

Who are the Navy SEALs?

Plenary Presentation

By Bob Schoultz

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(Note: Captain Schoultz's gave a speech rather than reading a paper. The following are his presentation notes. The formatting of the notes has been modified in some areas for ease of reading. After approximately 40 minutes, the audience was presented with a consultation question regarding a challenge currently facing the SEALs organization. The audience was invited to first discuss the question at their tables and then offer their thoughts. Three active duty SEAL leaders attended this session at Captain Schoultz's invitation to provide current and accurate information about the SEALs - a Captain, a Master Chief Petty Officer and a Lieutenant. Captain Schoultz and his colleagues were available to answer specific questions during the audience's deliberations. The responses of the audience to the question were then recorded. A link to an online audio recording of the discussion and concluding remarks are included at the end of this document. ISPSO deeply appreciates the contributions of Captain Schoultz and his active duty colleagues to this annual meeting.)

Moderator's Introduction to the Session (Ernest Frugé)

Welcome. At an early meeting of the planning committee, Amy was searching for a moderator for this plenary and I immediately volunteered. Like many of you here, my and my wife's family have deep connections to the military. In thinking about this event I have had a flood of associations – many about the tragedies of war. The complicated mix of motives – positive, negative. Some secret, some unconscious – many unknowable. But most of my associations connected to the great respect I have for the people who risk their lives to protect the innocent, the vulnerable, the oppressed.

I also recalled the leaders in our field and their significant linkages to military service. I thought of Bion, his role of tank commander in WWI and then his WWII work with the soldiers in the Northfield experiment. I thought of Gordon Lawrence and his role training UK soldiers in mountaineering skills. I thought of Amy Fraher and her work preparing young helicopter pilots for action. As you listen to this plenary, I invite you to reflect on your own connections to the military.

Before I introduce our speaker, Bob Schoultz who will present “Who are the Navy SEALs?” let me tell you the design for today’s plenary. Bob will present for about 40 minutes, he will then take a few clarifying questions. Bob will then pose a challenge that the SEALs organization is facing for you to discuss at your tables. Bob and his colleagues will circulate through the room to answer any specific questions you might have. We will then collect your thoughts on the challenge and Bob will respond.

Now to introduce our plenary speaker. Bob Schoultz attended Stanford University on a Navy scholarship, graduating with a BA in Philosophy in December 1974. He was commissioned an Ensign in the Navy and then attended Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL (BUD/S) training, graduating in the summer of 1975. He subsequently had a thirty year career as a Naval Special Warfare (SEAL) officer, serving in a wide variety of assignments.

During his career, he and his family lived overseas four times and eventually he commanded all the SEAL teams on the east coast of the United States. He concluded his career as the Director of Leadership and Character Development at the U.S. Naval Academy, retiring from the Navy in 2005.

For the next six years he served as the Director of the Master of Science in Global Leadership program at the University of San Diego. He left this position in November 2011. He is currently a leadership and education consultant.

His wife Mary Anne have been married for 32 years and have three grown children. The oldest son is a Navy SEAL. Their other son and daughter want nothing to do with the military.

Bob...

(Captain Schoultz begins...)

- *The only Easy Day was Yesterday*
- *Pain is Weakness leaving the body*
- *It sucked from beginning until the end, and that's just the way I like it*
- *Embrace the Suck*
- *That which does not kill me makes me stronger*

These are some of the slogans that all young SEALs learn when going through training, and which begin to define their culture.

Good morning. I'm going to spend some time with you this morning sharing some perspectives on the Navy SEALs – their culture, and some challenges and tensions within that culture that have been present for a long time, but are becoming particularly acute now. I would like to welcome these three men who are here to provide a perspective from those still active later on in the morning.

I am sharing my perspective – they have not heard my remarks – and may not even agree with them – but they are here to help with questions at the end.

