

Hey everybody and welcome to the show! Today we're in the middle of the 8 weeks series focused on building resilience. We'll be talking about why resilience is important, how to become more resilient, and talking to the most impressive and resilient people on earth. If you want to live a more interesting life like challenge yourself to do the impossible, you're in the right place. Let's get started!

Joel: Hey everybody, welcome to another episode of impossible radio where we talk about pushing your limits and doing the impossible. This isn't all about resilience and we're learning about mental toughness and grit so you can do impossible things and keep going when most people fail. Today's episode is with Paul Tharp. I met Paul through a mutual friend and got to know him at San Diego. He's one of the nicest guy in the world but I also learned he was the command master chief of Coronado Island in charge training both the SEAL and SQT teams A teams of the US Special Forces. Seriously he has trained some of the top military operators in the entire world. He also founded the training school that perhaps every SEAL candidate from buds the mandatory and infamous training that every trainee must pass in order to become a SEAL. There are so many abbreviations and titles that I screw up on this and I'm sorry for it but I apologize enough for playing long and hopefully I added the most that out but if I screw anything up my apologies in advance. But if anyone knows something about mental toughness and resilience it's Paul Tharp. Pissing thousands of SEAL candidates come and go and only a handful of them pass. He knows that separates the finishers from the dreamers, talkers from the doers and today we're gonna learn a little bit about him. What it takes to become a SEAL and the difference of those have what it takes and those that don't. Let's do this!

Joel: Hey everybody today I'm here with Paul Tharp. Paul Tharp is one of the most badass man I know. I've had the opportunity to get to know him since i move here to San Diego. To give you a quick run down of his many accomplishments; Paul is an ex-Navy SEAL joined in the 80s. He was in there for about 28 years graduated BUDS in class 146 certain SEAL team 4. Was part of the DEVGRU Naval Special Warfare Development Group. Was deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan. His peer had the establishment of the Naval Special Warfare preparatory School for the BUDS training. He's also the command master chief of the NAVAL Special Warfare Basic Training Command in Coronado. It's the A school for the SEAL and SQT teams. On top of that he also find somewhere time in there to be a multi sport athlete competing in tri-running, cycling, and surfing. Thanks for being on the show!

Paul: No problem. I wanted to be here.

Paul: Sorry i put you in the intro multiple times. So many acronyms in there i don't even know where to get started.

Paul: Yeah no worries me neither. It's not a big deal. The titles are not really.. we have to have them for the structures and you spend a while in an organization or community. Ultimately you grew and you gain new titles or nicknames or reputations so be it. Yeah. It's good to be here. It's good to chat with you.

Joel: Yeah so you fed a quite bit of time in the SEALS and the NAVY to build up your own reputation you joined what year in the 80s?

Paul: I joined in 1984.

Joel: Okay and you're in 28 years.

Paul: Right. I was in the Navy fleet on a ship for 2 years and on the SEAL team for 28 years so i did it all of actually 30 years in it in the NAVY. Total of 28 year and that's in the SEAL

Joel: Okay. So i'm really intrigued about your type of background. We've talked about it personally in the past but i love hearing sort of the story of what drew you to the SEALS in general. What made you want to join the NAVY and specifically the SEAL unit as far as that's kind of the next level. So what prompted you to even consider that?

Paul: That's a good question. Like so many young men and women out there i grew up in the mid west. Was in the high school band play a few sports, missing swimming. Was relatively competitive but i also like to have a lot fun and was bored with life in Indiana and had a really good friend of my brothers come out he actually came home on leave as we call it. He takes some leave and spend some time with his family. He came back to indiana for a week or so and he was a SEAL and he told me all about what the SEAL life was like and i was completely in for all and listened on all every word. And that's what really drove my ambition to first of all join the NAVY and second of all try to become a part of that elite team which i knew very little about. He looked back in the 80s and the only information there were a few books and a couple of magazines with very short stories of the SEAL team. There was no internet, there was no texting and facebook, or twitter. So there was really very low information. You know with that information i got word of mouth on putting stories that's kinda drove me in the NAVY. I joined 2 weeks right after high school which Navy boot camp and back then the system was a little different. I ended a pact good to the fleet on a ship for 2 years which is amazing what experience that was. Got to see world almost a couple times in a matter of 2 years and it was a lot of fun but the ultimate goal is to go to BUDS, go to SEAL training and join the SEALS team. That was what i did along with a lot of other guys. So that's my short story on how i came in.

