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Whatever you want to become we can show you how...

How2become... **SPECIAL BOAT SERVICE**

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INTRODUCTION

Dear Sir,

Thank you for purchasing your new 'How to Join the Special Boat Service' CD-ROM – We very much value your custom.

The Special Boat Service is one of the most respected and feared units of all the worldwide military fighting forces. The mystery that surrounds them is both intriguing and fascinating. Only the best get to become a member of this elite fighting force and this unique guide will provide you with an insight into their selection procedure.

If it is your desire to one day become a member of the Special Boat Service then the road is a long one, but don't let this put you off. The SBS soldier never gives up and will succeed at all costs. After all, their motto 'By strength and Guile' speaks for itself. To become a member of the SBS you must be better than the rest. The only way to achieve this is to work extremely hard and to be determined to achieve your goals. Please ensure that you read the disclaimer contained within this guide before you perform any of the exercises or routines contained with the 'How to get SBS fit' guide.

Finally, we hope that you enjoy the guide and find it as intriguing and enjoyable as we found creating it.

Good luck and best wishes,

The how2become team

The how2become team



INTRODUCTION

The Royal Navy's Special Boat Service (SBS) is the lesser-known sister unit of the British Army's Special Air Service (SAS) regiment.

The SBS is a Special Forces unit which is based in Poole, Dorset. It predominantly specialises in special operations at sea, along the world's coastlines and on international river networks. The SBS also have a team on standby which is only available for maritime counter terrorism (MCT) operations. Whilst the unit specialises in water-borne activities, they are also highly skilled on dry land and often work side by side with the Special Air Service.

Recent operations have taken place in the mountains of land-locked Afghanistan and deep in the deserts of Iraq. The Special Boat Service was previously known as the Special Boat Squadron and was only open to members of the Royal Marines. However, the SBS is now open to members of other regiments and services from throughout the UK military. Conversely, many members of the Royal Marines also join the Special Air Service.

As you progress through the recruitment and selection element of this guide you will notice that the majority of the SBS selection process is exactly the same as the SAS selection process and takes place at Hereford in Worcestershire.



INTRODUCTION

BADGES AND INSIGNIA

The old cap badge and motto of the SBS are indicated below. 'Not by Strength by Guile' had served the SBS for many years until it was more recently changed.



'By Strength and Guile' is the now the new motto of the Special Boat Service and has the following new cap insignia to match.



INTRODUCTION

WEAPONS USED BY THE SBS

The type of weapons used by the SBS regiment will very much depend on the assignment or mission they are undertaking. The following is a list of some of the more common weapons used by the service in recent years.

Assault Rifle - Diemaco C8 SFW

Throughout much of the 70s, 80s and 90s, the main assault rifle of the SBS was the M16. A modern day SBS trooper is more likely to use the Canadian Diemaco C8 carbine. This is a 5.56mm weapon which can be fired full-auto or single-shot. For additional firepower, the C8 can be fitted with an under-slung grenade launcher. The C8 is essentially an improved version of the Colt M4 carbine as used by U.S. Special Forces.

British military designation: L119A1

Magazine capacity: 30 rounds.



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WEAPONS USED BY THE SBS

Sub Machine Gun - HK MP5



For use in Close Quarters Battle (CQB), the Heckler & Koch MP5 is a sub machine gun used by many of the world's police and counter-terrorism units. It's ergonomic, accurate and has a high rate of fire. The MP5 comes in several variants including a cut-down version for concealed carry (MP5K) and the MP5SD which is fitted with an integral sound suppressor.

British military designation: L92A1

Magazine capacity: 30 rounds.

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WEAPONS USED BY THE SBS

Assault Carbine - HK53



The Heckler & Koch HK53 assault rifle bridges the gap between sub-machine gun and assault rifle. Essentially a cut-down HK33, the 53 is a 5.56mm carbine that UKSF used in Northern Ireland where its compactness and firepower was popular amongst teams working in cars. The HK53 is also frequently carried by various British Military close protection units (bodyguards).

British military designation: L101A1

Magazine capacity: 25/30 rounds.

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WEAPONS USED BY THE SBS

Sniper / Assault Rifle - G3



Carrying a heavier punch than the 5.56 C8 or M16, the Heckler & Koch G3 fires a 7.62 round. When fitted with a scope, the G3 is used by SBS sniper teams aboard Lynx helicopters during MCT operations. The G3A4 variant is preferred due to its retractable stock. It's believed that the SBS also uses a cut down G3 variant, the MC51.

British military designation: L100A1 (G3)

Magazine capacity: 20 round magazine.

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WEAPONS USED BY THE SBS

Pistol - Sig Sauer P226



Usually employed as a secondary sidearm, the Sig P226 9mm pistol is reliable and compact. SBS operators may also use such pistols when working undercover as they can be carried concealed.

British military designation: L107A1

Magazine capacity: 15 rounds.

INTRODUCTION

WEAPONS USED BY THE SBS

Light Machine Gun - FN Minimi Para



Packing heavy firepower into a compact package, the 5.56 mm FN Minimi Para machine gun gives a small SBS patrol the additional wallop it needs to repel an ambush and press home an attack. The Minimi can lay down fire at 725 rounds per minute. The para version of the weapon, with its telescopic stock is a favourite among special operations forces.

