CHALLENGE #7

The main objective here is to slowly start to remove the governor from your brain.

First, a quick reminder of how this process works. In 1999, when I weighed 297 pounds, my first run was a quarter mile. Fast forward to 2007, I ran 205 miles in thirty-nine hours, nonstop. I didn't get there overnight, and I don't expect you to either. Your job is to push past your normal stopping point.

Whether you are running on a treadmill or doing a set of push-ups, get to the point where you are so tired and in pain that your mind is begging you to stop. Then push just 5 to 10 percent further. If the most push-ups you have ever done is one hundred in a workout, do 105 or 110. If you normally run thirty miles each week, run 10 percent more next week.

This gradual ramp-up will help prevent injury and allow your body and mind to slowly adapt to your new workload. It also resets your baseline, which is important because you're about to increase your workload another 5 to 10 percent the following week, and the week after that.

There is so much pain and suffering involved in physical challenges that it's the best training to take command of your inner dialogue, and the newfound mental strength and confidence you gain by continuing to push yourself physically will carry over to other aspects in your life. You will realize that if you were underperforming in your physical challenges, there is a good chance you are underperforming at school and work too.

The bottom line is that life is one big mind game. The only person you are playing against is yourself. Stick with this process and soon what you thought was impossible will be something you do every day of your life. I want to hear your stories. Post on social. Hashtags: #canthurtme #The40PercentRule #dontgetcomfortable.

CHAPTER EIGHT

TALENT NOT REQUIRED

THE NIGHT BEFORE THE FIRST LONG-DISTANCE TRIATHLON IN MY LIFE, I STOOD WITH my mother on the deck of a sprawling, seven-million-dollar beach house in Kona watching the moonlight play on the water. Most people know Kona, a gorgeous town on the west coast of the island of Hawaii, and triathlons in general, thanks to the Ironman World Championships. Although there are far more Olympic distance and shorter sprint triathlons held around the world than there are Ironman events, it was the original Ironman in Kona that placed the sport on the international radar. It starts with a 2.4-mile swim followed by a 112-mile bike ride, and closes with a marathon run. Add to that stiff and shifting winds and blistering heat corridors reflected by harsh lava fields, and the race reduces most competitors to open blisters of raw anguish, but I wasn't here for that. I came to Kona to compete in a less celebrated form of even more intense masochism. I was there to compete for the title of Ultraman.

Over the next three days I would swim 6.2 miles, ride 261 miles, and run a double marathon, covering the entire perimeter of the Big Island of Hawaii. Once again, I was raising money for the Special Operations Warrior Foundation, and because I'd been written up and interviewed on camera after Badwater, I was invited by a multi-millionaire I'd never met to stay in his absurd palace on the sand in the run-up to the Ultraman World Championships in November 2006.

It was a generous gesture, but I was so focused on becoming the very best version of myself his glitz didn't impress me. In my mind, I still hadn't achieved anything. If anything, staying in his house only inflated the chip on my shoulder. He would never have invited me to come chill with him in

Kona luxury back in the day. He only reached out because I'd become somebody a rich guy like him wanted to know. Still, I appreciated being able to show my mom a better life, and whenever I was offered a taste, I invited her to experience it with me. She'd swallowed more pain than anyone I'd ever known, and I wanted to remind her that we'd climbed out of that gutter, while I kept my own gaze locked at sewer level. We didn't live in that $7 a month place in Brazil anymore, but I was still paying rent on it, and will be for the rest of my life.

The race launched from the beach beside the pier in downtown Kona—the same start line as the Ironman World Championships, but there wasn't much of a crowd for our race. There were only thirty athletes in the entire field compared to over 1,200 in the Ironman! It was such a small group I could look every one of my competitors in the eye and size them up, which is how I noticed the hardest man on the beach. I never did catch his name, but I'll always remember him because he was in a wheelchair. Talk about heart. That man had a presence beyond his stature.

He was immense!

Ever since I'd started up in BUD/S, I'd been in search of people like that. Men and women with an uncommon way of thinking. One thing that surprised me about military special operations was that some of the guys lived so mainstream. They weren't trying to push themselves every day of their lives, and I wanted to be around people who thought and trained uncommon 24/7, not just when duty called. That man had every excuse in the world to be at home, but he was ready to do one of the hardest stage races in the world, something 99.9 percent of the public wouldn't even consider, and with just his two arms! To me, he was what ultra racing was all about, and it's why after Badwater I'd become hooked on this world. Talent wasn't required for this sport. It was all about heart and hard work, and it delivered relentless challenge after relentless challenge, always demanding more.

But that doesn't mean I was well-prepared for this race. I still didn't own a bike. I borrowed one three weeks earlier from another friend. It was a Griffin, an uber-high-end bicycle custom made for my friend who was even bigger than I was. I borrowed his clip-in shoes too, which were just shy of

clown-sized. I filled the empty space with thick socks and compression tape, and didn't take the time to learn bike mechanics before leaving for Kona. Changing tires, fixing chains and spokes, all the stuff I know how to do now, I hadn't learned yet. I just borrowed the bike and logged over 1,000 miles in the three weeks prior to Ultraman. I'd wake up at 4 a.m. and get hundred-mile rides in before work. On weekends I'd ride 125 miles, get off the bike and run a marathon, but I only did six training swims, just two in the open water, and in the ultra octagon all your weaknesses are revealed.

The ten-kilometer swim should have taken me about two and a half hours to complete, but it took me over three, and it hurt. I was dressed in a sleeveless wetsuit for buoyancy, but it was too tight under my arms, and within thirty minutes my armpits began to chafe. An hour later the salty edge of my suit had become sandpaper that ripped my skin with every stroke. I switched from freestyle to side stroke and back again, desperate for comfort that never came. Every revolution of my arms cut my skin raw and bloody on both sides.

Coming out of the water at Ultraman

Plus, the sea was extremely choppy. I drank sea water, my stomach flipped and flopped like a fish suffocating in fresh air, and I puked a half dozen times at least. Because of the pain, my poor mechanics, and the strong current, I swam a meandering line that stretched to seven and a half miles. All of that in order to clear what was supposed to be a 6.2-mile swim. My legs were jelly when I staggered to shore, and my vision rocked like a teeter totter during an earthquake. I had to lie down, then crawl behind the bathrooms, where I vomited again. Other swimmers gathered in the

transition area, hopped into their saddles, and pedaled off into the lava fields in a blink. We still had a ninety-mile bike ride to knock off before the day was done, and they were getting after it while I was still on my knees. Right on time, those simple questions bubbled to the surface.

Why on Earth am I even out here?

I'm not a triathlete!

I'm chafed everywhere (and I mean everywhere!), sick to my stomach, and the first part of the ride is all uphill!

Why do you keep doing this to yourself, Goggins?

I sounded like a whiny kid, but I knew finding some comfort would help, so I paid no attention to the other athletes who eased through their transition. I had to focus on getting my legs under me and slowing my spun-out mind. First I got some food down, a little at a time. Then I treated the cuts under my arms. Most triathletes don't change their clothes. I did. I slipped on some comfortable bike shorts and a Lycra shirt, and fifteen minutes later I was upright, in the saddle, and climbing into the lava fields. For the first twenty minutes I was still nauseous. I pedaled and puked, replenished my fluids, and puked again. Through it all, I gave myself one job: stay in the fight! Stay in it long enough to find a foothold.

Ten miles later, as the road rose onto the shoulders of a giant volcano and the incline increased, I shook off my sea legs and found momentum. Riders appeared ahead like bogeys on a radar, and I picked them off, one by one. Victory was a cure-all. Each time I passed another racer I got less and less sick. I was in fourteenth place when I saddled up, but by the time I approached the end of that ninety-mile leg there was only one man in front of me. Gary Wang, the favorite in the race.

As I hammered toward the finish line I could see a reporter and photographer from *Triathlete* magazine interviewing him. None of them expected to see me that close to the leader, and they all watched me carefully. During the four months since Badwater, I'd often dreamt of being in position to win an ultra race, and as I coasted past Gary and those

reporters, I knew the moment had arrived, and my expectations were intergalactic.

The following morning, we lined up for the second stage, a 171-mile bike ride through the mountains and back toward the west coast. Gary Wang had a buddy in the race, Jeff Landauer, aka the Land Shark, and those two rode together. Gary had done the race before and knew the terrain. I didn't, and by mile one hundred, I was roughly six minutes off the lead.

As usual, my mother and Kate were my two-headed support crew. They handed me replacement water bottles, packets of GU, and protein drinks from the side of the road, which I consumed in motion to keep my glycogen and electrolyte levels up. I'd become much more scientific about my nutrition since that Myoplex and Ritz cracker meltdown in San Diego, and with the biggest climb of the day looming into view I needed to be ready to roar. On a bicycle, mountains produce pain, and pain was my business. As the road peaked in pitch, I put my head down and hammered as hard as I could. My lungs heaved until they were flipped inside out and back again. My heart was a pounding bass line. When I crested the pass, my mom pulled up alongside me and hollered, "David, you are two minutes off the lead!"

Roger that!

I curled into an aerodynamic crouch and shot downhill at over 40 mph. My borrowed Griffin was equipped with aero bars and I leaned over them, focusing only on the white dotted line and my perfect form. When the road leveled off I went all out and kept my pace up around 27 mph. I had a Land Shark and his buddy on an industrial-sized hook, and was reeling them all the way in.

Until my front tire blew.

Before I had time to react, I was off the bike, somersaulting over the handlebars into space. I could see it happening in slow motion, but time sped back up when I crash landed on my right side and my shoulder crumpled with blunt force. The side of my face skidded the asphalt until I stopped moving, and I rolled onto my back in shock. My mother slammed on her brakes, leapt from the car, and rushed over. I was bleeding in five places, but

nothing felt broken. Except my helmet, which was cracked in two, my sunglasses, which were shattered, and my bicycle.

I'd run over a bolt that pierced the tire, tube, and rim. I didn't pay attention to my road rash, the pain in my shoulder, or the blood dribbling down my elbow and cheek. All I thought about was that bicycle. Once again, I was underprepared! I had no spare parts and didn't have any clue how to change a tube or a tire. I had rented a back-up bicycle which was in my mom's rental car, but it was heavy and slow compared to that Griffin. It didn't even have clip in pedals, so I called for the official race mechanics to assess the Griffin. As we waited, seconds piled up into twenty precious minutes and when mechanics arrived, they didn't have supplies to fix my front wheel either, so I hopped on my clunky back-up and kept rolling.

I tried not to think of bad luck and missed opportunities. I needed to finish strong and get myself within striking distance by the end of the day, because day three would bring a double marathon, and I was convinced that I was the best runner in the field. Sixteen miles from the finish line, the bike mechanic tracked me down. He'd repaired my Griffin! I switched out my hardware for the second time and made up eight minutes on the leaders, finishing the day in third place, twenty-two minutes off the lead.

I crafted a simple strategy for day three. Go out hard and build up a fat cushion over Gary and the Land Shark so that when I hit the inevitable wall, I'd have enough distance to maintain the overall lead all the way to the finish line. In other words, I didn't have any strategy at all.

I began my run at Boston Marathon qualifying pace. I pushed hard because I wanted my competitors to hear my splits and forfeit their souls as I built that big lead I'd anticipated. I knew I would blow up somewhere. That's ultra life. I just hoped it would happen late enough in the race that Gary and the Land Shark would be content to race one another for second and give up all hope of winning the overall title.

Didn't happen quite like that.

At mile thirty-five I was already in agony and walking more than I was running. By mile forty, I watched both enemy vehicles pull up so their crew

chiefs could peep my form. I was showing a ton of weakness, which gave Gary and the Land Shark ammunition. The miles mounted too slowly. I hemorrhaged time. Luckily, by mile forty-five, Gary had blown up too, but the Land Shark was rock solid, still on my tail, and I didn't have anything left to fight him off. Instead, as I suffered and staggered toward downtown Kona, my lead evaporated.

In the end, the Land Shark taught me a vital lesson. From day one, he had run his own race. My early burst on day three didn't faze him. He welcomed it as the ill-conceived strategy that it was, focused on his own pace, waited me out, and took *my* soul. I was the first athlete to cross the finish line of the Ultraman that year, but as far as the clock was concerned I was no winner. While I came in first place on the run, I lost the overall race by ten minutes and took second place. The Land Shark was crowned Ultraman!

I watched him celebrate knowing exactly how I'd wasted an opportunity to win. I'd lost my vantage point. I'd never evaluated the race strategically and didn't have any backstops in place. Backstops are a versatile tool that I employ in all facets of my life. I was lead navigator when I operated in Iraq with the SEAL Teams, and "backstop" is a navigation term. It's the mark I made on my map. An alert that we'd missed a turn or veered off course.