First, I know that many of you may not know much about who are the Navy SEALs – and there may even be some of you that haven't heard of them so I'll give you a very Brief - overview of who they are, before we get into their culture –

SEALs are essentially Maritime Commandos. SEAL is an acronym that stand for SEA, AIR LAND - SE, for SEA, A for Air, L for Land– the environments in which they are prepared to operate. The SEAL teams grew out of the Underwater Demolition teams that had been formed during WW2. These 'FROGMEN' from their missions were simply beach reconnaissance and preparation for Marine Amphibious Landings. In 1962 the SEALs were formed to do Counterinsurgency and other types of maritime and riverine commando missions with broader and more strategic objectives. Initially you had to have served in one of the UDT's before joining a SEAL team. They acquitted themselves well in the Vietnam War and in a number of skirmishes since.

During the 70's 80's and 90's and even the early 2000's we didn't hear much about the SEALs except for the occasional article or Discovery Channel story about their training. In the 80's – Parade Magazine did a cover story on them in the 80's with the question: The TOUGHEST MEN ALIVE?

THE SEALS - leapt into the spotlight recently when a group of them successfully attacked the compound in Pakistan where Osama bin Laden was hiding and killed him. Other recent well publicized successes include SEAL snipers killing the Somali Pirates who were holding as a hostage Captain Phillips, the Captain of the Maersk Alabama in a small life boat at sea – enabling his recovery. A couple of months ago the SEALS were again in the news for a successful raid on a compound in Somalia and recovering 2 humanitarian workers an American and a Dane who had been taken hostage. JUST LAST WEEK...

And then to add to the Tsunami of publicity the SEALS have been receiving, this past February Hollywood released the movie Act of Valor about a Navy SEAL platoon saving the civilized world from numerous Terrorist plots – with the unique addition that the SEAL roles were played by actual active duty Navy SEALS. The movie had been in the works for years, but it was just a coincidence that it was released in the midst of all the positive news stories about successful Navy SEAL missions.

As you might imagine, all this publicity has caused some perturbations in a culture of young, aggressive testosterone –saturated men, and that is key to what I'll be talking about this morning

I'm going to show you about a 7 or 7 8minute video clip that gives you an idea of basic training, because I, and many others believe that this is the foundation, or the Center of Gravity of the SEAL culture.

Their basic training is known as BASIC UNDERWATER DEMOLITION/SEAL training – or BUD/S training. This is the very demanding RIGHT OF PASSAGE that creates the Tribal values and ethic that binds the SEALS to each other and to their organization.

This is the essential Right of Passage to become a SEAL and which I believe is at the core of the SEAL culture.

(At this point in the presentation Bob showed a video depicting the first phase of SEAL training and graduation in BUD/S Class 224. The video can be found at:

<http://www.sealswcc.com/navy-seals-videos.aspx> and is the one listed as BUD/S Class 224)

The rest of this video and other videos that are in the public domain are available to see and download – just google: “Navy Seal Videos to download” and you'll find the rest of these and many more videos if you should be interested.

Now this may look fairly familiar to those of you familiar with the cultures of elite military units – and the SEALs have a lot in common with other ‘elite’ units in the US Military and around the world. SAS/SBS, Kamfschwimmer Kompanie, Commando Hubert, Danish Fromandkorpset, Norwegian Marine Jaegers , Polish Grom, Spanish Buceadores de Combate, etc.

1. A very demanding selection process, and right of passage to get in;
2. A very male, and testosterone driven, tribal culture, with a high value put on loyalty.
3. A high value put on athletic prowess, competition, success,
4. Officers and Enlisted go through the same training, which is not uncommon in elite commando units in the Western world, but as common in the developing world. This ensures a strong bond of loyalty and camaraderie between officers and enlisted.

So now I’ve set the scene – an elite military culture – young, fit, aggressive male culture, with a lot of public adoration in a culture intoxicated with celebrity. You may know where I am going here.

Now we’ll get into some of the challenges.

I wrote an essay last year that resonated with many in the SEAL community when I contrasted the SEAL ***Ethos*** with the SEAL ***Mythos*** and pointed to the tension between the two.