Joel: So there's a very specific athletes SEALS take on 2015 and you're part of the hand in crafting how that works right now. What was it like back in 84, 86 when you joined up, when you were just starting out? Are the basics still there? What was it like when you joined up and let's talk about maybe how is it changed or what's been added over the years

Paul: Sure. This could turn into a really complex conversation but i'll try to keep the basics and we'll talk about what we call now a pipeline. Like mini schools or training organizations, they have a pipeline and the things that support the pipeline or the instructors or the students. All these different things are part of in what they need to focus on to make and create a successful pipeline. Back in the 80s, the organization was much smaller there weren't as many teams as

there are today. There weren't as many a call of duty SEALs. We also have a new organization row which is new, slick special warfare comeback craftsman with a special boat unit guys. We always had special boat unit guys all the way back in Vietnam, more or two but they didn't have their own pipeline or their own warfare pan or a special warfare designator. So that's whole of a topic but back to the SEAL training to the 80s, it was again much smaller which required a little bit of short ordered pipeline and the biggest difference in the pipeline back then and today the 6 months of buds is still there but we have what i was part of leading organization stand up naval special offer preparatory school which in short is called BUDS Prep. And it's an 8 week preparation program at Great lakes which is the only Navy Bootcamp. So if we start from day one of this pipeline, you'll see young man today joins the navy becomes a seal. The pipeline today, he has to be tested beforehand he has to find a civilian mentor. When he finds that mentor with the recruiting, the navy recruiting district or office, he meets with them, he has tested he does some psychological testing, he does some physical testing and does some training. And if he passes all that then he gets a contract much like an NFL player going to the team. So we have a contract process that tolds him when he will be joining the training, certain contract specifications, pretty basic. But when he gets a contract, then he comes in to the Navy. This is for only this pipeline, many young men coming in today have degrees if not advance degrees. They have about 80 percent guys coming have undergrads. So they want of that pipeline is joining the navy going to navy bootcamp and learning about the navy. So they're turning in that 18 week navy boot camp program. The goal there is to turn a civilian into a sailor and teach them everything they know at that point about the navy, very basic. Most of our young men that are joining to become a SEAL have absolutely no problem with all going to that navy boot camp. Actually after that navy boot camp they switch over and throughout that entire process were tested they have to continually pass the requirements that they need to stay align with their current contract in the pipeline. So they finish navy boot camp and they step across the street in Great Lakes in another program, the one we stood up and the BUDS prep. that's another 8 weeks. Again they're tested almost weekly in that program. There are some, it picks up a little bit in academic and mental training but the goal of that course is to prepare the students for through the regress of BUDS. Now most of these guys, it's impossible to prepare anybody for BUDS without a certain mindset and for us to give them that mindset again you have to have it when you show up. We used to call our students "tadpoles" and a couple different names. We used to tell them there are plenty of young men already tadpoles. They're gonna be SEALS they just need to be refined. So they kinda show up as this big rock and we just start chipping away the shape that's SEALS culture. That's gonna take from their day at the end of BUDS Prep which is gonna 8 weeks long and then they enter and they're going to Coronado, California, they go through Buds which is 6 months long. BUDS is Basic Underwater Demolition Seal Training.

Joel: And this is the thing when people think about the SEALS that's kind of the hallmark of what most civilians think or familiar with that use.

Paul: Absolutely. When they are watching discovery channel and you see Hell Week and you see the SEAL Training, that's what the focus and the emphasis and the attraction is drawn on.

In that portion, that's 6 months of BUD is really where most of the attrition takes place, most of the quitting as we call it or ringing out. Attrition also comes in different flavors such as injuries or not passing the standard. So we look at BUDS as.. if we look at the SEAL training in general from day one of BUDS to the graduation of SQT, we look at a selection training qualification. So this first 6 months of BUDS is mostly selection a little bit of training and then the next 6 months after they complete BUDS, you go through what's called SEAL Qualification Training. Now this is where it differs greatly back in the 80s when I went to training. Back in the 80s all the way up to early 2000, 2001 is when we started SQT in Coronado. We've always had SEAL Qualification Training that core SEAL tactical training. So qualification training typically took place after you completed BUDS, you're 6 months of BUDS in Coronado which ever SEAL can and went through. From there you will go to your prospective team, in my case when I finished BUDS, I went to SEAL team 4 in Virginia Beach. And once they had a full troop of guys ready to start another class for SEAL Qualification Training they would do it on the East Coast or the West Coast Collectively. So all the teams back then if you're at SEAL Team 2 or SEAL Team 4, there was one SEAL qualification class per year, that's about 6 months long. And sometimes there would be some nutritional as well but SEAL qualification today, SEAL qualification training today starts immediately after BUDS, it's another 6 months of more technical, tactical training. We get a little more in depth on SEAL combat swimmer for example, more complicated diving, more complex engagement scenarios, more complex close quarter combat training, weapons training. We really get down in the detail which much more beyond the basic. There's more up-to-date, current, relevant equipment all the way from night vision goggles, better weapons, using drones and conducting multiple layers of surveillance integrated with communications, integrated with supporting access exercise based scenarios. So we go out with complete form of scenario.