Let's say you're navigating through the woods and you have to go one click toward a ridgeline, then make a turn. In the military, we would do a map study ahead of time and mark that turn on our maps, and another point about 200 meters past that turn, and a third an additional 150 meters past the second mark. Those last two marks are your backstops. Typically, I used terrain features, like roads, creeks, a giant cliff in the countryside, or landmark buildings in an urban setting, so that when we hit them I knew we'd gone off course. That's what backstops are for, to tell you to turn around, reassess, and take an alternative route to accomplish the same mission. I never left our base in Iraq without having three exit strategies. A primary route and two others, pinned to backstops, we could fall back to if our main route became compromised.

On day three of Ultraman, I tried to win with sheer will. I was all motor, no intellect. I didn't evaluate my condition, respect my opponents' heart, or manage the clock well enough. I had no primary strategy, let alone

alternative avenues to victory, and therefore I had no idea where to employ backstops. In retrospect I should have paid more attention to my own clock, and my backstops should have been placed on my split times. When I saw how fast I was running that first marathon, I should have been alarmed and eased off the gas. A slower first marathon may have left me with enough energy to drop the hammer once we were back in the lava fields on the Ironman course, heading toward the finish line. That's when you take someone's soul—at the end of a race, not at the beginning. I'd raced hard, but if I'd run smarter and handled the bike situation better, I would have given myself a better chance to win.

Still, coming in second place at Ultraman was no disaster. I raised good money for families in need and booked more positive ink for the SEALs in *Triathlete* and *Competitor* magazines. Navy brass took notice. One morning, I was called into a meeting with Admiral Ed Winters, a two-star Admiral and the top man at Naval Special Warfare Command. When you're an enlisted guy and hear an Admiral wants a word, you become extremely nervous. He wasn't supposed to seek me out. There was a chain of command in place specifically to prevent conversations between Rear Admirals and enlisted men like me. Without any warning that was all out the window, and I had a feeling it was my own fault.

Thanks to the positive media I'd generated, I had received orders to join the recruitment division in 2007, and by the time I was ordered into the Admiral's office I'd done plenty of public speaking on behalf of the Navy SEALs. But I was different than most of the other recruiters. I didn't just parrot the Navy's script. I always included my own life story, off the cuff. As I waited outside the Admiral's office I closed my eyes and flipped through memory files, searching for when and how I'd overstepped and embarrassed the SEALs. I was the picture of tension, sitting stiff and alert, sweating through my uniform when he opened the door to his office.

"Goggins," he said, "good to see you, come on in." I opened my eyes, followed him inside, and stood straight as an arrow, locked at attention. "Sit down," he said with a smile, gesturing to a chair facing his desk. I sat, but maintained my posture and avoided all eye contact. Admiral Winters sized me up.

He was in his late fifties, and though he appeared relaxed, he maintained perfect posture. To become an Admiral is to rise through the ranks of tens of thousands. He'd been a SEAL since 1981, was an Operations Officer at DEVGRU (Naval Special Warfare Development Group), and a Commander in Afghanistan and Iraq. At each stop he stood taller than the rest, and was among the strongest, smartest, shrewdest, and most charismatic men the Navy had ever seen. He also fit a certain standard. Admiral Winters was the ultimate insider, and I was as outside the box as you could get in the United States Navy.

"Hey, relax," he said, "you aren't in any trouble. You're doing a great job in recruiting." He gestured to a file on his otherwise immaculate desk. It was filled with some of my clips. "You're representing us really well. But there's some men out there we need to do a better job of reaching out to, and I'm hoping you can help."

That's when it finally hit me. A two-star Admiral needed my help.

The trouble we faced as an organization, he said, was that we were terrible at recruiting African Americans into the SEAL Teams. I knew that already. Black people made up only 1 percent of all special forces, even though we are 13 percent of the general population. I was just the thirty-sixth African American ever to graduate BUD/S, and one of the reasons for that was we weren't hitting the best places to recruit black men into the SEAL Teams, and we didn't have the right recruiters either. The military likes to think of itself as a pure meritocracy (it isn't), which is why for decades this issue was ignored. I called Admiral Winters recently, and he had this to say about the problem, which was originally flagged by the Pentagon during the second Bush administration and sent to the Admiral's desk to fix.

"We were missing an opportunity to get great athletes into the teams and make the teams better," he said, "and we had places we needed to send people where, if they looked like me, they would be compromised."

In Iraq, Admiral Winters made his name building elite counter terrorism forces. That's one of the primary missions in special forces: to train allied military units so they can control social cancers like terrorism and drug trafficking and maintain stability within borders. By 2007, Al Qaeda had

made inroads into Africa, allied with existing extremist networks including Boko Haram and al Shabaab, and there was talk of building up counterterrorism forces in Somalia, Chad, Nigeria, Mali, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Our operations in Niger made international news in 2018 when four American special operations soldiers were killed in an ambush, drawing public scrutiny to the mission. But back in 2007, almost nobody knew we were about to get involved in West Africa, or that we lacked the personnel to get it done. As I sat in his office, what I heard was the time had finally come when we needed black people in special forces and our military leaders were clueless as to how to meet that need and entice more of us into the fold.

It was all new information to me. I didn't know anything about the African threat. The only hostile terrain I knew about was in Afghanistan and Iraq. That is, until Admiral Winters dropped a whole new detail on me, and the military's problem officially became my problem. I'd report to my Captain and the Admiral, he said, and hit the road, visiting ten to twelve cities at a time, with a goal of spiking recruiting numbers in the POC (people of color) category.

We made the first stop on this new mission together. It was at Howard University, in Washington, D.C., probably the best known historically black university in America. We'd dropped in to speak to the football team, and though I knew almost nothing about historically black colleges and universities, I knew students who attended them aren't usually the type to think of the military as an optimal career choice. Thanks to our country's history and the rampant racism that continues to this day, black political thought trends left of center at these institutions, and if you're recruiting for the Navy SEALs, there are definitely better choices than the Howard University practice field to find a willing ear. But this new focus required work in hostile territory, not mass enthusiasm. We were looking for one or two great men at each stop.

The Admiral and I walked onto the field, dressed in uniform, and I noted suspicion and disregard in the eyes of our audience. Admiral Winters had planned to introduce me, but our icy reception told me we had to go another way.

“You were shy at first,” Admiral Winters remembered, “but when it was time to speak, you looked at me and said, ‘I got this, sir.’”

I launched right into my life story. I told those athletes what I’ve already told you, and said we were looking for guys with heart. Men who knew it was going to be hard tomorrow and the day after that and welcomed every challenge. Men who wanted to become better athletes, and smarter and more capable in all aspects of their life. We wanted guys who craved honor and purpose and were open-minded enough to face their deepest fears.

“By the time you were done you could have heard a pin drop,” Admiral Winters recalled.

From then on, I was given command of my own schedule and budget and leeway to operate, as long as I hit certain recruitment thresholds. I had to come up with my own material and knew that most people didn’t think they could ever become a Navy SEAL, so I broadened the message. I wanted everyone who heard me out to know that even if they didn’t walk in our direction they could still become more than they ever dreamed. I made sure to cover my life in its entirety so if anyone had any excuse, my story would void all that out. My main drive was to deliver hope that with or without the military anybody could change their life, so long as they kept an open mind, abandoned the path of least resistance, and sought out the difficult and most challenging tasks they could find. I was mining for diamonds in the rough like me.

From 2007–2009, I was on the road for 250 days a year and spoke to 500,000 people at high schools and universities. I spoke at inner city high schools in tough neighborhoods, at dozens of historically black colleges and universities, and at schools with all cultures, shapes, and shades well represented. I’d come a long way from fourth grade, when I couldn’t stand up in front of a class of twenty kids and say my own name without stuttering.

Teenagers are walking, talking lie detectors, but the kids who heard me speak bought into my message because everywhere I stopped, I also ran an ultra race and rolled my training runs and races into my overall recruitment strategy. I’d usually land in their town midweek, make my speeches, then

run a race on Saturday and Sunday. In one stretch in 2007, I ran an ultra almost every weekend. There were fifty-mile races, 100-kilometer races, 100-mile races, and longer ones too. I was all about spreading the Navy SEAL legend that I loved, and wanted to be true and living our ethos.

Essentially, I had two full-time jobs. My schedule was jammed full, and while I know that having the flexibility to manage my own time contributed to my ability to train for and compete on the ultra circuit, I still put in fifty hours a week at work, clocking in every day from about 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. My training hours came in addition to, not instead of, my work commitments.

I appeared at upwards of forty-five schools every month, and after each appearance I had to file an After Action Report (AAR), detailing how many separate events (an auditorium speech, a workout, etc.) I organized, how many kids I spoke to, and how many of those were actually interested. These AARs went directly to my Captain and the Admiral.

I learned quickly that I was my own best prop. Sometimes I'd dress in a SEAL T-shirt with a Trident on it, run fifty miles to a speaking engagement, and show up soaking wet. Or I would do push-ups for the first five minutes of my speech, or roll a pull-up bar out on stage and do pull-ups while I was talking. That's right, the stuff you see me do on social media isn't new. I've been living this life for eleven years!

Wherever I stopped, I invited the kids who were interested to come train with me before or after school, or crew on one of my ultra races. Word got out and soon the media—local television, print, and radio—showed up, especially if I was running between cities to get to the next gig. I had to be articulate, well groomed, and do well in the races I entered.

I remember landing in Colorado the week of the legendary Leadville 100 trail race. The school year had just started, and on my first night in Denver I mapped out the five schools on my roster in relation to the trails I wanted to hike and run. At each stop I'd invite the kids to train with me, but warn them that my day started early. At 3 a.m. I would drive to a trailhead, meet up with all the students who dared to show, and by 4 a.m. we'd begin power hiking up one of Colorado's fifty-eight summits above 14,000-feet. Then we'd

sprint down the mountain to strengthen our quads. At 9 a.m. I hit another school, and then another. After the bell rang, I worked out with the football, track, or swim teams at the schools I visited, then ran back into the mountains to train until sunset. All of that to recruit stud athletes and acclimatize for the highest altitude ultra marathon in the world.

The race started at 4 a.m. on a Saturday, departing from the city of Leadville, a working-class ski town with frontier roots, and traversing a network of beautiful and harsh Rocky Mountain trails that range from 9,200 feet to 12,600 feet in elevation. When I finished at 2 a.m. on Sunday, a teenager from Denver who attended a school I'd visited a few days earlier was waiting for me at the finish line. I didn't have a great race (I came in 14th place, rather than my typical top five), but I always made sure to finish strong, and when I sprinted home he approached me with a wide smile and said, "I drove two hours just to see you finish!"

The lesson: you never know who you're affecting. My poor race results meant less than nothing to that young man because I'd helped open his eyes to a new world of possibility and capability that he sensed within himself. He'd followed me from his high school auditorium to Leadville because he was looking for absolute proof—my finishing the race—that it *was* possible to transcend the typical and become more, and as I cooled down and toweled off he asked me for tips so he could one day run all day and night through the mountains in his backyard.

I have several stories like that. More than a dozen kids came out to pace and crew for me at the McNaughton Park Trail Race, a 150-miler held outside of Peoria, Illinois. Two dozen students trained with me in Minot, North Dakota. Together we ran the frozen tundra before sunrise in January when it was twenty below zero! Once I spoke at a school in a majority black neighborhood in Atlanta, and as I was leaving, a mother showed up with her two sons who had long dreamed of becoming Navy SEALs but kept it a secret because enlisting in the military wasn't considered cool in their neighborhood. When summer vacation broke out, I flew them to San Diego to live and train with me. I woke them up at 4 a.m. and beat them down on the beach like they were in a junior version of First Phase. They did not enjoy themselves, but they learned the truth about what it takes to live the ethos. Wherever I went, whether the students were interested in a military

career or not, they always asked if they had the same hardware I had. Could they run a hundred miles in one day? What would it take to reach their full potential? This is what I'd tell them:

Our culture has become hooked on the quick-fix, the life hack, efficiency. Everyone is on the hunt for that simple action algorithm that nets maximum profit with the least amount of effort. There's no denying this attitude may get you some of the trappings of success, if you're lucky, but it will not lead to a calloused mind or self-mastery. If you want to master the mind and remove your governor, you'll have to become addicted to hard work. Because passion and obsession, even talent, are only useful tools if you have the work ethic to back them up.

My work ethic is the single most important factor in all of my accomplishments. Everything else is secondary, and when it comes to hard work, whether in the gym or on the job, The 40% Rule applies. To me, a forty-hour workweek is a 40 percent effort. It may be satisfactory, but that's another word for mediocrity. Don't settle for a forty-hour workweek. There are 168 hours in a week! That means you have the hours to put in that extra time at work without skimping on your exercise. It means streamlining your nutrition, spending quality time with your wife and kids. It means scheduling your life like you're on a twenty-four-hour mission every single day.