First, the ETHOS – is expressed in a document entitled “THE SEAL ETHOS”, some of which I’ll share with you this morning, the rest you can find on-line under “Navy SEAL Ethos” – google it.

The Seal Ethos describes a quiet professional with impeccable integrity, who is a physically and mentally tough, compassionate, tactical athlete, proud of his heritage, his training, and his team-mates. A gifted and talented leader, humbly ready to risk all for the benefit of his team, his service, and his country. The SEAL Ethos provides the professional military ideal, citizen soldier, but highly trained, highly focused, brave, and courageous.

Some lines out of the SEAL Ethos:

My loyalty to Country and Team is beyond reproach. I humbly serve as a guardian to my fellow Americans always ready to defend those who are unable to defend themselves.

I do not advertise the nature of my work, nor seek recognition for my actions.

I serve with honor on and off the battlefield. The ability to control my emotions and my actions, regardless of circumstance, sets me apart from other men.

Uncompromising integrity is my standard. My character and honor are steadfast. My word is my bond.

The SEAL described in the SEAL Ethos is in contrast with what I have called the SEAL Mythos – which does not have its own document, but is what I see that the public, the media, and indeed some of the younger and even not-so-young SEALs subscribe to:

The SEAL **Mythos** portrays the BAD-ASS military hero and speaks more of bravado than quiet professionalism.

1. More in-your-face, than humble servant of our country
2. Amazing fighters, experts in the full range of commando skills
3. Incredibly strong and fit, who love the fighting, violence and killing of war
4. Can kill you in a nanosecond with their bare hands (and not think twice about it).

This is almost an Archetype - the young happy go-lucky warrior, who loves war, drinking, fighting, whoring, - who is hard to manage in peace, but indispensable in war.

The media and the public love the character of the SEAL Mythos, because it makes for great drama.

Indeed, much of the public wants to believe in the SEALs as the modern embodiment of the all-american, larger-than-life, independent cowboy of the west. Think – ‘Rambo’

The SEAL senior leaders extol the virtues of the SEAL Ethos. They promote officers and enlisted men who live and embody the Seal Ethos, leading by example, and seek to build the culture around those values - while many of the 19-25 year old young men who come into the SEALs believe more in the rebellious and charismatic fighter in the SEAL MYTHOS.

This is not a new or unique tension. I like to go back 3000 years and contrast the characters of Achilles and Hector.

The young men want to become Achilles – the greatest warrior – almost god-like in his demeanor and abilities – the center-piece of his military’s capabilities.

I wanted to be Achilles! Who wouldn’t?!

- Young charismatic,
- beautiful to look at
- terrible to fight –
- admired and feared by all
- hero and idol to other warriors

There are other interesting aspects of the Achilles myth that are relevant to us.

- Tribe within a Tribe – the Myrmidons
- The Cause is not that important – he fought because he loved to fight
- Achilles is full of passion and for him - fighting and war is personal
 - o He’s fighting for his own glory or that of his comrades
 - o Or to avenge the death of his best friend Patroclus

Achilles is a very appealing hero – and it’s no surprise that all the ladies would be more attracted to the **beautiful, rebellious and charismatic** great warrior Achilles than to his **more straight-laced and respectable** counterpart, Hector.

...but it is Hector who the SEAL leaders hold up as a model. It is Hector who represents the values and virtues of the SEAL Ethos.

Hector too was a great warrior, but he fought not because he loved war, Hector fought out of duty, to protect his city, and his family.

He was not just a great warrior he was also a great citizen, a good father, a good husband, a good son.

His passion and humanity were contained by his honor and duty. In many ways, for his time - He was the model leader of character.

Achilles is the warrior the young women fall in love with.

Hector is the one their parents would prefer that they marry.

In the movie “Troy” – Achilles was played by Brad Pitt. Who played Hector? Eric Bana. Who?

You get the message – there is an ETHOS- MYTHOS tension that has it's analogies in Homer's Illiad.

Ok, we know that old guys have different values than the young guys. So what? This tension between the young lions and the old guard has been around for millennia. What's new here?

