

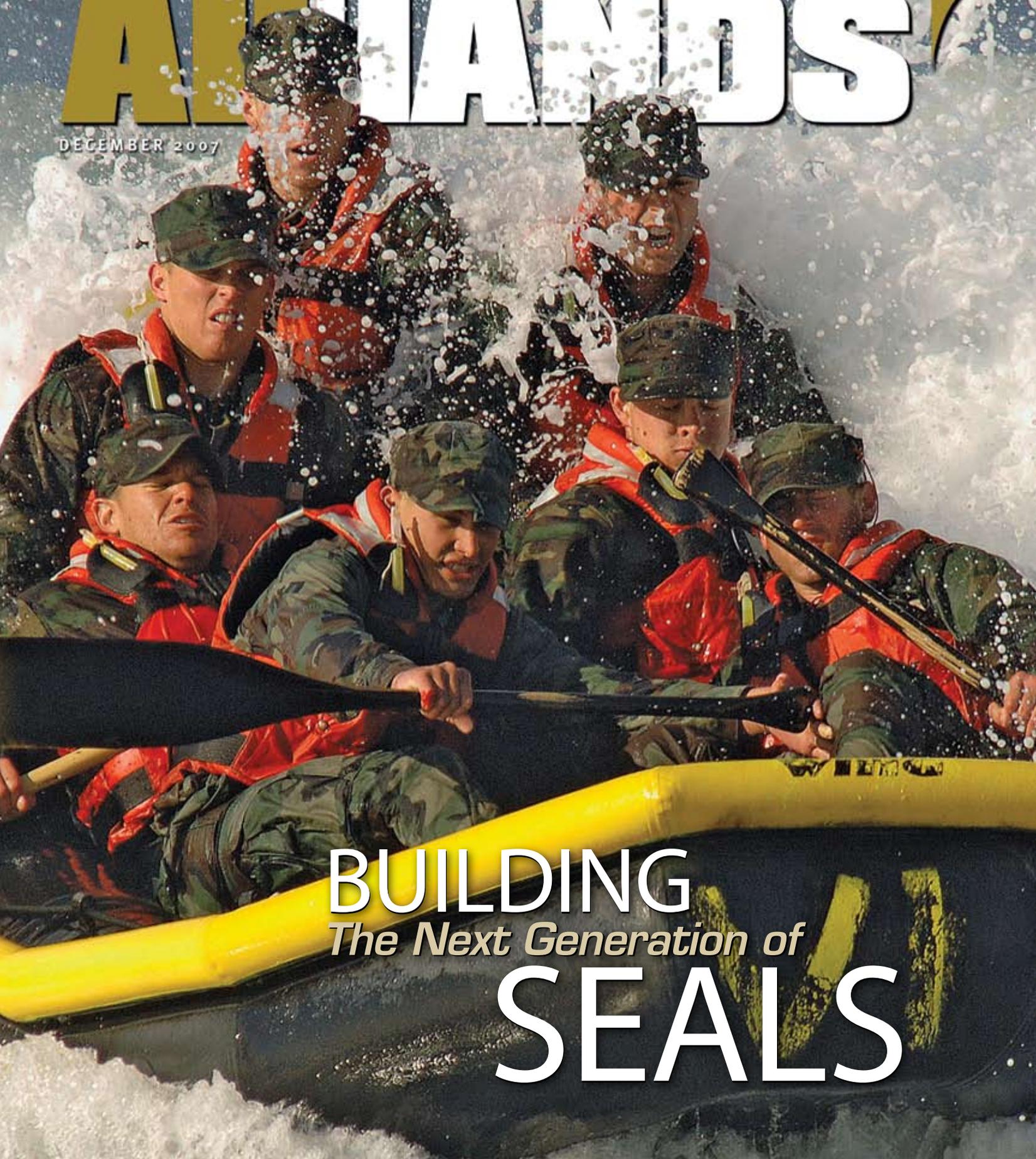
Sailors Making a Difference in the Horn of Africa



