

TOP SECRET.

To: Commander S.R.U. S.S. Group H.Q., Army Post Office, England.

FROM: O.C., S.R.U.

DATE: 1st August 1944.

SUBJECT: Selection and Training of S.R.U. Personnel.

Attached is an outline of the method of selection and training of S.R.U. personnel as requested. This outline gives the method employed in the selection of personnel actually borne and would in future be modified and considerably simplified by drawing all personnel from one Service.

1. On July 17th, 1943 the Chiefs of Staff Committee approved C.C.O.'s proposal for the formation of the unit and authorised the selection of forty all ranks, suitable personnel from the Navy, The Army, The R.A.F. and C.G. Command. Each Service and C.G. Command were to provide ten personnel. A circular was issued by C.O.H.Q. to the three Services and C.G. Command and the volunteers were assembled at H.M.S. "NORTHNEY". The forty chosen were selected by C.C. R.M.B.P.D. They were chosen for the ordinary qualities of a commando soldier plus a high standard of swimming ability. It was necessary to assemble two groups of volunteers at H.M.S. NORTHNEY, as only a small number of the first group could pass the swimming tests. The forty finally selected consisted of 8 Officers and 32 other ranks. The party was then despatched to Camp Pendleton, Oceanside California, U.S.A. to begin training.

2. The party arrived at Camp Pendleton on September 7th 1943, and were accommodated with the U.S. Marine Corps Raider Battalion. A Beach H.Q. was set up at San Onofre Beach and phase I of the training programme was started. This phase consisted of elementary training in the use of fins, mask and paddleboard, and the all important building up of confidence of the individual so that he felt at home in heavy surf both by day and by night and introducing him to the bottom of a tropical sea. The technique of surf riding with and without a board and the proper method of passing to seaward through heavy breakers was taught.

The very important "surf" sense was developed whereby a man can look on a line of breakers and say "I can catch a wave and come through those at 2 O.K." or "They are hanging over too far. A board would not live a minute there, but I can get through by swimming and perhaps bodysurf in the last lap". That sense has to be taught by experts who can demonstrate it as well as talk about it. Two such experts were specially commissioned in the R.C.N.V.R. at C.C.O.'s request to take charge of this phase of the S.R.U.'s training.

The trainees were given their first introduction to large marine fauna. Care was taken to introduce them to strictly harmless species and unwarranted cockiness was kept under control by lectures and pictures of dangerous species and the results of their attack. At this time they were introduced to Sea Lions, Leopard Sharks and small Octopus and given tasks to do at the bottom in the vicinity of these species to accustom them to their presence. Exercises were carried out against a beach defended by sentries and dogs and a final full scale exercise consisting of an attack on a heavily defended railway bridge was successfully carried out. This phase was completed on December 7th, 1943. Of the original forty, nine failed to reach the required standard and were returned.

Throughout Phase I the basic fundamental of small scale raiding, scouting and patrolling, unarmed combat and cliff climbing were an integral part of the programme. Whenever the weather made water work impossible the time was spent on these subjects. At the end of this phase the S.R.U. was at least the equal of the Scout Sections of the U.S.M.C. Raider Battalion in fieldcraft, and successfully infiltrated their position in the exercise against the railway bridge defended by the Raiders.

At the end of this phase personnel were considered trained in the following subjects:

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2 (cont.)

1. The use of a paddleboard.
2. Bodysurfing.
3. Skin diving in (a) heavy surge.
(b) rough rock bottoms.
(c) kelp.
4. Familiarity with the presence of marine fauna (harmless).
5. A general feeling of confidence in (a) heavy breakers.
(b) the sea bed.
6. The basic training of a commando soldier.

On December 7th 1943, the Unit entrained for Nassau the Bahamas to begin Phase II of the Training Programme, where these subjects would be translated into their operational roles in the proper setting of dangerous sharks, barracuda and coral reefs.

3. Through the office of B.A.D. Washington an island was leased near Nassau and proclaimed a restricted area by the Bahamas Government. The Salt Cay. Base was established and the training commenced by Jan. 1st, 1944. An instructor was sent out from H.M.S. DOLEPHIN and an extensive course of DSEA training was given all hands. They were required to remain submerged for the duration of the bottle (approx. 1 hr) and be able to work comfortably at 30 ft. A depth of 65 ft. was the deepest dive recorded. Dangerous marine fauna were abundant and consisted of the following :-
 - (a) Sharks (Ground, Tiger, Hammerhead and Nurse identified)
 - (b) Barracuda.
 - (c) Moray Eels (Spotted and Green).
 - (d) Stinging Jellies.
 - (e) Sting Rays.
 - (f) Sea Urchins.
 - (g) Stinging Corals.

Personnel became so used to the presence of these species that the shout of "A shark here" or "A barracuda coming your way" when they were strung out over half a mile of reef a mile off shore spearfishing, caused only passing interest to those in the immediate vicinity instead of a general retreat to the boat as it did in the first week. A detailed analysis of the dangerous fish training entitled "A Study of the Distribution and Habitat of Dangerous Fish in Bahamian Coastal Waters with Operational Recommendations" has been prepared by the writer and is available.

Night exercises were carried out two nights per week throughout this phase. Long distance paddleboarding and swimming was carried out and night swimming in dangerous waters was initiated. This latter was kept to a minimum as the risk was too great to justify more than what was required in the exercises.

Limpet attacks were carried out with dummy limpets against ships in Montague Bay and exercise raids and reconnaissances were carried out against a variety of targets from a pillbox or a sentry to oil tanks and a radio station.

A twenty-three day course in demolitions was given all hands by an expert provided by Washington, and the use of all military explosives was studied with special emphasis on underwater demolitions.

The Unit was armed with M-3 submachine guns, .30 carbines and .45 Automatic Pistols and a small arms course was carried out for each of these weapons. An introduction to jungle warfare was given here with night stalking and patrolling and jungle marches (1 mile per hour is excellent time in this type). Instruction was given in the technique of survival on tropical sea shores and general bush lore was taught with special emphasis on Japanese jungle warfare tactics.

On May 7th 1944 Phase II of the Training Programme was completed and personnel were considered trained to carry out any of the functions of either the Italian Gamma Group or the Japanese Military Swimming Units. In addition they were trained in the use of paddle-boards which have not so far been used by the enemy. On May 7th the Unit left Nassau by air for Miami en route for England.

On completion of Phase II five other ranks were R.T.U. having failed to attain the required standard and two were returned for medical reasons.

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4. On July 22nd 1944, the Unit proceeded to Ringway, Manchester to qualify at the Parachute Training School. Their course includes a water jump as an operational requirement.
5. Of the thirty-two other ranks originally sent to California only twenty completed the course up to, but not including, the Parachute Training. Of the nine replacements sent out, three failed to make the grade and were R.T.U. on returning to England. It will be seen, therefore, that the degree of specialisation is very high, and that a very high standard is required in volunteers for hazardous service who volunteer for this Unit.
6. On the completion of Phase III, the Parachute Course, the S.R.U. will be trained to carry out the following operations:-
 1. Naval Operations.
 - (a) Limpet attacks by swimming and paddleboard approach.
 - (b) Cutting out operations.
 - (c) Harbour defence reconnaissance.
 2. Military Operations:-
 - (a) Beach reconnaissance above high water mark.
 - (b) Scouting and guerilla warfare.
 - (c) Small scale demolition raids in areas inaccessible to other methods of approach.

The approach to the target area can be made either by sea or by air and all equipment and personnel can be dropped by parachute.

(Signed)

B.S. WRIGHT.

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Lieut. Commander, R.C.N.V.R.
O.C., S.R.U.