Two things are new with the SEALs, and the potential impact concerns the SEAL Admirals, Captains and Master Chiefs...

1. All the press and public attention.
2. 10 years of being at War.

Let's look at the Press issue first:

The SEAL Admirals, Captains, and Master Chiefs are concerned about the siren song in all the publicity, the press, and the celebrity. But unlike Odysseus – they are unable to put beeswax in the ears of their men when the press starts singing their songs of praise. They sometimes struggle to navigate their ships through the archipelago of press reports about how awesome the Navy SEALs are. They are concerned about their young Achilles-wannabes - being seduced by the siren song of the Spotlight and celebrity.

... but it has been a boon to recruiting.

- Becoming a NAVY SEAL gets lots of approval from three groups they want to impress – the greater society, their buddies, the pretty girls.

And obviously all SEALs – all of us like to get the acknowledgement that their hard work and risks have been appreciated.

There is also concern that some young men will want to become SEALs for the wrong reasons

- not primarily to serve and be a part of fighting force
- but primarily for the ego satisfactions, as an avenue to 'the big time' – to the spotlight, to elected office, to the prestige and status of being a 'former Navy SEAL.'

Furthermore there has been a plethora of books from former SEALs, sharing inside secrets, and former SEALs are appearing on the TV talk shows hawking their books, or giving their opinions about the Obama Administration's handling of the Iraq or Afghanistan War. They are running for political office all over the country.

Meanwhile, you need to understand that the US Special Operations forces Community has subscribed to the moniker – *The Quiet Professionals*, and the other services – our Special Forces

and Air Force and Marine Special Operations brothers are looking askance at all this press and publicity -

- Part of it is a violation of the spoken and unspoken prohibition about seeking the spotlight
- Part of it is that they are also doing great and important work – but all anyone hears or reads about is – The Navy SEALs

You can imagine the barbed comments – implied and explicit that Admiral Pybus and other SEAL leaders get from their brothers in the other Special Forces.

I recently read an essay about how Queen Elizabeth II has been stalwart in her resistance to the trend she's seen in some of the younger royals being seduced by the Hollywood-style glamour and celerity and to become media darlings – obviously Princess Di, and then all the scandal about Prince Charles and Camilla Bowles and Prince Harry and Fergie.

John O'Sullivan noted in an essay in last weekend's Wall Street Journal that celebrity and monarchy are natural enemies. He noted that:

- celebrity is all about enjoying the accoutrements that come with Fame;
- monarchy is about performing one's Duty.

The same can be said about celebrity and the military professional ethos –

All this press attention and the appearance that SEALs are publicity-seeking runs not only counter to the SEAL Ethos, but also to the Professional Military Ethos.

Again – the Admirals, and Captains, and the Master Chiefs are concerned –

- partly with managing perceptions – because it is NOT true of much of the force,
- but also managing those to whom it may apply, and making sure that it doesn't become a trend and negatively impact the culture and undermine the values in the SEAL Ethos.

So I mentioned that there are two things that are new - first is all the press and publicity.

The second thing that is new is that we've been at war for 10 years - and we're still at war, though it isn't on the front pages every day.

Many young men choose to become SEALs with – at least to some degree - visions of glory and the opportunity to be one of the best – because in part, that is what our recruiters promise them. All their instructors in BUD/S have multiple combat tours, a chest full of ribbons for valor in combat, and this is what they feel they are due, and the media reinforces the image by naming them America's new heroes.

They graduate from SEAL training, and feel somewhat entitled to the missions that their instructors and older Seal heroes had. The Mythos reinforces this.

... but the problem is that more and more of the missions they are being called to perform, don't meet their expectations. And some are disgruntled at getting important and necessary missions that have little action or glamor.

As the wars wind down, SEALs are getting missions, which require more patience, and less passion, more deliberation, and less drama. They are deploying away from their families for months and months in Village Support Operations, building bridges with local leaders, training Afghans or Iraqi's or African national forces to fight, rather than fighting themselves.