The number one excuse I hear from people as to why they don't work out as much as they want to is that they don't have time. Look, we all have work obligations, none of us want to lose sleep, and you'll need time with the family or they'll trip out. I get it, and if that's your situation, you must win the morning.

When I was full-time with the SEALs I maximized the dark hours before dawn. When my wife was sleeping, I would bang out a six- to ten-mile run. My gear was all laid out the night before, my lunch was packed, and my work clothes were in my locker at work where I'd shower before my day started at 7:30 a.m. On a typical day, I'd be out the door for my run just after 4 a.m. and back by 5:15 a.m. Since that wasn't enough for me, and because we only owned one car, I rode my bike (I finally got my own!) twenty-five miles to work. I'd work from 7:30 a.m. to noon, and eat at my desk before or after my lunch break. During the lunch hour I'd hit the gym or do a four- to

six-mile beach run, work the afternoon shift and hop on my bike for the twenty-five-mile ride home. By the time I was home at 7 p.m., I'd have run about fifteen miles, rocked fifty miles on the bike, and put in a full day at the office. I was always home for dinner and in bed by 10 p.m. so I could do it all over again the next day. On Saturdays I'd sleep in until 7 a.m., hit a three-hour workout, and spend the rest of the weekend with Kate. If I didn't have a race, Sundays were my active recovery days. I'd do an easy ride at a low heart rate, keeping my pulse below 110 beats per minute to stimulate healthy blood flow.

Maybe you think I'm a special case or an obsessive maniac. Fine, I won't argue with you. But what about my friend Mike? He's a big-time financial advisor in New York City. His job is high pressure and his workday is a lot longer than eight hours. He has a wife and two kids, and he's an ultra runner. Here's how he does it. He wakes up at 4 a.m. every weekday, runs sixty to ninety minutes each morning while his family is still snoozing, rides a bike to work and back and does a quick thirty-minute treadmill run after he gets home. He goes out for longer runs on weekends, but he minimizes its impact on his family obligations.

He's high-powered, wealthy, and could easily maintain his status quo with less effort and enjoy the sweet fruits of his labors, but he finds a way to stay hard because his labors are his sweetest fruits. And he makes time to get it all in by minimizing the amount of nonsense clogging his schedule. His priorities are clear, and he remains dedicated to his priorities. I'm not talking about general priorities here either. Each hour of his week is dedicated to a particular task and when that hour shows up in real time, he focuses 100 percent on that task. That's how I do it too, because that is the only way to minimize wasted hours.

Evaluate your life in its totality! We all waste so much time doing meaningless things. We burn hours on social media and watching television, which by the end of the year would add up to entire days and weeks if you tabulated time like you do your taxes. You should, because if you knew the truth you'd deactivate your Facebook account STAT, and cut your cable. When you find yourself having frivolous conversations or becoming ensnared in activities that don't better you in any way, move on!

For years I've lived like a monk. I don't see or spend time with a lot of people. My circle is very tight. I post on social media once or twice a week and I never check anybody else's feeds because I don't follow anyone. That's just me. I'm not saying you need to be that unforgiving, because you and I probably don't share the same goals. But I know you have goals too, and room for improvement, or you wouldn't be reading my book, and I guarantee that if you audited your schedule you'd find more time for the things that will improve your life.

It's up to you to find ways to eviscerate the hollow hours. How much time do you spend at the dinner table talking about nothing after the meal is done? How many calls and texts do you send for no reason at all? Look at your whole life, list your obligations and tasks. Put a time stamp on them. How many hours are required to shop, eat, and clean? How much sleep do you need? What's your commute like? Can you make it there under your own power? Block everything into windows of time, and once your day is scheduled out, you'll know how much flexibility you have to exercise on a given day and how to maximize it.

Perhaps you aren't looking to get fit, but have been dreaming of starting a business of your own, or have always wanted to learn a language or an instrument you're obsessed with. Fine, the same rule applies. Analyze your schedule, kill your empty habits, burn out the time-wasters, and see what's left. Is it one hour per day? Three? Now maximize that. That means listing your prioritized tasks every hour of the day. You can even narrow it down to fifteen-minute windows, and don't forget to include backstops in your day-to-day schedule. Remember how I forgot to include backstops in my race plan at Ultraman? You need backstops in your day-to-day schedule too. If one task bleeds into overtime, make sure you know it, and begin to transition into your next prioritized task straight away. Use your smartphone for productivity hacks, not click bait. Turn on your calendar alerts. Have those alarms set.

If you audit your life, skip the time-wasting nonsense, and use backstops, you'll find time to do everything you need and want to do. But remember that you also need rest, so schedule that in. Listen to your body, sneak in those ten- to twenty-minute power naps when necessary, and take one full rest day per week. If it's a rest day, truly allow your mind and body to relax.

Turn your phone off. Keep the computer shut down. A rest day means you should be relaxed, hanging with friends or family, and eating and drinking well, so you can recharge and get back at it. It's not a day to lose yourself in technology or stay hunched at your desk in the form of a question mark.

The whole point of the twenty-four-hour mission is to keep up a championship pace, not for a season or a year, but for your entire life! That requires quality rest and recovery time. Because there is no finish line. There is always more to learn, and you will always have weaknesses to strengthen if you want to become as hard as woodpecker lips. Hard enough to hammer countless miles, and finish strong!

* * *

In 2008, I was back in Kona for the Ironman World Championships. I was in peak visibility mode for the Navy SEALs, and Commander Keith Davids, one of the best athletes I ever saw in the SEAL Teams, and I were slated to do the race. The NBC Sports broadcast tracked our every move and turned our race within the race into a feature the announcers could cut to between clocking the main contenders.

Our entrance was straight out of a Hollywood pitch meeting. While most athletes were deep into their pre-race rituals and getting psyched up for the longest day of their racing lives, we buzzed overhead in a C-130, jumped from 1,500 feet, and parachuted into the water, where we were scooped up by a Zodiac and motored to shore just four minutes before the gun. That was barely enough time for a blast of energy gel, a swig of water, and to change into our Navy SEAL triathlon suits.

You know by now that I'm slow in the water, and Davids destroyed me on the 2.4-mile swim. I'm just as strong as he is on a bicycle, but my lower back tightened up that day and at the halfway point I had to stop and stretch out. By the time I coasted into the transition area after a 112-mile bike ride, Davids had thirty minutes on me, and early on in the marathon, I didn't do a great job of getting any of it back. My body was rebelling and I had to walk those early miles, but I stayed in the fight, and at mile ten found a rhythm and started clipping time. Somewhere ahead of me Davids blew up, and I inched closer. For a few miles I could see him plodding in the distance,

suffering in those lava fields, heat shimmering off the asphalt in sheets. I knew he wanted to beat me because he was a proud man. He was an Officer, a great operator, and a stud athlete. I wanted to beat him too. That's how Navy SEALs are wired, and I could have blown by him, but as I got closer I told myself to humble up. I caught him with just over two miles to go. He looked at me with a mix of respect and hilarious exasperation.

"Goggins," he said with a smile. We'd jumped into the water together, started the race together, and we were gonna finish this thing together. We ran side by side for the final two miles, crossed the finish line, and hugged it out. It was terrific television.

At the Kona Ironman finish line with Keith Davids

* * *

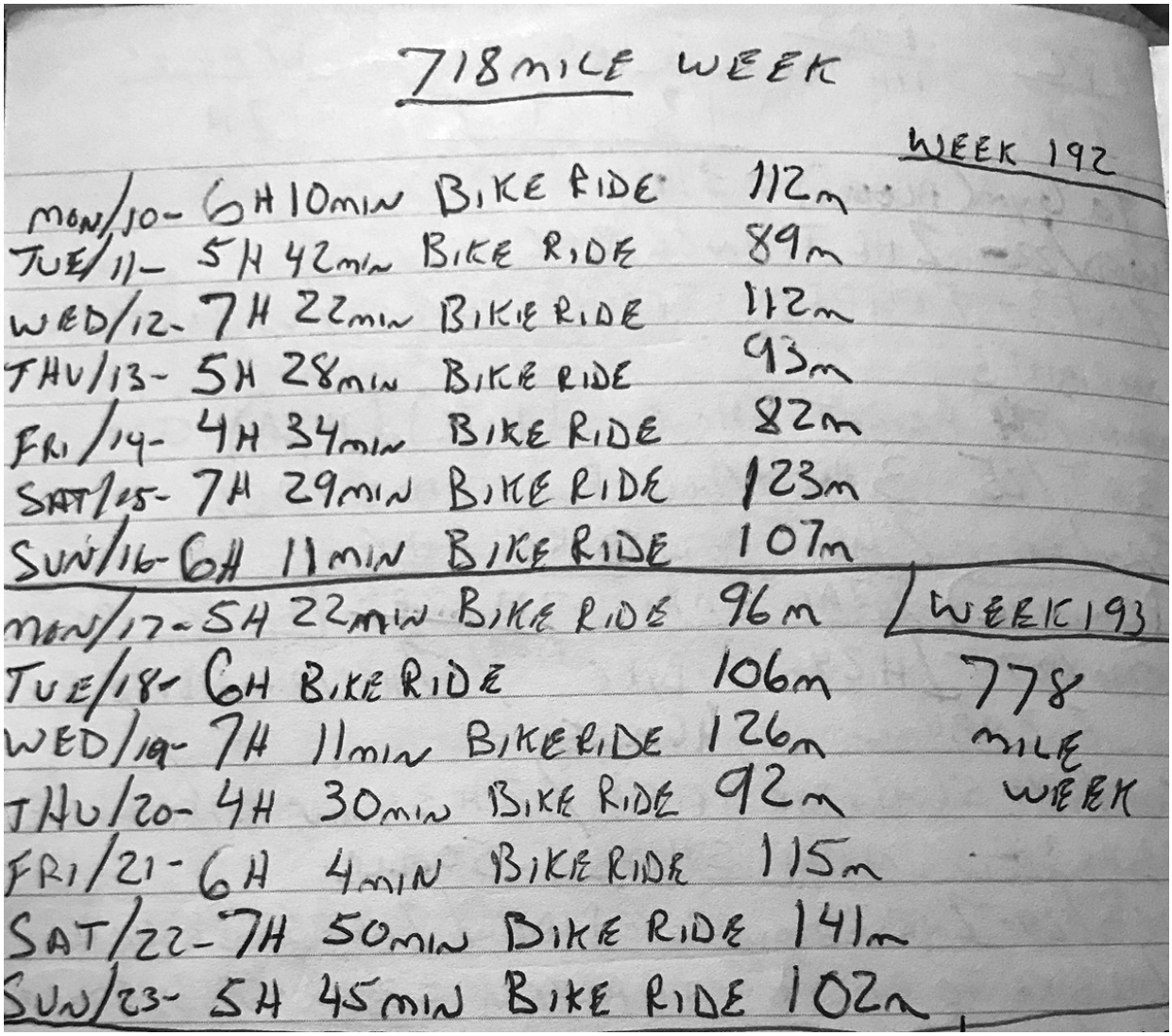
Everything was going well in my life. My career was spit-shined and gleaming, I'd made a name for myself in the sports world, and I had plans to get back onto the battlefield like a Navy SEAL should. But sometimes, even when you are doing everything right in life, storms appear and multiply. Chaos can and will descend without warning, and when (not if) that happens, there won't be anything you can do to stop it.

If you're fortunate, the issues or injuries are relatively minor, and when those incidents crop up it's on you to adjust and stay after it. If you get injured or other complications arise that prevent you from working on your primary passion, refocus your energy elsewhere. The activities we pursue tend to be our strengths because it's fun to do what we're great at. Very few people enjoy working on their weaknesses, so if you're a terrific runner with a knee injury that will prevent you from running for twelve weeks, that is a great time to get into yoga, increasing your flexibility and your overall strength, which will make you a better and less injury-prone athlete. If you're a guitar player with a broken hand, sit down at the keys and use your one good hand to become a more versatile musician. The point is not to allow a setback to shatter our focus, or our detours to dictate our mindset. Always be ready to adjust, recalibrate, and stay after it to become better, somehow.

The sole reason I work out like I do isn't to prepare for and win ultra races. I don't have an athletic motive at all. It's to prepare my mind for life itself. Life will always be the most grueling endurance sport, and when you train hard, get uncomfortable, and callous your mind, you will become a more versatile competitor, trained to find a way forward no matter what. Because there will be times when life comes at you like a sledgehammer. Sometimes life hits you dead in the heart.

My two-year stint on recruitment detail was due to end in 2009, and while I enjoyed my time inspiring the next gen, I was looking forward to getting back out and operating in the field. But before I left my post I planned one more big splash. I would ride a bicycle from the beach in San Diego to Annapolis, Maryland, in a legendary endurance road race, the Race Across America. The race was in June, so from January to May I spent all my free

time on the bike. I woke up at 4 a.m. and rode 110 miles before work, then rode twenty to thirty miles home at the end of a long workday. On weekends I put in at least one 200-mile day, and averaged over 700 miles per week. The race would take about two weeks to complete, there would be very little sleep involved, and I wanted to be ready for the greatest athletic challenge of my entire life.