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BUILDING
The Next Generation of
SEALS

Recruiting SPECOPs

First Mission at RTC, Becoming a Sailor

Story by Scott A. Thornbloom

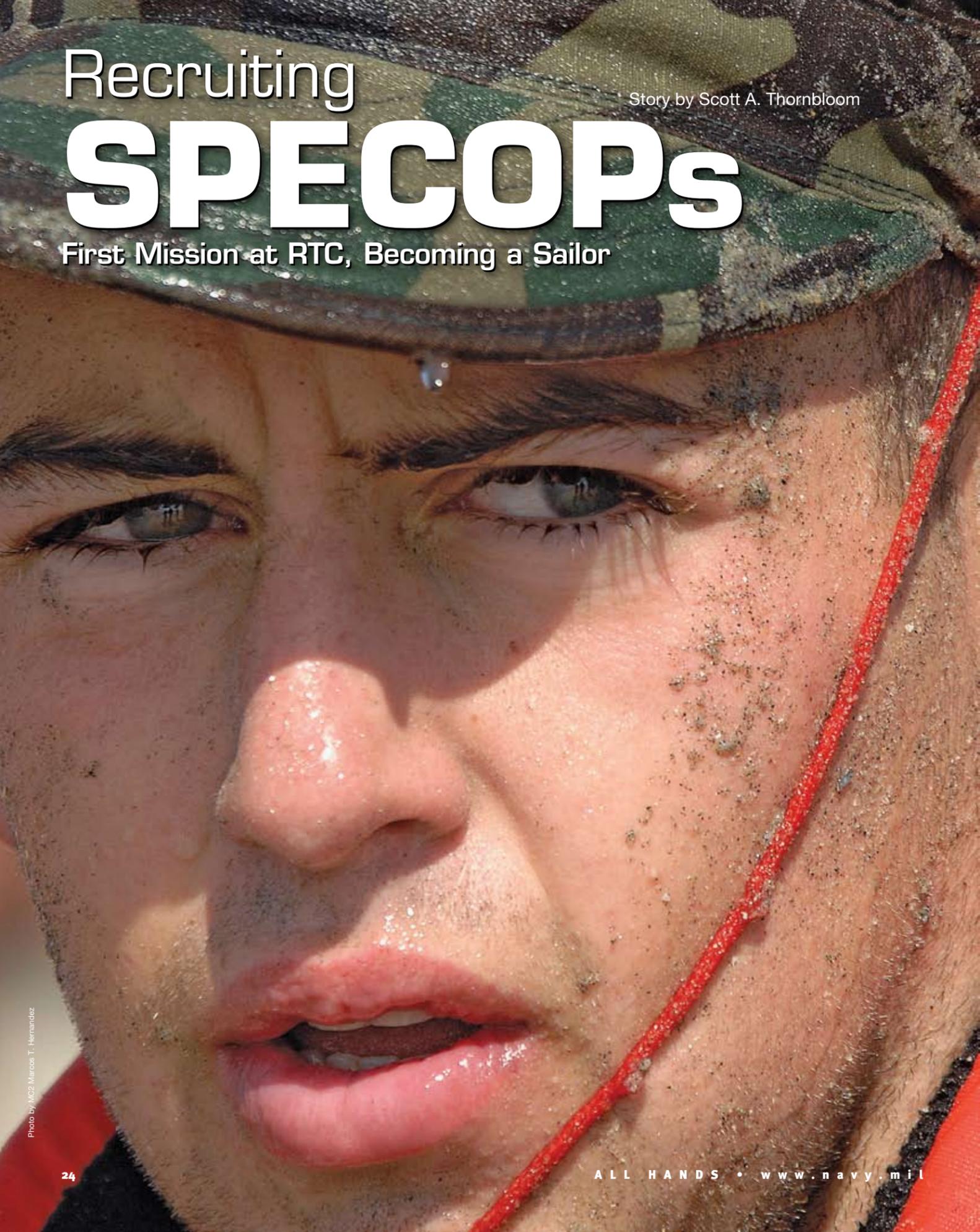


Photo by MC2 Marcos T. Hernandez

When liberty call was announced in the USS *Midway* Drill and Graduation Hall at Recruit Training Command (RTC), Great Lakes, last August, the former recruits, now Sailors, of Division 253 had the same reactions as the more than 800 other new Sailors from the eight graduating divisions. First, was a sigh of relief upon completing recruit training, followed by high fives and congratulatory hand shakes among the members of each division. Then came the race to embrace loved ones and family members attending the graduation ceremony.

But there was also a quiet air of confidence from the 77 graduating Sailors of Div. 253. It was a determined attitude of having completed the first step in their goal of becoming a part of Navy special operations (SPECOPs).

"They were all amazingly confident from day one," said Aviation Electrician's Mate 1st Class (AW) Richard Fenters, one of Div. 253's recruit division commanders.

"When they first started they were far ahead of the other recruits," said Fenters, "especially in their physical training. They knew what they wanted and they all have a strong desire to accomplish their goals."

Recruit divisions, like 253, are part of a Navywide plan to recruit and grow naval special warfare (NSW) and Navy special operations (NSO) ratings. Div. 253 was the third all-NSW/NSO division to graduate from RTC. Since April 2007, more than 18 NSW/NSO divisions have graduated. There are five divisions currently attending recruit



Photo by MCC Rhonda Burke

▲ Commodore, Naval Special Warfare Group 4, Capt. Evin Thompson, (left) talks with SR Kohl Curran, during breakfast prior to his graduation from boot camp at Great Lakes, Ill. Curran trained with Division 149, the first all-SEAL candidate division to train together in boot camp. Thompson served as Reviewing Officer for the Recruit Graduation ceremony. The division also attended Naval Military Training Classes at Training Support Center Great Lakes prior to reporting together for Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training.