SEAL Ethos says: *I am a professional – I do my best at what my country and its leaders tell me I need to do. Though I understand that I must train hard for the possibility that I'll be called upon to fight in intense combat and to do the extremely dangerous jobs, I am flexible and agile, and can step into wherever I am needed. It's not about me; it's about the mission, about how we can best contribute to the nation.*

SEAL Mythos: *I came into the SEALs to realize my inner War Hero. I've been preparing myself for years for the toughest missions, playing video games killing bad guys, working hard in the gym, and then train for years to be ready to go into intense combat with the guys you told me are the best warriors in the world, and now you're telling me to drink tea, and sit and smile while some local guy with a turban and a beard lies to me!? This is a bait and switch! Get somebody else!*

Disgruntlement among the young lions is not new, but it shouldn't be ignored. The disgruntlement of Achilles was contagious in Agamemnon's army – it is also contagious among the younger SEALs, and many are choosing not to re-enlist and to take their talent and energy into the private sector where they can earn more money – and the thrill of combat is replaced by the thrill of corporate conquest or making lots of money.

Maybe this is a simple issue of professional maturity and moral development. Maybe this is just a problem inherent in recruiting highly charged young men with strong egos, with promises of glory and heroism.

Should we be surprised and upset when many of them chafe at having their wings clipped – by a SEAL Ethos that appeals more to reason and rationality, than to passion and youthful exuberance?

In Wilfred Bion's terms, in the L – H – K Triad, this seems to be a case of the young men being motivated by L and H – love for their team mates, and hate for their enemies, while the

leadership is motivated by K – knowledge and wisdom and wants the younger ones to follow suit.

Well, the reality is that the country and the public from which we get these young men - is largely motivated by L and H – love for our country and our friends, and hate for our enemies.

The standards of the military professional ethos (of which the SEAL Ethos is a mere subset, adapted to SEALs) are very tough, but very rational - very K. The Traditional Law of Armed Conflict – upon which the Geneva Convention is based is very rational, and seeks to manage the passion – the hate and the killing in the military and warfare. ...But again, this is a difficult position to take.

When SEAL leaders speak to young men of the wisdom and rationality of the SEAL Ethos, or why it makes sense to follow the rules of the Traditional Law of Armed Conflict - it can be a tough sell, if their lives are ruled by passion – L&H – and when the K message runs counter to popular public sentiment.

So, as I finish up here, this is not a crisis in the SEAL Community. My impression is that the vast majority of SEALs are solid – my son is a Navy SEAL, and he and his friends are more solid than I was – yet this is an issue.

Anytime I speak with leaders in the SEAL teams, leaders like the Master Chief and Captain here with us today -they share with me this culture gap with the younger SEALs some of whom:

- insist on believing and living out the SEAL Mythos that the media loves to portray of the happy-go-lucky, hard fighting, hard drinking, BAD-ASS warrior
- have an expectation – almost an entitlement of going to war and having the opportunity to become a “combat hardened veteran”

So the problem I want to ask you to consider at your tables is this:

Given

1. The natural appeal to young people of 'THE CULT OF ACHILLES' and the SEAL Mythos
2. The intoxication of our culture with celebrity,
3. And continued propensity of the media to want to build up and mythologize Navy SEALs

How do we get our young men – those that come into the SEAL Community to turn away from the greater American culture's fascination with celebrity, and toward an ethos that stresses service, humility, and anonymity, and not the public recognition and adoration that comes with being a media celebrity?

How do we speed up their professional maturity and get them to 'turn the corner' more quickly, after entering a profession which has so much riding on their success?

(The participants discussed this consultation request for about 15 minutes at their tables. Bob Schoultz and his colleagues were available to answer any questions the participants might have had as they deliberated on the question. At the end of this period the participants were invited to share their thoughts. A recording of the comments from participants, responses from the active duty SEALs and Captain Schoultz's concluding remarks can be found by clicking on the following link: <http://webcasts.ispsso.org/>. Once at that site look for the podcast titled "Who are the Navy SEALs?")