My RAAM training log

Then in early May everything capsized. Like a malfunctioning appliance, my heart went on the blink, almost overnight. For years my resting pulse rate was in the thirties. Suddenly it was in the seventies and eighties and any activity would spike it until I verged on collapse. It was as if I'd sprung a

leak, and all my energy had been sucked from my body. A simple five-minute bike ride would send my heart racing to 150 beats per minute. It pounded uncontrollably during a short walk up a single flight of stairs.

At first I thought it was from overtraining and when I went to the doctor, he agreed, but scheduled an echocardiogram for me at Balboa Hospital just in case. When I went in for the test, the tech gelled up his all-knowing receiver and rolled it over my chest to get the angles he'd need while I lay on my left side, my head away from his monitor. He was a talker and kept talking about a whole lot of nothing while he checked out all my chambers and valves. Everything looked solid, he said, until suddenly, forty-five minutes into the procedure, this chatty dude stopped talking. Instead of his voice, I heard a lot of clicking and zooming. Then he left the room and reappeared with another tech a few minutes later. They clicked, zoomed, and whispered, but didn't let me in on their big secret.

When people in white coats are treating your heart as a puzzle to be solved right in front of you, it's hard not to think that you're probably pretty messed up. Part of me wanted answers immediately, because I was terrified, but I didn't want to show weakness, so I opted to stay calm and let the professionals work. Within a few minutes two other men walked into the room. One of them was a cardiologist. He took over the wand, rolled it on my chest, and peered into the monitor with one short nod. Then he patted me on the shoulder like I was his intern, and said, "Okay, let's talk."

"You have an Atrial Septal Defect," he said as we stood in the hallway, his techs and nurses pacing back and forth, disappearing into and reappearing from rooms on either side of us. I stared straight ahead and said nothing until he realized I had no idea what he was talking about. "You have a hole in your heart." He scrunched his forehead and stroked his chin. "A pretty good-sized one too."

"Holes don't just open in your heart, do they?"

"No, no," he said with a laugh, "you were born with it."

He went on to explain that the hole was in the wall between my right and left atria, which was a problem because when you have a hole between the

chambers in your heart, oxygenated blood mixes with the non-oxygenated blood. Oxygen is an essential element that every single one of our cells needs to survive. According to the doctor, I was only supplying about half of the necessary oxygen my muscles and organs needed for optimal performance.

That leads to swelling in the feet and abdomen, heart palpitations, and occasional bouts of shortness of breath. It certainly explained the fatigue I'd been feeling recently. It also impacts the lungs, he said, because it floods the pulmonary blood vessels with more blood than they can handle, which makes it much more difficult to recover from overexertion and illness. I flashed back to all the issues I had recovering after contracting double pneumonia during my first Hell Week. The fluid I had in my lungs never fully receded. During subsequent Hell Weeks, and after getting into ultras, I found myself hocking up phlegm during and after finishing races. Some nights, there was so much fluid in me I couldn't sleep. I'd just sit up and spit phlegm into empty Gatorade bottles, wondering when that boring ritual would play itself out. Most people, when they become ultra obsessed, may deal with overuse injuries, but their cardiovascular system is finely tuned. Even though I was able to compete and accomplish so much with my broken body, I never felt that great. I'd learned to endure and overcome, and as the doctor continued to download the essentials I realized that for the first time in my entire life, I'd also been pretty lucky. You know, the backhanded brand of luck where you have a hole in your heart, but are thanking God that it hasn't killed you…yet.

Because when you have an ASD like mine and you dive deep under water, gas bubbles, which are supposed to travel through the pulmonary blood vessels to be filtered through the lungs, might leak from that hole upon ascent, and recirculate as weaponized embolisms that can clog blood vessels in the brain and lead to a stroke, or block an artery to the heart, and cause cardiac arrest. It's like diving with a dirty bomb floating inside you, never knowing when or where it might go off.

I wasn't alone in this fight. One out of every ten children are born with this same defect, but in most cases the hole closes on its own, and surgery isn't required. In just under 2,000 American children each year, surgery is required, but is usually administered before a patient starts school, because

there are better screening processes these days. Most people my age who were born with ASD left the hospital in their mothers' arms and lived with a potential deadly problem without a clue. Until, like me, their heart started giving them trouble in their thirties. If I had ignored my warning signs, I could have dropped dead during a four-mile run.

That's why if you're in the military and are diagnosed with an ASD, you can't jump out of airplanes or scuba dive, and if anyone had known of my condition there is no way the Navy ever would have let me become a SEAL. It's astonishing I even made it through Hell Week, Badwater, or any of those other races.

"I'm truly amazed you could do all you've done with this condition," the doctor said.

I nodded. He thought I was a medical marvel, some kind of outlier, or simply a gifted athlete blessed with amazing luck. To me, it was just further evidence that I didn't owe my accomplishments to God-given talent or great genetics. I had a hole in my heart! I was running on a tank perpetually half full, and that meant my life was absolute proof of what's possible when someone dedicates themselves to harnessing the full power of the human mind.

Three days later I was in surgery.

And boy did the doctor botch that one up. First off, the anesthesia didn't take all the way, which meant I was half awake as the surgeon sliced into my inner thigh, inserted a catheter into my femoral artery, and once it reached my heart, deployed a helix patch through that catheter and moved it into place, supposedly patching the hole in my heart. Meanwhile, they had a camera down my throat, which I could feel as I gagged and struggled to endure the two-hour-long procedure. After all of that, my troubles were supposed to have been over. The doctor mentioned that it would take time for my heart tissue to grow around and seal the patch, but after a week he cleared me for light exercise.

Roger that, I thought, as I dropped to the floor to do a set of push-ups as soon as I got home. Almost immediately my heart went into atrial

fibrillation, also known as A-fib. My pulse spiked from 120 to 230, back to 120 then up to 250. I felt dizzy and had to sit down as I stared at my heart rate monitor, while my breathing normalized. Once again my resting heart rate was in the eighties. In other words, nothing had changed. I called the cardiologist who tagged it a minor side effect and begged patience. I took him at his word and rested for a few more days then hopped on the bike for an easy ride home from work. At first all went well but after about fifteen miles, my heart went into A-fib once again. My pulse rate bounced from 120 to 230 and back again across the imaginary graph in my mind's eye with no rhythm whatsoever. Kate drove me straight to Balboa Hospital. After that visit, and second and third opinions, it was clear that the patch had either failed or was insufficient to cover the entire hole, and that I'd need a second heart surgery.

The Navy didn't want any part of that. They feared further complications and suggested I scale back my lifestyle, accept my new normal, and a retirement package. Yeah, right. Instead, I found a better doctor at Balboa who said we'd have to wait several months before we could even contemplate another heart surgery. In the meantime, I couldn't jump or dive, and obviously couldn't operate in the field, so I stayed in recruitment. It was a different life, no doubt, and I was tempted to feel sorry for myself. After all, this thing that hit me out of the clear blue changed the entire landscape of my military career, but I'd been training for life, not ultra races, and I refused to hang my head.

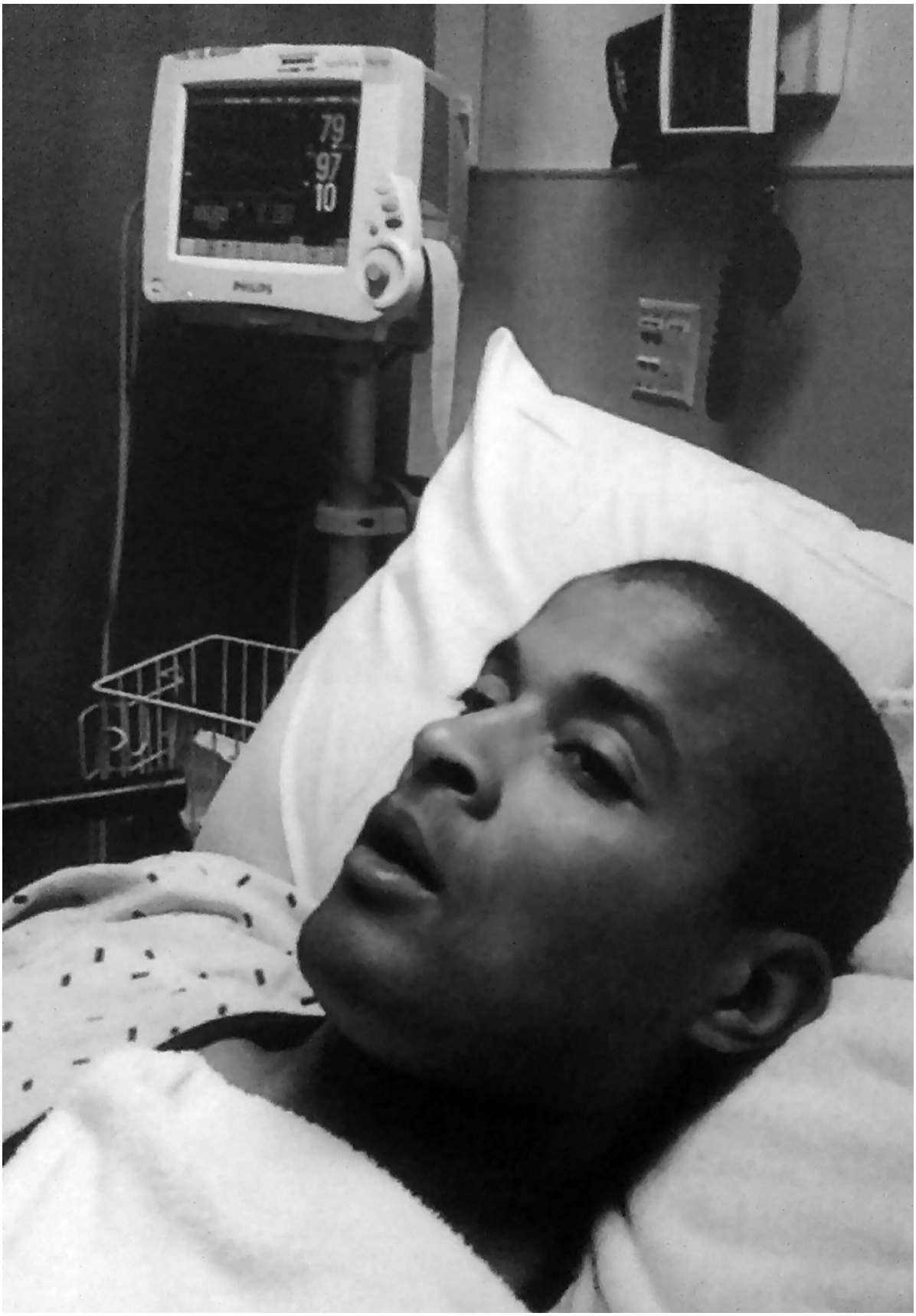
I knew that if I maintained a victim's mentality I wouldn't get anything at all out of a jacked-up situation, and I didn't want to sit home defeated all day long. So I used the time to perfect my recruitment presentation. I wrote up sterling AARs and became much more detail oriented in my administrative work. Does that sound boring to you? Oh yes, it was boring! But it was honest, necessary work, and I used it to keep my mind sharp for when the moment came that I'd be able to drop back into the fight for real.

Or so I hoped.

A full fourteen months after the first surgery, I was once again rolling through a hospital corridor on my back, staring at the fluorescent lights in the ceiling, headed to pre-op, with no guarantees. While the techs and nurses

shaved me down and prepped me up, I thought about all I'd accomplished in the military and wondered, was it enough? If the docs couldn't fix me this time would I be willing to retire, satisfied? That question lingered in my head until the anesthesiologist placed an oxygen mask over my face and counted down softly in my ear. Just before lights out, I heard the answer erupt from the abyss of my jet-black soul.

Not today!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After second heart surgery

CHALLENGE #8

Schedule it in!

It's time to compartmentalize your day. Too many of us have become multitaskers, and that's created a nation of people who get lots of things halfway done. This will be a three-week challenge. During week one, go about your normal schedule, but take notes. When do you work? Are you working nonstop or checking your phone (the Moment app will tell you)? How long are your meal breaks? When do you exercise, watch TV, or chat to friends? How long is your commute? Are you driving? I want you to get super detailed and document it all with timestamps. This will be your baseline, and you'll find plenty of fat to trim. Most people waste four to five hours on a given day, and if you can learn to identify and utilize it, you'll be on your way toward increased productivity.

