my GPS. I shifted a bit to open my pack and a second later I heard the sound of my water bottle rocketing down the mountain, never to be seen again.

‘Hmm. That’s not good.’ I thought to myself. It would suck, but with the cold temps I knew I could cover the ground without getting too severely dehydrated. I’d feel like shit, but it was doable. Onward.

Six hours, 13 miles, and 6,000 feet after I started, I was on the summit enjoying the sunrise. I was operating on two hours of sleep, had no water, and still had to safely descend several thousand feet of fall-you-die terrain, navigate through another few thousand feet of tricky descent, and complete a ten mile walk back to my car. I was certainly a little tired, and would be exhausted when I made it to my car; but I was also *prepared* and ready for this.

There is a common perception that strength and endurance exist in a zero sum relationship. Increased strength means decreased endurance. As a collegiate athlete, this was my view of endurance work. Prolonged anything was really just a way to lose my progress in the gym and become skinny and weak.

At the extreme margins, that relationship is true. A world-class marathoner will never be an Olympic caliber weight lifter as well.

What we forget, though, is that very few of us will ever be near the true extremes of single-sport performance. In reality, a good training process will allow you to develop more than enough of any capacity without compromising your overall performance.

In the process of improving my aerobic fitness, I took up road biking. I completed the Colorado

Triple Bypass twice, each time covering 120 miles, three mountain passes topping out at almost 12,000 feet and totaling over 10,000 feet of elevation gain.

Despite this focus on endurance, I could still deadlift around 500 pounds, but at a lower, more efficient bodyweight of 195 or so.

This may seem extreme, but in reality a 500-pound pull isn’t even halfway to the all-time world record. In terms of maximal strength, it’s passable. In terms of world-class cyclists, my Triple Bypass times are similarly mundane. But, just like a special operator training for selection or operational life, my goal is not to be the best deadlifter or the best cyclist. It’s to have the capacities that I need in order to do something that’s far more complex than exercising.

I no longer spend much time on a road bike. Instead, in between training and competing in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, I spend over 80 days per year in the backcountry, traveling to places like Peru, Antarctica and Morocco for ski mountaineering expeditions.

Craig, whose resting heart rate was so low on his EKG during his exit physical in the Navy that he had to do flutter kicks to *raise* his heart rate into the forties and clear the test without bradycardia, can no longer keep up with me in the mountains.

The Mighty Hump is long gone. My posture and movement have drastically improved. I can sustain high workloads on skis carrying a pack uphill in the mountains, and I’ve still got as much strength in the gym as I did when barbells were my only form of training.

Most importantly for me, my training volume is now often higher than it was in my early twenties and *nothing hurts*. The glass man, and the crippling pain that followed most of my workouts, is a distant memory. This training process has not just made me more physically capable in the immediate sense, it has made me more resilient in the long run.

Today, I’m no world class athlete, but I can easily hit any of the physiological metrics we expect our SOF trainees to hit pre-selection. Almost all of the

programs and methods described in this book were beta-tested by me, *on me*.

Special operations are extremely and uniquely demanding. The reasoning went: if I could build those kinds of athletes, (a) I'd know how to help *anyone* needing to become more physically resilient, and (b) I could fix my own broken dead ass. So, my life has been dedicated to coaching and refining the system outlined in this book for over a decade. We never give anyone a workout or a program that we haven't done or wouldn't do ourselves.

So that's how I got here. I didn't start my career aiming to work with individuals looking to pass

special operation selection processes; I fell into it. And I kept doing it, because the system Craig and I have created has worked time and time again and enabled me to physically perform at levels that I thought would never be possible for me as a broken athlete on the wrong side of 5 different surgeries.

Our complementary areas of expertise along with a shared passion for learning the nuances of what it takes to be an elite performer have led to the book you're reading today. It is the culmination of the last decade of obsessively going down various rabbit holes of research and applying various methods using trial and error on ourselves and others.