Joel: So throughout this whole thing. You have a hundred people, they decided they're gonna be SEALs. How many actually make it down? After you have all these different levels of attrition where people are either getting witted out based on capability, based on training, based on injuries. If you have a hundred people how many make it all the way through training that actually come at SEAL?

Paul: That's interesting question. So we're talking about the success rates on an average cohort or class of BUDS students for example. It averages and has been historically between 25-35 percent success rate and this may sound ridiculous but clearly in months of February or March Hell Week is much cooler than Hell Week in June or July and the numbers indicate the differences. Typically have a higher level of attrition in the winter months because it's just cold.

Joel: As a SEAL or as someone applying to be one, do you have any control of that or you automatically assign whether or not you're not gonna be on winter or summer class.

Paul: Your control . It's all time. You might think you have it great so you gonna go to summer but then you show up, you sprain your ankle when you get rolled back for 2 months and you class up again for one Hell Week.

Joel: So there's a very real element of like physical discomfort and there's the actual physical training that goes on to being a SEAL and then there's a weapon's training which is another piece. What i'm really interested in is sort of the mental training. Both the training that you guys kind of if you don't teach it you help them uncover it but also the mindset that the 25-35 percent of SEALS that succeed or that actually complete the training. What separates them out from joke you off the street that thought that's gonna be a SEAL and then signed up and tap out as soon as it gets tough.

Paul: It's again, it could be a very complicated, long answered question. I can simplify in a couple different ways and one way i like to simplify is that there's Yes-doers and Yes-sayers. Very simple and it's just like if you're going football camp and you're gonna play football or if you gonna go run a tri-athlete or run a marathon and those who show up they've got a certain goals and there's those who show up and they talk about it and then the result is.. whatever that result is. BUDS training, SEAL training and SQT training actually is sort of similar but what i've seen over the years the last 3 or 4 years of running, training programs is you have a lot of young men telling their families they're gonna do this and that and they're on facebook, they're on twitter, they're talking what about they're gonna do. they're saying this and they're saying that and when comes a time that to go through Hell Week with your team, with your boat crew, they're not keeping up, they're not doing their part because they're so used to talking about it instead of doing it and then quitting. that's just one small aspect but really the bottomline is most of the guys who show up who aren't gonna quit, they have a pretty good work ethic. That's pretty simple. They've already got some resilient skills set internally. They used to go into some level of being uncomfortable, some level of what we call putting out of working hard and working with the team and taking the attention off yourself and helping your buddy up. All these things if you take the focus off yourself and put it on the team. You share the pain with the crew, with your boat crew, with your teammates, it's not nearly as hard. But there's a lot of young men who show up and they have no concept to that, no matter how much we told them or how much we try to teach them or how much we talk about mental toughness, things such as visualization, teamwork, all these different things they're kinda take yourself out of it that they would not stand quitting.

Joel: I think that's interesting that there's a team element. It's almost like part of it that's about unselfishness, it's not just about your pain, it's not just about how tough it is for you but everyone around you is kinda go on the same thing and if you can bind into that team mentality and then other people are either depending on you or need you there that gives you another sort of well to dig into where if it's just about you and how comfortable you are that individualize concept of like it's all about you, how do you feel right now, how does this affect you, you. Everything's so individualize that sometimes if you're part of that group, if you're part of a team you can actually hack your endurance levels a little bit coz you could say hey, there's other people going through this and even if i'm in pain, i'm in pain with other people.

Paul: Absolutely. we can talk to some many aspects as there's so many variables. If you look at any major sports team, this is the teams that they wanna hear in the beginning of the first

season. We actually go out and talk to my fellow instructors and gather with what today were going and speak with the pro in the team, pro majorly baseball. And for example you go in a league baseball team, 5 or 6 of the players might be making 10 million dollars a year and the rest of the team the average player is bringing in a couple of hundred grand. So there's a huge variable difference in between what motivates you to play. In the team and in BUDS, it's much different game obviously but what motivates everybody to play? What motivates people come to work , what motivates us to bring the team together,. to suffer together and not just to go to hard times together but to enjoy what you're doing. And that's big difference between what i've seen again over my years in the team and the last 3 or 4 years running training organizations. is the guys are coming in the teams today, we 2001