In week two, build an optimal schedule. Lock everything into place in fifteen- to thirty-minute blocks. Some tasks will take multiple blocks or entire days. Fine. When you work, only work on one thing at a time, think about the task in front of you and pursue it relentlessly. When it comes time for the next task on your schedule, place that first one aside, and apply the same focus.

Make sure your meal breaks are adequate but not open-ended, and schedule in exercise and rest too. But when it's time to rest, actually rest. No checking email or wasting time on social media. If you are going to work hard you must also rest your brain.

Make notes with timestamps in week two. You may still find some residual dead space. By week three, you should have a working schedule that maximizes your effort without sacrificing sleep. Post photos of your schedule, with the hashtags #canthurtme #talentnotrequired.

CHAPTER NINE

UNCOMMON AMONGST UNCOMMON

THE ANESTHESIA TOOK HOLD, AND I FELT MYSELF WHEELING BACKWARD UNTIL I landed in a scene from my past. We were humping through the jungle in the dead of night. Our movement was stealthy and silent, but swift. Had to be. He who hits first wins the fight, most of the time.

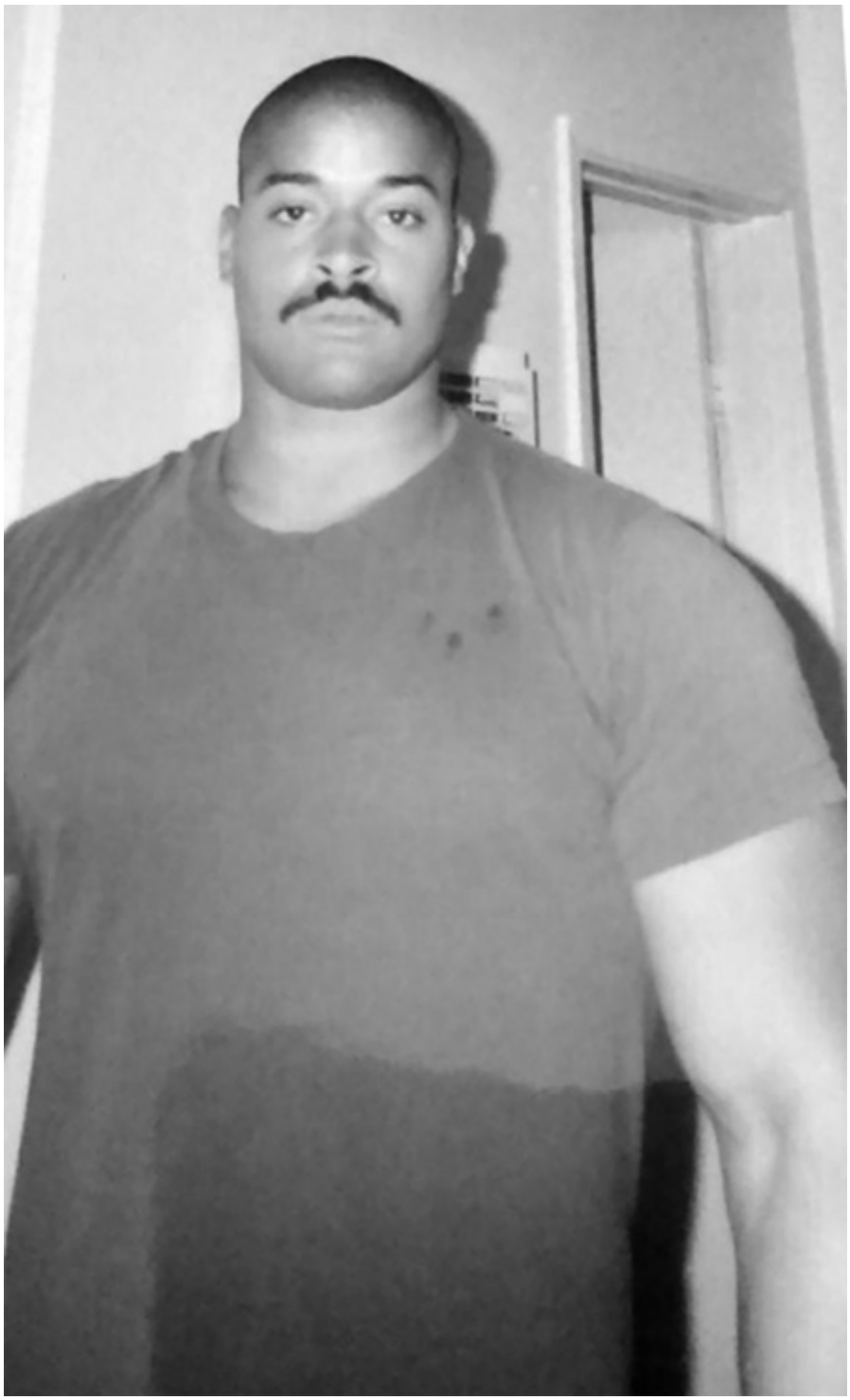
We crested a pass, took shelter beneath a thick stand of towering mahogany trees in the triple canopy jungle, and tracked our targets through night vision goggles. Even without sunlight, the tropical heat was intense and sweat slid down the side of my face like dew drops on a windowpane. I was twenty-seven years old, and my *Platoon* and *Rambo* fever dreams had become real. I blinked twice, exhaled, and on the OIC's signal, opened fire.

My entire body reverberated with the rhythm of the M60, a belt-fed machine gun, firing 500–650 rounds per minute. As the one-hundred-round belt fed the growling machine and flared from the barrel, adrenaline flooded my bloodstream and saturated my brain. My focus narrowed. There was nothing else but me, my weapon, and the target I was shredding with zero apologies.

It was 2002, I was fresh out of BUD/S, and as a full-time Navy SEAL, I was now officially one of the world's most fit and deadly warriors and one of the hardest men alive. Or so I thought, but this was years before my descent into the ultra rabbit hole. September 11th was still a fresh, gaping wound in the American collective consciousness, and its ripple effects changed everything for guys like us. Combat was no longer a mythical state of mind we aspired to. It was real and ongoing in the mountains, villages, and cities of Afghanistan. Meanwhile, we were moored in Malaysia, awaiting orders, hoping to join the fight.

And we trained like it.

After BUD/S, I moved on to SEAL Qualification Training, where I officially earned my Trident before landing in my first platoon. Training continued with jungle warfare exercises in Malaysia. We rappelled and fast-roped up and down from hovering helicopters. Some men were trained as snipers, and since I was the biggest man in the unit—my weight was back up to 250 pounds by then—I scored the job of carrying the Pig, the nickname for the M60 because it sounded like the grunt of a barnyard hog.



SQT graduation (note the blood stains from the Trident being punched into my chest)

Most people dreaded Pig detail, but I was obsessed with that gun. The weapon alone was twenty pounds, and each belt of one-hundred rounds weighed in at seven pounds. I carried six to seven of those (one on the gun,

four on my waist, and one in a pouch strapped to my rucksack), the weapon, and my fifty-pound ruck everywhere we went and was expected to move just as fast as everyone else. I had no choice. We train as we fight, and live ammo is necessary to mimic true combat so we could perfect the SEAL battle maxim: shoot, move, communicate.

That meant keeping barrel discretion on point. We couldn't let our weapon spray just anywhere. That's how friendly fire incidents happen, and it takes great muscle discipline and attention to detail to know where you're aiming in relation to the location of your teammates at all times, especially when armed with the Pig. Maintaining a high standard of safety and delivering deadly force on-target when duty calls is what makes an average SEAL a good operator.

Most people think once you're a SEAL you're always in the circle, but that's not true. I learned quickly that we were constantly being judged, and the second I was unsafe, whether I was still a new guy or a veteran operator, I'd be out! I was one of three new guys in my first platoon, and one of them had to have his gun taken away because he was so unsafe. For ten days, we moved through the Malaysian jungle, sleeping in hammocks, paddling dugouts, carrying our weapons all day and night, and he was stuck hauling a broomstick like the Wicked Witch of the West. Even then he couldn't hack it and wound up getting booted. Our officers in that first platoon kept everybody honest, and I respected them for it.

"In combat, nobody just turns into Rambo," Dana De Coster told me recently. Dana was second in command on my first platoon with SEAL Team Five. These days he's Director of Operations at BUD/S. "We push ourselves hard so when bullets do start flying we fall back on really good training, and it's important that the point where we fall back is so high, we know we're gonna outperform the enemy. We may not become Rambo, but we'll be close."

A lot of people are fascinated by the weaponry and gunfights SEALs utilize and engage in, but that was never my favorite part of the job. I was good at it, but I preferred going to war with myself. I'm talking about strong physical training, and my first platoon delivered that too. We would go on long run-swim-runs most mornings before work. We weren't just getting

miles in either. We were competing, and our officers led from the front. Our OIC and Dana, his second, were two of the best athletes in the entire platoon and my Platoon Chief, Chris Beck (who now goes by Kristin Beck, and is one of the most famous trans women on Twitter; talk about being *the only!*), was one of the best operators in the Platoon.

“It’s funny,” Dana said, “[the OIC and I] never really talked about our philosophy on PT. We just competed. I wanted to beat him and he wanted to beat me, and that got people talking about how hard we were getting after it.”

There was never a doubt in my mind that Dana was off his rocker. I remember before we shipped out for Indonesia, with stops in Guam, Malaysia, Thailand, and Korea, we did a number of training dives off San Clemente Island. Dana was my swim buddy, and one morning he challenged me to do a training dive in fifty-five-degree water without a wetsuit because that’s how the predecessors to the SEALs did it when they prepared the beaches in Normandy for the famous D-Day invasion during World War II.

“Let’s go old school and dive in shorts with our dive knives,” he said.

He had the animalistic mentality I thrived on, and I wasn’t about to back down from that challenge. We swam and dove together all over Southeast Asia, where we trained elite military units in Malaysia and sharpened the skills of Thai Navy SEALs—the crew of frogmen who saved the soccer kids in the cave in the summer of 2018. They were engaged with an Islamist insurgency in South Thailand. Wherever we deployed, I loved those PT mornings above all else. Pretty soon, every man in that platoon was competing against everyone else, but no matter how hard I tried I couldn’t seem to catch our two officers and usually came in third place. Didn’t matter. It wasn’t important who won because everybody was capping personal bests almost every day, and that’s what stayed with me. The power of a competitive environment to amp up an entire platoon’s commitment and achievement!

This was exactly the environment I’d been dreaming of when I classed up for BUD/S. We were all living the SEAL ethos, and I couldn’t wait to see where it took us individually and as a unit once we tagged in to the fight. But

as war raged in Afghanistan, all we could do was sit tight and hope our number was called.

We were in a Korean bowling alley when we watched the invasion of Iraq together. It was seriously depressing. We had been training hard for an opportunity like that. Our foundation had been reinforced with all that PT, and filled out with robust weapons and tactical training. We'd become a deadly unit frothing to be a part of the action, and the fact that we were passed over again ticked us all off. So we took it out on one another every morning.

Navy SEALs were treated like rock stars at the bases we visited around the world, and some of the guys partied like it. In fact, most SEALs enjoyed their share of big nights out, but not me. I'd gotten into the SEALs by living a Spartan lifestyle and felt my job at night was to rest, recharge, and get my body and mind right for battle again the next day. I was forever mission-ready, and my attitude earned respect from some, but our OIC tried to influence me to let go a little and become "one of the boys."

I had great respect for our OIC. He'd graduated from the Naval Academy and the University of Cambridge. He was clearly smart, a stud athlete, and a great leader, on his way to claiming a coveted spot on DEVGRU, so his opinion mattered to me. It mattered to all of us, because he was responsible for evaluating us and those evaluations have a way of following you around and affecting your military career going forward.

On paper, my first evaluation was solid. He was impressed with my skills and all-out effort, but he also dropped some off the record wisdom. "You know, Goggins," he said, "you'd understand the job a little better if you hung out with the guys more. That's when I learn the most about operating in the field, hanging with the boys, hearing their stories. It's important to be part of the group."

His words were a reality check that hurt. Clearly, the OIC, and probably some of the other guys, thought I was a little different. Of course I was! I came from nothing! I didn't get recruited to the Naval Academy. I didn't even know where Cambridge was. I wasn't raised around pools. I had to teach myself to swim. Truth be told, I shouldn't have even been a SEAL, but

I made it, and I thought *that* made me part of the group, but now I realized I was part of the Teams—not the brotherhood.

I had to go out and socialize with the guys after hours to prove my value? That was a big ask for an introvert like me.

Little did they know, that was not an option for me.

I'd arrived in that platoon because of my intense dedication and I wasn't about to let up. While people were out at night I was reading up on tactics, weaponry, and war. I was a perpetual student! In my mind I was training for opportunities that didn't even exist yet. Back then you couldn't screen to join DEVGRU until after you finished your second platoon, but I was already preparing for that opportunity, and I refused to compromise who I was to conform to their unwritten rules.