training. That's more than 1,400 NSW/NSO candidates in less than a year who are now in the training pipelines, to include recruit training preparatory courses and "A" schools for their ratings.

Navy Creates New Ratings

In October 2006, the Navy created four new ratings that the Navy categorizes as naval

special operations: special warfare operator (SO), special warfare boat operator (SB), Navy diver (ND) and explosive ordnance disposal (EOD). The new ratings replaced previous source ratings, that had been used to distinguish SEALs (Sea, Air, Land) and special warfare combatant-craft crewmen (SWCC), Navy divers and Sailors in EOD detachments by job classifications. Before the new ratings



Photo by Scott A. Thornbloom

▲ Recruits from Division 253 stand at attention during graduation ceremonies.



▲ Recruits from Division 253 run in formation on an outdoor track at Recruit Training Command, Great Lakes, Ill. Division 253 was the third all-Special Warfare Operations division to go through recruit training. The division was made up of rating candidates for Special Warfare Operator (SO), Special Warfare Boat Operator, Navy Diver and Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD). It is part of a new Navy and Special Warfare Command initiative to grow the ranks of SEALs, littoral and riverboat squadrons, dive units and EOD Detachments.

“Our goal is to make sure each candidate is ready to go to boot camp and ready to start their journey to reach their special operations goal.”

– Mark Negle, Mentor

were formed, all naval special warfare (SEALs and SWCC) and special operations (ND and EOD) Sailors maintained a source rating, although their training and focus was to maintain special warfare qualifications.

The Navy is now actively recruiting for candidates for the new ratings with the goal of developing a more cohesive special operations team.

“Special operators are dependant on each other, knowing each other’s mission or task and working as a team,” said Master Chief Special Warfare Operator Paul Tharp, officer-in-charge of the new Naval Special Warfare Center Preparatory Course (NSWCPC) at Great Lakes. The NSWCPC prepares SEAL candidates for Basic Underwater Demolition/

SEAL (BUD/S) training at the Naval Special Warfare Center.