DEVGRU (and the Army's Delta Force) are considered the very best within the best of special operations. They get the tip of the spear missions, like the Osama bin Laden raid, and from that point on, I decided I wouldn't and couldn't be satisfied just being a vanilla Navy SEAL. Yeah, we were all uncommon men compared to civilians, but now I saw I was uncommon even among the uncommon, and if that's who I was, then so be it. I may as well separate myself even more. Not long after that evaluation, I won the morning race for the first time. I passed up Dana and the OIC in the last half mile and never looked back.

Platoon assignments last for two years, and by the end of our deployment most of the guys were ready for a breather before tackling their next platoon, which judging by the wars we were involved in were almost guaranteed to take them into combat. I didn't want or need a break because the uncommon among uncommon don't take breaks!

After my first evaluation I started studying the other branches in the military (Coast Guard not included) and read up on their special forces. Navy SEALs like to think that we're the best of them all, but I wanted to see for myself. I suspected all the branches employed a few individuals who stood out in the worst environments. I was on a hunt to find and train with those guys because I knew they could make me better. Plus, I'd read that Army Ranger

School was known as one of the best, if not the best, leadership schools in the entire military, so during my first platoon, I put seven chits in with my OIC hoping to get approval to go to Army Ranger School between deployments. I wanted to sponge more knowledge, I told him, and become more skilled as a special operator.

Chits are special requests, and my first six were ignored. I was a new guy, after all, and some thought my focus should remain within Naval Special Warfare, rather than stray into the dreaded Army. But I'd earned my own reputation after serving two years in my first platoon, and my seventh request went up the ladder to the CO in charge of SEAL Team Five. When he signed off, I was in.

"Goggins," my OIC said after giving me the good news, "you are the type of guy who wishes you were a POW just to see if you have what it takes to last."

He was onto me. He knew the kind of person I was becoming—the type of man willing to challenge myself to the nth degree. We shook hands. The OIC was off to DEVGRU, and there was a chance we'd meet there soon. He told me that with two ongoing wars, for the first time DEVGRU had opened their recruitment process to include guys off their first platoon. By always searching for more and preparing my mind and body for opportunities that didn't yet exist, I was one of a handful of men on the West Coast approved by SEAL Team Five brass to screen for Green Team, the training program for DEVGRU, just before I left for Army Ranger School.

The Green Team screening process unfolds over two days. The first day is the physical fitness portion, which included a three-mile run, a 1,200-meter swim, three minutes of sit-ups and push-ups, and a max set of pull-ups. I smoked everybody, because my first platoon had made me a much stronger swimmer and a better runner. Day two was the interview, which was more like an interrogation. Only three men from my screening class of eighteen guys were approved for Green Team. I was one of them, which theoretically meant that after my second platoon I'd be one step closer to joining DEVGRU. I could hardly wait. It was December 2003, and as imagined, my special forces career was zooming into hyperspace because I kept proving

myself to be the most uncommon of men, and remained on track to become that One Warrior.

A few weeks later, I arrived in Fort Benning, Georgia, for Army Ranger School. It was early December, and as the only Navy guy in a class of 308 men, I was greeted with skepticism by the instructors because a few classes before mine, a couple of Navy SEALs quit in the middle of training. Back then they used to send Navy SEALs to Ranger School as punishment, so they may not have been the best representatives. I'd been begging to go, but the instructors didn't know that yet. They thought I was just another cocky special ops guy. Within hours they stripped me and everyone else of our uniforms and reputations until we all looked the same. Officers lost rank, and minted special forces warriors like me became nobodies with a lot to prove.

On day one, we were split into three companies and I was appointed first sergeant in command of Bravo company. I got the job because the original first sergeant had been asked to recite the Ranger Creed after a beat down on the pull-up bar, and he was so tired he messed it up. To Rangers, their creed is everything. Our Ranger Instructor (RI) was livid as he took stock of Bravo company, all of us locked at attention.

"I don't know where you think you men are, but if you expect to become Rangers then I expect you to know our creed." His eyes found me. "I know for a fact Old Navy here doesn't know the Ranger Creed."

I'd been studying it for months and could have recited it while standing on my head. For effect, I cleared my throat and got loud.

"Recognizing that I volunteered as a Ranger, fully knowing the hazards of my chosen profession, I will always endeavor to uphold the prestige, honor, and high esprit de corps of the Rangers!"

"Very surpri…" He tried to cut me off, but I wasn't done.

"Acknowledging the fact that a Ranger is a more elite Soldier who arrives at the cutting edge of battle by land, sea, or air, I accept the fact that as a

Ranger my country expects me to move further, faster, and fight harder than any other Soldier!”

The RI nodded with a wry smile, but this time stayed out of my way.

“Never shall I fail my comrades! I will always keep myself mentally alert, physically strong, and morally straight, and I will shoulder more than my share of the task whatever it may be, 100 percent and then some!

“Gallantly will I show the world that I am a specially selected and well-trained Soldier! My courtesy to superior officers, neatness of dress, and care of equipment shall set the example for others to follow!

“Energetically will I meet the enemies of my country! I shall defeat them on the field of battle for I am better trained and will fight with all my might! Surrender is not a Ranger word! I will never leave a fallen comrade to fall into the hands of the enemy and under no circumstances will I ever embarrass my country!

“Readily will I display the intestinal fortitude required to fight on to the Ranger objective and complete the mission though I be the lone survivor!

“Rangers lead the way!”

I recited all six stanzas, and afterward he shook his head in disbelief, and mulled the ideal way to get the last laugh. “Congratulations, Goggins,” he said, “you are now first sergeant.”

He left me there, in front of my platoon, speechless. It was now my job to march our platoon around and make sure every man was prepared for whatever lay in front of us. I became part boss, part big brother, and full-time quasi-instructor. In Ranger School it’s hard enough to get yourself squared away enough to graduate. Now I had to look after a hundred men and make sure they had their act together, too.

Plus, I still had to go through the same evolutions as everyone else, but that was the easy part and actually gave me a chance to chill out. For me the physical punishment was more than manageable, but the way I went about accomplishing those physical tasks had shifted. In BUD/S I’d always lead

my boat crews, often with tough love, but in general I didn't care how the guys in the other boat crews were doing or if they quit. This time, I wasn't just putting out, I was also looking after everybody. If I saw someone having trouble with navigation, patrolling, keeping up on a run, or staying awake all night, I made sure we all rallied together to help. Not everybody wanted to. The training was so difficult that when some guys weren't on the clock being graded, they did the bare minimum and found opportunities to rest and hide. In my sixty-nine days at Ranger School I didn't coast for a single second. I was becoming a true leader.

The whole point of Ranger School is to give every man a taste of what it takes to lead a high-level team. The field exercises were like an operator's scavenger hunt blended with an endurance race. Over the course of six testing phases we were evaluated on navigation, weapons, rope techniques, reconnaissance, and overall leadership. The field tests were notorious for their Spartan brutality and capped three separate phases of training.

First, we were split into groups of twelve men and together spent five days and four nights in the foothills for Fort Benning phase. We were given very little food to eat—one or two MREs per day—and only a couple of hours sleep per night, as we raced the clock to navigate cross-country terrain between stations where we'd knock off a series of tasks to prove our proficiency in a particular skill. Leadership in the group rotated between men.

Mountain phase was exponentially harder than Fort Benning. Now we were grouped into teams of twenty-five men to navigate the mountains in north Georgia, and buddy, Appalachia gets ridiculously cold in wintertime. I'd read stories about black soldiers with Sickle Cell Trait dying during Mountain Phase, and the Army wanted me to wear special dog tags with a red casing to alert medics if something went wrong, but I was leading men and didn't want my crew to think of me as some sickly child, so the red casing never quite found its way to my dog tags.

In the mountains we learned how to rappel and rock climb, among other mountaineering skills, and became proficient in ambush techniques and mountain patrol. To prove it we went out on two separate, four-night field training exercises, known as FTXs. A storm blew in during our second FTX.

Thirty-mile-per-hour winds howled with ice and snow. We didn't haul sleeping bags or warm clothes, and again we had very little food. All we could use to keep warm was a poncho liner and one another, which was an issue because the rancid odor in the air was our own. We'd burned so many calories without proper nutrition, we'd lost all our fat and were incinerating our own muscle mass for fuel. The putrid stink made our eyes water. It triggered the gag reflex. Visibility narrowed to a few feet. Guys wheezed, coughed, and jackhammered, their eyes wide with terror. I thought for sure someone was gonna die from frostbite, hypothermia, or pneumonia that night.

Whenever you stop to sleep during field tests, rest is brief and you're required to maintain security in four directions, but in the face of that storm, Bravo platoon buckled. These were generally very hard men with a ton of pride, but they were focused on survival above all else. I understood the impulse, and the instructors didn't mind because we were in weather emergency mode, but to me that presented an opportunity to stand apart and lead by example. I looked at that winter storm as a platform to become uncommon among uncommon men.

No matter who you are, life will present you similar opportunities where you can prove to be uncommon. There are people in all walks of life who relish those moments, and when I see them I recognize them immediately because they are usually that guy who's all by himself. It's the suit who's still at the office at midnight while everyone else is at the bar, or the savage who hits the gym directly after coming off a forty-eight-hour op. She's the wildland firefighter who instead of hitting her bedroll, sharpens her chainsaw after working a fire for twenty-four hours. That mentality is there for all of us. Man, woman, straight, gay, black, white, or purple polka dot. All of us can be the person who flies all day and night only to arrive home to a filthy house, and instead of blaming family or roommates, cleans it up right then because they refuse to ignore duties undone.

All over the world amazing human beings like that exist. It doesn't take wearing a uniform. It's not about all the hard schools they graduated from, all their patches and medals. It's about wanting it like there's no tomorrow—because there might not be. It's about thinking of everybody else before yourself and developing your own code of ethics that sets you apart from

others. One of those ethics is the drive to turn every negative into a positive, and then when the storm comes, being prepared to lead from the front.

My thinking on that Georgia mountaintop was that, in a real-world scenario, a storm like that would provide the perfect cover for an enemy attack, so I didn't group up and seek warmth. I dialed deeper, welcomed the carnage of ice and snow, and held the western perimeter like it was my duty—because it was! And I loved every second of it. I squinted into the wind, and as hail stung my cheeks, I screamed into the night from the depths of my misunderstood soul.

A few guys heard me, popped out of the tree line to the north, and stood tall. Then another guy emerged to the east, and another on the edge of the south-facing slope. They were all shivering, wrapped in their measly poncho liners. None of them wanted to be there, but they rose up and did their duty. In spite of one of the most brutal storms in Ranger School history, we held a complete perimeter until the instructors radioed us to come in from the cold. Literally. They put up a circus tent. We filed in and huddled up until the storm passed.

The final weeks in Ranger School are called Florida Phase, a ten-day FTX in which fifty men navigate the panhandle, GPS point by GPS point, as a single unit. It started with a static line jump from an aircraft at 1,500 feet into frigid swamplands near Fort Walton Beach. We waded and swam across rivers, set up rope bridges, and with our hands and feet shimmied back to the other side. We couldn't stay dry, and the water temperature was in the high thirties and low forties. We'd all heard the story that during the winter of 1994 it got so cold, four would-be Rangers died of hypothermia during Florida Phase. Being near the beach, freezing, reminded me of Hell Week. Whenever we stopped, guys were shivering uncontrollably, but as usual, I focused hard and refused to show any weakness. This time it wasn't about taking the souls of our instructors. It was about giving courage to the men who were struggling. I'd cross the river six times if that's what it took to help one of my guys tie off his rope bridge. I'd walk them step-by-step through the process until they could prove their value to the Ranger brass.

We slept very little, ate even less, and continually knocked off reconnaissance tasks, hitting waypoints, setting up bridges and weapons, and

preparing for ambush, while taking turns leading a group of fifty men. Those men were tired, hungry, cold, frustrated, and they did not want to be there anymore. Most were at their ultimate edge, their 100 percent. I was getting there too, but even when it wasn't my turn to lead, I helped out because in those sixty-nine days of Ranger School I learned that if you want to call yourself a leader, that's what it takes.

A true leader stays exhausted, abhors arrogance, and never looks down on the weakest link. He fights for his men and leads by example. That's what it meant to be uncommon among uncommon. It meant being one of the best and helping your men find their best too. It was a lesson I'd wish sunk in a lot deeper, because in just a few more weeks I'd be challenged in the leadership department and come up well short.

Ranger School was so demanding, and the standards were so high that only ninety-six men graduated out of a class of 308 candidates, and the majority of them were from Bravo platoon. I was awarded Enlisted Honor Man and received a 100 percent peer evaluation. To me that meant even more, because my classmates, my fellow knuckle draggers, had valued my leadership in harsh conditions, and one look in the mirror revealed just how harsh those conditions were.

Certificate for being the Enlisted Honor Man at Ranger School

I lost fifty-six pounds in Ranger School. I looked like death. My cheeks were sunken. My eyes bugged out. I had no bicep muscle left. All of us were emaciated. Guys had trouble running down the block. Men who could do forty pull-ups in one go now struggled to do a single one. The Army expected that and scheduled three days between the end of Florida Phase and graduation to fatten us up before our families flew in to celebrate.

As soon as the final FTX was called, we hustled straight to chow hall. I piled my tray with doughnuts, fries, and cheeseburgers, and went looking for the milk machine. After drinking all those chocolate shakes when I was down and out, my body had become lactose intolerant, and I hadn't touched dairy in years. But that day I was like a little child, unable to stifle a primordial yearning for a glass of milk.

I found the milk machine, pulled the lever down and watched, confused, as it funneled out, chunky as cottage cheese. I shrugged and sniffed. It smelled all kinds of wrong, but I remember downing that spoiled milk like it was a fresh glass of sweet tea, courtesy of another hellacious special forces school that put us through so much, by the end anybody who survived was grateful for their cold glass of spoiled milk.

* * *

Most people take a couple weeks off to recover from Ranger School and put some weight back on. Most people do that. The day of graduation, on Valentine's Day, I flew into Coronado to meet up with my second platoon. Once again, I looked at that lack of lag time as an opportunity to be uncommon. Not that anybody else was watching, but when it comes to mindset, it doesn't matter where other people's attention lies. I had my own uncommon standards to live up to.

At every stop I'd made in the SEALs, from BUD/S to that first platoon to Ranger School, I was known as a knuckledragger, and when the OIC in my second platoon put me in charge of PT, I was encouraged because it told me that once again I'd landed with a group of men who were driven to put out and get better. Inspired, I bent my brain to think of evil workouts we could do to get us battle ready. This time we all knew we'd deploy to Iraq, and I made it my mission to help us become the hardest SEAL platoon in the fight. That was a high bar, set by the original Navy SEAL legend still lodged like an anchor deep in my brain. Our legend suggested we were the type of men to swim five miles on Monday, run twenty miles on Tuesday, and climb a 14,000-foot peak on Wednesday, and my expectations were sky-high.

For the first week, guys rallied at 5 a.m. for a run-swim-run or a twelve-mile ruck, followed by a lap through the O-Course. We carried logs over the berm and hammered hundreds of push-ups. I had us doing the hard stuff, the real stuff, the workouts that made us SEALs. Each day the workouts were harder than the last and over the course of a week or two, that wore people down. Every alpha male in special ops wants to be the best at everything they do, but with me leading PT they couldn't always be the best. Because I never gave them a break. We were all breaking down and showing weakness. That

was the idea, but they didn't want to be challenged like that every day. During the second week, attendance flagged and the OIC and the Chief of our platoon took me aside.

"Look, dude," our OIC said, "this is stupid. What are we doing?"

"We aren't in BUD/S anymore, Goggins," said the Chief.

To me, this wasn't about being in BUD/S, this was about living the SEAL ethos and earning the Trident every day. These guys wanted to do their own PT, which typically meant hitting the gym and getting big. They weren't interested in being punished physically, and definitely weren't interested in being pushed to meet my standard. Their reaction shouldn't have surprised me, but it sure did disappoint me and made me lose all respect for their leadership.

I understood that not everyone wanted to work out like an animal for the rest of their career, because I didn't want to do that either! But what put distance between me and almost everybody else in that platoon is that I didn't let my desire for comfort rule me. I was determined to go to war with myself to find more because I believed it was our duty to maintain a BUD/S mentality and prove ourselves every day. Navy SEALs are revered the world over and are thought to be the hardest men that God ever created, but that conversation made me realize that wasn't always true.

I had just come from Ranger School, a place where nobody has any rank at all. Even if a General had classed up, he'd have been in the same clothes we all had to wear, that of an enlisted man on day one of basic training. We were all maggots reborn, with no future and no past, starting at zero. I loved that concept because it sent a message that no matter what we'd accomplished in the outside world, as far as the Rangers were concerned we weren't jack. And I claimed that metaphor for myself, because it's always and forever true. No matter what you or I achieve, in sports, business, or life, we can't be satisfied. Life is too dynamic a game. We're either getting better or we're getting worse. Yes, we need to celebrate our victories. There's power in victory that's transformative, but after our celebration we should dial it down, dream up new training regimens, new goals, and start at zero the very next day. I wake up every day as if I am back in BUD/S, day one, week one.

Starting at zero is a mindset that says my refrigerator is never full, and it never will be. We can always become stronger and more agile, mentally and physically. We can always become more capable and more reliable. Since that's the case we should never feel that our work is done. There is always more to do.

Are you an experienced scuba diver? Great, shed your gear, take a deep breath and become a one-hundred-foot free diver. Are you a competitive triathlete? Cool, learn how to rock climb. Are you enjoying a wildly successful career? Wonderful, learn a new language or skill. Get a second degree. Always be willing to embrace ignorance and become the idiot in the classroom again, because that is the only way to expand your body of knowledge and body of work. It's the only way to expand your mind.

During week two of my second platoon, my Chief and OIC showed their cards. It was devastating to hear that they didn't feel that we needed to earn our status every day. Sure, all the guys I worked with over the years were relatively hard guys and highly skilled. They enjoyed the challenges of the job, the brotherhood, and being treated like superstars. They all loved being SEALs, but some weren't interested in starting at zero because just by qualifying to breathe rare air they were already satisfied. Now, that is a very common way of thinking. Most people in the world, if they ever push themselves at all, are willing to push themselves only so far. Once they reach a cushy plateau, they chill out and enjoy their rewards, but there's another phrase for that mentality. It's called getting soft, and that I could not abide.

As far as I was concerned I had my own reputation to uphold, and when the rest of the platoon opted out of my custom made torture sessions, the chip on my shoulder grew even bigger. I ramped up my workouts and vowed to put out so hard it would hurt their feelings. As head of PT, that was not in my job description. I was supposed to inspire guys to give more. Instead, I saw what I considered a glaring weakness and let them know I wasn't impressed.

In one short week, my leadership regressed light years from where I was in Ranger School. I lost touch with my situational awareness (SA) and didn't respect the men in my platoon enough. As a leader, I was trying to bull my way through, and they bucked against that. Nobody gave an inch, including

the officers. I suppose all of us took a path of least resistance. I just didn't notice it because physically I was going harder than ever.

And I had one guy with me. Sledge was a warrior who grew up in San Bernardino, the son of a firefighter and a secretary, and, like me, he taught himself to swim in order to pass the swim test and qualify for BUD/S. He was only a year older but was already in his fourth platoon. He was also a heavy drinker, a little overweight, and looking to change his life. The morning after the Chief, the OIC, and I had words, Sledge showed up at 5 a.m. ready to roll. I'd been there since 4:30 a.m. and had a lather of sweat working already.

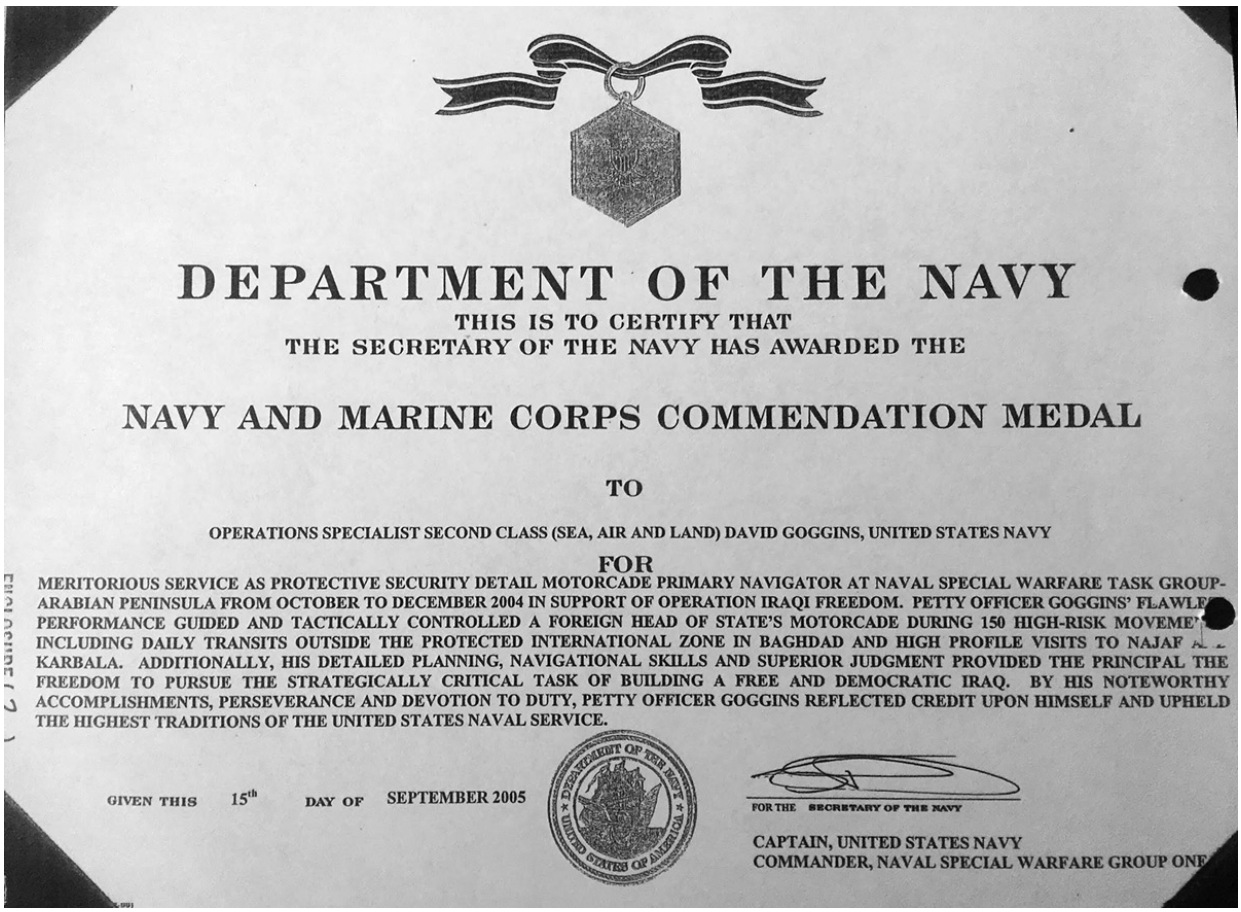
"I like what you're doing with the workouts," he said, "and I wanna keep doing them."

"Roger that."

From then on, no matter where we were stationed, whether that was Coronado, Niland, or Iraq, we got after it every single morning. We'd meet up at 4 a.m. and get to it. Sometimes that meant running up the side of a mountain before hitting the O-Course at high speed and carrying logs up and over the berm and down the beach. In BUD/S, usually six men carried those logs. We did it with just the two of us. On another day we rocked a pull-up pyramid, hitting sets of one, all the way up to twenty, and back down to one again. After every other set we'd climb a rope forty feet high. One thousand pull-ups before breakfast became our new mantra. At first, Sledge struggled to rock one set of ten pull-ups. Within months he'd lost thirty-five pounds and was hitting one hundred sets of ten!

In Iraq, it was impossible to get long runs in, so we lived in the weight room. We did hundreds of deadlifts and spent hours on the hip sled. We went way beyond overtraining. We didn't care about muscle fatigue or breakdown because after a certain point we were training our minds, not our bodies. My workouts weren't designed to make us fast runners or to be the strongest men on the mission. I was training us to take torture so we'd remain relaxed in extraordinarily uncomfortable environments. And things did get uncomfortable from time to time.

Despite the clear divide within our platoon (Sledge and me vs. everyone else) we operated well together in Iraq. Off duty, however, there was a huge gulf between who the two of us were becoming and who I thought the men in my platoon were, and my disappointment showed. I wore my attitude around like a shroud, thus earning me the platoon nickname David "Leave Me Alone" Goggins, and never woke up to realize that my disappointment was my own problem. Not my teammates' fault.