“From day one in the Navy, SPECOP candidates are learning how to work as a unit,” said Tharp. “In the NSWCPC and BUD/S training it’s imperative the division stays together, learns to work as a team and depend on and trust each other.”

“Special operations was very well recognized in the last Quadrennial Defense Review,” said Capt. Evin Thompson, commanding officer, Special Warfare Group 4. “Throughout SOCOM, we are growing in Army, Air Force, Marine Corps and Navy special operations. The SEALs are growing from 1,800 enlisted SEALs up to 2,500 this year. Special boat operators will grow from 525 to 825.”

Former Special Warfare Operators Become Mentors

To recruit the right candidates, Commander, Navy Recruiting Command has contracted retired and former operators to assist Navy recruiters find and mentor the right candidates to be SEALs, special warfare boat operators, Navy divers and EOD specialists. These former operators are assigned to all 26 Navy recruiting districts in the country and travel to different high school and college athletic events, triathlons and even extreme sporting events, like the X Games, looking for potential candidates.

“Just as the Navy recruits for the submarine community, nuclear programs, aviation and medical communities, it is now recruiting for the special operations community,” said Mark Negle, a retired senior chief hull technician Navy diver. “But we need a more physically fit candidate than the normal recruit. We look for a candidate we think will be able to handle the physical and mental rigors of being a special operator.”

Negle was one of the first mentors who worked with Navy recruiting to help find candidates for the special operation ratings. He now is continuing that mentoring with the dive motivators at RTC. The dive motivators are present and former senior enlisted members of the SPECOPS community who are responsible for screening special operations candidates after they arrive at RTC. They also are in charge of providing the extra physical training each candidate is required to participate in during recruit training including periodic physical screening tests and swim qualifications.

“We’re there to not only write the contracts for the candidates who have been recruited but also to set both the recruiters and the candidates up for success,” Negle said. “Our goal is to make sure each candidate is ready to go to boot camp and ready to start their journey to reach their special operations goal.”

Becoming a Sailor First

Div. 253 graduated 47 SEAL (SO) candidates, 23 SB candidates, six ND candidates and one EOD candidate. Of the original 83 candidates who arrived at RTC, these 77 successfully completed training, drilling and learning how to be Sailors first.

“Special Warfare Command (SPECWARCOM)



▲ The Coronado Bridge and San Diego skyline frame Basic Underwater Demolition/ SEAL (BUD/S) students as they run with their inflatable boats back to BUD/S compound at the Naval Special Warfare Center.



▲ SOC Darek Laviolette talks about the Special Operations Program to Trident Challenge attendees at the University of Minnesota. The Trident Challenge allows interested people to find out how they measure up against SEALs and gives the general public an opportunity to meet and learn more about the SEALs.

► Recruits from Division 253 run during Basic Training at Recruit Training Command, Naval Station Great Lakes, Ill.

insists that all recruits become Sailors first,” said Capt. Annie B. Andrews, commanding officer of RTC. “If they don’t learn the Core Values of the Navy, the teamwork and how to be a Sailor first they could never learn how to be part of the SPECWARCOM team. The special operator candidates go through the same ‘Sailorization’ process, including curriculum and regimen, as every other recruit who begins a Navy career here at RTC.”

Andrews added that except for the additional physical training handled by the dive motivators at the pool.

“Every recruit participates in the same basic military training requirements. Every minute of recruit training has been consciously designed to provide the fleet with basically trained, highly-motivated and dedicated Sailors ready to operate in the Navy.”

For the recruit candidates who have already graduated or are still attending boot camp, becoming a Sailor and serving their country is

the first thing on their minds.

“I’ve wanted to serve my country for a long time and I can’t think of any better way of doing that than by being a Sailor and special warfare operator,” said Seaman Travis Carter, the recruit chief petty officer from the now-graduated Div. 253.