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT
THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAS AWARDED THE

NAVY AND MARINE CORPS COMMENDATION MEDAL

TO

OPERATIONS SPECIALIST SECOND CLASS (SEA, AIR AND LAND) DAVID GOGGINS, UNITED STATES NAVY

FOR

MERITORIOUS SERVICE AS PROTECTIVE SECURITY DETAIL MOTORCADE PRIMARY NAVIGATOR AT NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE TASK GROUP-ARABIAN PENINSULA FROM OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2004 IN SUPPORT OF OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM. PETTY OFFICER GOGGINS' FLAWLE[illegible] PERFORMANCE GUIDED AND TACTICALLY CONTROLLED A FOREIGN HEAD OF STATE'S MOTORCADE DURING 150 HIGH-RISK MOVEME[illegible] INCLUDING DAILY TRANSITS OUTSIDE THE PROTECTED INTERNATIONAL ZONE IN BAGHDAD AND HIGH PROFILE VISITS TO NAJAF [illegible] KARBALA. ADDITIONALLY, HIS DETAILED PLANNING, NAVIGATIONAL SKILLS AND SUPERIOR JUDGMENT PROVIDED THE PRINCIPAL THE FREEDOM TO PURSUE THE STRATEGICALLY CRITICAL TASK OF BUILDING A FREE AND DEMOCRATIC IRAQ. BY HIS NOTEWORTHY ACCOMPLISHMENTS, PERSEVERANCE AND DEVOTION TO DUTY, PETTY OFFICER GOGGINS REFLECTED CREDIT UPON HIMSELF AND UPHELD THE HIGHEST TRADITIONS OF THE UNITED STATES NAVAL SERVICE.

GIVEN THIS 15th DAY OF SEPTEMBER 2005

FOR THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY

CAPTAIN, UNITED STATES NAVY
COMMANDER, NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE GROUP ONE

Platoon dynamics aside, there was still a job to do in Iraq

That's the drawback of becoming uncommon amongst uncommon. You can push yourself to a place that is beyond the current capability or temporal mindset of the people you work with, and that's okay. Just know that your supposed superiority is a figment of your own ego. So don't lord it over them, because it won't help you advance as a team or as an individual in your field. Instead of getting angry that your colleagues can't keep up, help pick your colleagues up and bring them with you!

We are all fighting the same battle. All of us are torn between comfort and performance, between settling for mediocrity or being willing to suffer in order to become our best self, all the time. We make those kinds of decisions a dozen or more times each day. My job as head of PT wasn't to demand that my guys live up to the Navy SEAL legend I loved, it was to help them become the best version of themselves. But I never listened, and I didn't lead. Instead, I got angry and showed up my teammates. For two years I played the tough guy and never took a step back with a calm mind to address my original error. I had countless opportunities to bridge the gap I'd helped create, but I never did, and it cost me.

I didn't realize any of that right away, because after my second platoon, I was ordered to freefall school, then made an assaults instructor. Both were posts scheduled to prep me for Green Team. Assaults was critical because most people who get cut from Green Team are dismissed for sloppy house runs. They move too slow when clearing buildings, are too easily exposed, or are amped up and trigger happy and end up shooting friendly targets. Teaching those skills made me clinical, stealthy, and calm in confined environments, and I expected to receive my orders to train with DEVGRU in Dam Neck, Virginia, any day, but they never came. The other two guys who'd rocked the screening with me received their orders. Mine went AWOL.

I called leadership at Dam Neck. They told me to screen again, and that's when I knew something was off. I thought about the process I'd been through. Did I really expect to do better? I smoked it. But then I remembered the actual interview, which felt more like an interrogation with two men playing good cop, bad cop. They didn't probe my skillset or Navy know-how. Eighty-five percent of their questions had nothing to do with my ability to operate whatsoever. The bulk of that interview was about my race.

"We are a bunch of good ol' boys," one of them said, "and we need to know how you're gonna handle hearing black jokes, bro."

Most of their questions were a variation on that one theme and through it all, I smiled and thought, *How are you white boys gonna feel when I'm the hardest man in here?* But that's not what I said, and it wasn't because I was intimidated or uncomfortable. I was more at home in that interview than

anywhere I'd been in the military, because for the first time in my life it was out in the open. They weren't trying to pretend that being one of only a handful of black guys in perhaps the most revered military organization in the world didn't have its own unique set of challenges. One guy was challenging me with his aggressive posture and tone, the other guy kept it cool, but they were both being real. There were two or three black men in DEVGRU already and they were telling me that entry into their inner circle required my signing off on certain terms and conditions. And in a sick way, I loved that message and the challenge that came with it.

DEVGRU was a renegade crew within the SEALs, and they wanted it to stay that way. They didn't want to civilize anybody. They didn't want to evolve or change, and I knew where I was and what I was getting myself into. This crew was responsible for the most dangerous, tip of the spear missions. It was a white man's underworld, and these guys needed to know how I'd act if someone started to mess with me. They needed assurances I could control my emotions, and once I saw through their language into the greater purpose, I couldn't be offended by their act.

"Look, I've experienced racism my entire life," I replied, "and there is nothing any of you can say to me that I haven't heard twenty times before, but be ready. Because I'm coming right back at you!" At the time, they seemed to like the sound of that. Trouble is, when you're a black guy giving it back it usually doesn't go over nearly as well.

I will never know why I didn't receive my orders for Green Team, and it doesn't matter. We can't control all the variables in our lives. It's about what we do with opportunities revoked or presented to us that determine how a story ends. Instead of thinking, *I crushed the screening process once, I can do it again,* I decided to start at zero and screen for Delta Force—the Army's version of DEVGRU, instead.

Delta Selection is rigorous, and I'd always been intrigued by it due to the elusive nature of the group. Unlike SEALs, you never heard about Delta. The screening for Delta Selection included an IQ test, a complete military resume including my qualifications and war experience, and my evaluations. I pulled all of that together in a few days, knowing that I was competing against the best guys from every military branch and that only the cream

would be extended an invitation. My Delta orders came through in a matter of weeks. Not long after that, I landed in the mountains of West Virginia ready to compete for a spot among the Army's very best soldiers.

Strangely, there was no yelling or screaming in the Delta void. There was no muster and no OICs. The men that showed up there were all self-starters and our orders were chalked on a board hanging in the barracks. For three days we weren't allowed to leave the compound. Our focus was rest and acclimatization, but on day four, PT started up with the basic screening test, which included two minutes of push-ups, two minutes of sit-ups, and a timed two-mile run. They expected everyone to meet a minimum standard, and those that didn't were sent home. From there things got immediately and progressively more difficult. In fact, later that same night we had our first road march. Like everything in Delta, officially the distance was unknown, but I believe it was about an eighteen-mile course from start to finish.

It was cold and very dark when all 160 of us took off, strapped with around forty-pound rucksacks. Most guys started out in a slow march, content to pace themselves and hike it out. I took off hot, and in the first quarter mile left everyone behind. I saw an opportunity to be uncommon and seized it, and I finished about thirty minutes before anybody else.

Delta Selection is the best orienteering course in the world. For the next ten days we hammered PT in the morning and worked on advanced land navigation skills into the night. They taught us how to get from A to B by reading the terrain instead of roads and trails on a map. We learned to read fingers and cuts, and that if you get high you want to stay high. We were taught to follow water. When you start reading the land this way, your map comes alive, and for the first time in my life I became great at orienteering. We learned to judge distance and how to draw our own topographic maps. At first we were assigned an instructor to tail through the wildlands, and those instructors moved fast. For the next few weeks we were on our own. Technically, we were still practicing, but we were also being graded and watched to make sure we were moving cross-country instead of taking roads.

It all culminated with an extended final exam in the field that lasted seven days and nights, if we even made it that far. This wasn't a team effort. Each of us was on our own to use our map and compass to navigate from one

waypoint to the next. There was a Humvee at every stop and the cadres (our instructors and evaluators) there noted our time and gave us the next set of coordinates. Each day was its own unique challenge, and we never knew how many points we'd have to navigate before the test was done. Plus, there was an unknown time limit that only the cadres were privy to. At the finish line we weren't told if we passed or failed. Instead we were directed to one of two covered Humvees. The good truck took you to the next camp, the bad truck motored back to base, where you would have to pack your stuff and head home. Most of the time I didn't know if I made it for sure until the truck stopped.

By day five I was one of roughly thirty guys still in consideration for Delta Force. There were only three days left and I was rocking every test, coming in at least ninety minutes before drop-dead time. The final test would be a forty-mile back-breaker of a land navigation, and I was looking forward to that, but first I had work to do. I splashed through washes, huffed up sloped woodlands, and rambled along ridgelines, point-to-point until the unthinkable happened. I got lost. I was on the wrong ridge. I double-checked my map and compass and looked across a valley to the correct one, due south.

Roger that!

For the first time, the clock became a factor. I didn't know the drop-dead time, but knew I was cutting it close, so I sprinted down a steep ravine but lost my footing. My left foot jammed between two boulders, I rolled over my ankle and felt it pop. The pain was immediate. I checked my watch, gritted my teeth, and laced my boot tight as quickly as I could, then hobbled up a steep hillside to the correct ridge.

On the final stretch to the finish, my ankle blew up so bad I had to untie my boot to relieve the pain. I moved slow, convinced I would be sent home. I was wrong. My Humvee unloaded us at the second to last base camp of Delta Selection, where I iced my ankle all night knowing that thanks to my injury, the next day's land navigation test was likely beyond my capability. But I didn't quit. I showed up, fought to stay in the mix, but missed my time on one of the early checkpoints and that was that. I didn't hang my head,

because injuries happen. I'd given it everything I had and when you handle business like that, your effort will not go unnoticed.

Delta cadres are like robots. Throughout Selection they didn't show any personality, but as I was getting ready to leave the compound, one of the officers in charge called me into his office.

"Goggins," he said, extending his hand, "you are a stud! We want you to heal up, come back, and try again. We believe you will be a great addition to Delta Force someday."

But when? I came to from my second heart surgery in a billowing cloud of anesthesia. I looked over my right shoulder to an IV drip and followed the flow to my veins. I was wired to the medical mind. Beeping heart monitors recorded data to tell a story in a language beyond my comprehension. If only I were fluent, maybe I'd know if my heart was finally whole, if there would ever be a "someday." I placed my hand over my heart, closed my eyes and listened for clues.

After leaving Delta, I went back to the SEAL Teams and was assigned to land warfare as an instructor. At first my morale flagged. Men who lacked my skills, commitment, and athletic ability were in the field in two countries and I was moored in no-man's-land, wondering how it had all gone so haywire so quickly. It felt like I'd hit a glass ceiling, but had it always been there or did I slide it into place myself? The truth was somewhere in between.

I realized from living in Brazil, Indiana, that prejudice is everywhere. There is a piece of it in every person and each and every organization, and if you are *the only* in any given situation, it's on you to decide how you're going to handle it because you can't make it go away. For years, I used it to fuel me because there's a lot of power in being *the only*. It forces you to juice your own resources and to believe in yourself in the face of unfair scrutiny. It increases the degree of difficulty, which makes every success that much sweeter. That's why I continually put myself in situations where I knew I would encounter it. I fed off being *the only* one in a room. I brought the war to people and watched my excellence explode small minds. I didn't sit back

and cry about being *the only*. I took action and used all the prejudice I felt as dynamite to blow up those walls.

But that kind of raw material will only get you so far in life. I was so confrontational I created needless enemies along the way, and I believe that's what limited my access to the top SEAL Teams. With my career at a crossroads, I didn't have time to dwell on those mistakes. I had to find higher ground and turn the negative I'd created into another positive. I didn't just accept land warfare duty, I was the best instructor I could possibly be, and on my own time I created new opportunities for myself by launching my ultra quest, which revived my stalled career. I was right back on track until I learned I'd been born with a broken heart.

Yet there was a positive side to that too. Tucked into my post-op hospital bed, I looked to be fading in and out of consciousness, as conversations between doctors, nurses, my wife, and my mother bled into one another like white noise. They had no clue that I was wide awake the whole time, listening to my wounded heartbeat, and smiling inside. Knowing I finally had definitive, scientific proof that I was as uncommon as any man who has ever lived.

CHALLENGE #9

This one's for the unusual people in this world. A lot of people think that once they reach a certain level of status, respect, or success, that they've made it in life. I'm here to tell you that you always have to find more. Greatness is not something that if you meet it once it stays with you forever. It evaporates like a flash of oil in a hot pan.

If you truly want to become uncommon amongst the uncommon, it will require sustaining greatness for a long period of time. It requires staying in constant pursuit and putting out unending effort. This may sound appealing but will require everything you have to give and then some. Believe me, this is not for everyone because it will demand singular focus and may upset the balance in your life.

That's what it takes to become a true overachiever, and if you are already surrounded by people who are at the top of their game, what are you going to do differently to stand out? It's easy to stand out amongst everyday people and be a big fish in a small pond. It is a much more difficult task when you are a wolf surrounded by wolves.

This means not only getting into Wharton Business School, but being ranked #1 in your class. It means not just graduating BUD/S, but becoming Enlisted Honor Man in Army Ranger School then going out and finishing Badwater.

Torch the complacency you feel gathering around you, your coworkers, and teammates in that rare air. Continue to put obstacles in front of yourself, because that's where you'll find the friction that will help you grow even stronger. Before you know it, you will stand alone.

#canthurtme #uncommonamongstuncommon.