Carter, whose father is a retired Marine Corps lieutenant colonel, said it was exciting getting through the training at RTC. “It was really fun being part of a special operator division. We all came together and helped each other get through the training. Becoming a Sailor first was really important to all of us and I think it will help us all move on in the communities we were recruited for.”

Carter, who transferred to BUD/S training after graduating from RTC, said he has always wanted to be a SEAL. “... It started with the diving I did in Okinawa, where my Dad was stationed, but grew after 9/11. I just wanted to come in and serve and protect my country.”





Photo by Scott A. Thornblom

▲ Recruits from Division 253 work out around the pool during their “down time” with the dive motivators while at Recruit Training Command, Great Lakes, Ill.

The next step: Preparatory Courses

Following graduation, Div. 253, and the other divisions, spent four days at the Training Support Center (TSC), Naval Station Great Lakes, for the Chief of Naval Operations-mandated courses in personal financial management and Navy military training. ND and EOD candidates then received orders to the Explosive Ordnance Disposal/Dive Preparatory Course also at Naval Station Great Lakes.

This month, SO SEAL candidates began staying at Great Lakes to attend the new Naval Special Warfare Center Preparatory Course (NSWCPC) before advancing to their BUD/S “A” school. Before NSWCPC stood up, SO candidates went straight to BUD/S at the Naval Special Warfare Center, Coronado, Calif. SB operators are the only special operations personnel who do not attend a prep course. After completing the CNO-mandated courses, SB candidates travel straight to Coronado and the Naval Special Warfare Center to attend basic crewman training.



Photo by Scott A. Thornblom

▲ Recruits are trained on the proper donning and use of the gas mask.

NSWCPC is under the direction and guidance of Naval Special Warfare Command, through the Naval Special Warfare Center and must be completed before an SO SEAL candidate moves on to BUD/S training. The course and students are supported in Great Lakes by the TSC and Naval Service Training Command. The course staff and course curriculum were developed and provided by the Naval Special Warfare Center.

According to a SPECWARCOM mission statement, NSWCPC was established to implement a progressive physical and mental training program to prepare SO SEAL candidates toward successful completion of their perspective training objectives in a military training environment.

“NSWCPC is a prep course for BUD/S. It is not an “A” or “C” School, but a course to prepare SEAL candidates for BUD/S, which can be considered the SEAL “A” School,” Tharp explained.” In other words it is designed to physically prepare the candidates for the rigors of BUD/S. The course will train the candidates in the proper ways of running and swimming.”

Tharp added the prep course is all about an opportunity for success. Every BUD/S candidate – to include fleet accessions – will cycle through this prep course prior to going to BUD/S. There will be physical exit standards beyond the historic PST that each candidate must pass. The program’s progressive nature will build the candidates up over time – average length of the course will be eight weeks.”

So far, thanks to the CNO-initiative and the work at RTC, TSC and NSTC, the numbers and percentages of the naval special warfare and special operations ratings are increasing.

“Having the Naval Special Warfare Center Preparatory Course here will enhance the training pipeline that started the day a special warfare operator candidate was recruited,” said Rear Adm. Arnold O. Lotring, Commander, Naval Service Training Command. “NSWCPC will also ensure that we will be sending a better prepared and highly motivated candidate to BUD/S.”

Thornblom is assigned to the public affairs office, NSTC, Naval Station Great Lakes

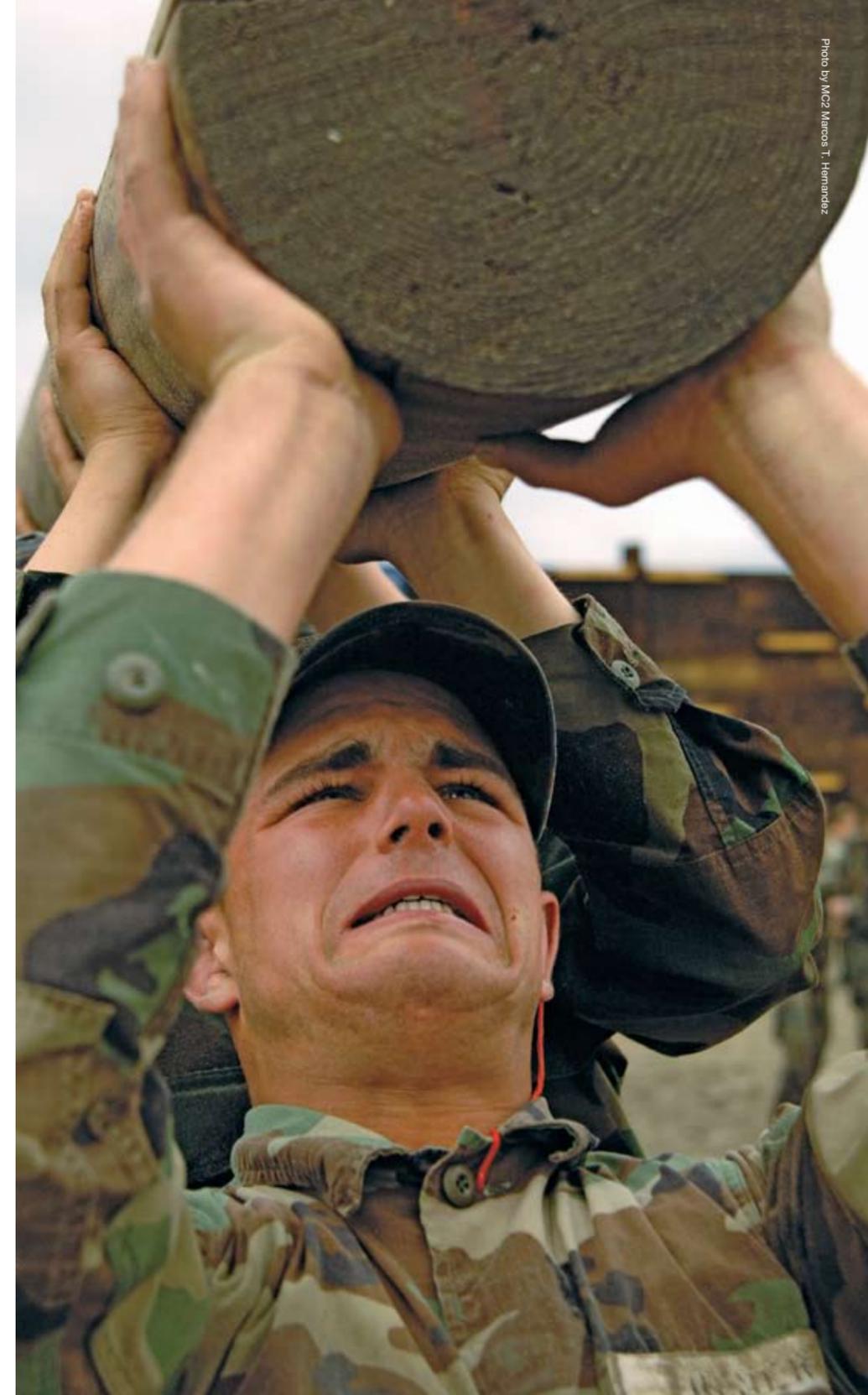


Photo by MCG2 Marcos T. Hernandez

▲ A Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL (BUD/S) student struggles to lift his portion of a heavy log over his head during Log PT at the Naval Special Warfare Center. Log PT fosters teamwork among the students and provides strength training. BUD/S students must endure 27 weeks of intense training in order to graduate from the program, followed by six months of SEAL Qualification Training before they can wear the trident of a U.S. Navy SEAL.

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