British military designation: L110A1

Magazine capacity: 200 round box / 30 round magazine.

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WEAPONS USED BY THE SBS

Machine Gun - L7A1 GPGM



With its 7.62mm caliber rounds pumping out at 750 rpm, the GPMG, or 'GIMPY', allows special ops teams to engage not only large groups of enemy troops but also soft-skinned vehicles. Often fitted to boats or vehicles, the GPGM can also be carried on patrol, although these days the lighter M249 is preferred by foot soldiers.

British military designation: L7A1

Magazine capacity: 100 round belt.

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WEAPONS USED BY THE SBS

Sniper Rifle - L96A1



Accurate up to 1km, the British made L96A1 sniper rifle is a fearsome weapon, especially when placed in the hands of an SBS sniper. Like most sniper rifles it is a single shot bolt operated weapon.

British military designation: L96A1

Magazine capacity: 10 round magazine.

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WEAPONS USED BY THE SBS

Underwater Pistol - HK P11



Carried by SBS frogmen, the HKP11 is an underwater weapon that fires 7.62mm x 36mm caliber darts. It is designed for underwater use, where it has a range of around 15 meters, but can also be fired above water, where it has a range of 50 meters.

One drawback of the P11 is that the specialised rounds can only be reloaded into the weapon at the HK factory!

Magazine capacity: 5 darts.

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WEAPONS USED BY THE SBS

Grenade - Flashbang



Flashbangs, or 'Stun Grenades', are non-lethal explosive devices designed to disorientate and immobilize terrorists and are used by the SBS when clearing rooms during hostage rescues.

The grenades produce a dazzlingly bright flash and a series of resounding booms. Some flashbangs include particles of CS tear gas to further immobilize anyone within range.

INTRODUCTION

EQUIPMENT USED BY THE SBS

Surface Boats

As one might expect, the SBS uses a variety of boats, each chosen for a specific task.

Fully / Rigid Inflatables

The SBS use a wide range of inflatables, depending on operational requirements. Boats used include Gemini and Avon Searider, Fully Inflatable and Rigid Inflatable Boats (RIBS) ranging in size. The inflatable boats are often used to insert and extract operators from the shoreline, patrol inland waterways and also in the ship boarding role.

Long Range Insertion Craft (LRIC)

The latest generation of LRIC are a revolutionary design. Known as VSVs (Very Slender Vehicles), they look more like aircraft than boats and are fitted with state of the art stealth features.

Klepper Canoes

In this age of high-tech warfare, it may seem strange that the SBS are still using canoes, equipment that hasn't essentially changed much since World War 2, but the reality is that these canoes still provide an effective, stealthy method of moving small teams of men around enemy coastlines and waterways.

The Klepper canoes can be broken down into 2 parts so that the 2 man crew can carry them on their backs across country or hide them effectively. A GPMG or mortar can be fitted and crew members may carry anti-tank rockets to deal with enemy surface craft.

The Kleppers are also versatile in the way they can be deployed. They can be launched from other boats and surfaced submarines or carried to the surface by divers.

Kleppers can also be parachuted from C130s into the ocean or dropped out the back of RAF Chinooks.



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EQUIPMENT USED BY THE SBS

Underwater Craft

The SBS employ highly specialised vehicles for the difficult and dangerous task of operating underwater.

Mini-sub and Swimmer Delivery Vehicles

2/4/6 man mini submarines are used to transport SBS sabotage teams into enemy harbors or to clandestinely approach MCT objectives. The SBS use a mixture of home-grown specially developed SDVs and off-the-shelf U.S. models. Unmanned Underwater Vehicle (UUV)

The underwater equivalent of airborne UAVs such as the Predator drone, the newly developed Talisman UUV from BAE systems is a remote controlled stealth submarine that has the capability to perform shoreline reconnaissance. The SBS would use the Talisman to complement their own missions or even to go into situations when the risks may be deemed to high, or conditions unsuitable, for human operators.

Boarding Equipment

The SBS use an array of specialised equipment to assist them in boarding hostile craft. These include:

Collapsible ladders - hooked ladders that can be unfolded to allow access to docked vessels by swimmers below.

Caving Ladders - carried by assault teams, these are long thin ladders that can be shot up from RIBS, hooking onto the ship's railings.

Grappling Hooks - climbing ropes with hooks propelled by either rocket or compressed air.



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EQUIPMENT USED BY THE SBS

Diving Equipment

The specialised diving gear used by the SBS includes:

LAR V Draeger - is a compact self-contained closed-circuit 're-breather' system designed for use in shallow waters. The Draeger recycles the exhaled oxygen which eliminates the bubble produced by traditional SCUBA gear, making the wearer much harder to detect.

Vehicles

Despite their name, the Special Boat Service carries out plenty of operations on dry land and they employ some specialised ground vehicles to move around.

Quad Bikes

4x4 quad bikes allow rapid transport over both rough terrain and to areas otherwise inaccessible to larger vehicles. The SBS used quads to move around the Iraqi desert and to traverse mountain paths in Afghanistan.

Landrovers

The Landrover, mainstay of the British military for many decades, is prized for its reliability and versatility. Besides passengers, the vehicles can carry a lot of equipment and can be fitted with various weapons systems such as GPMGs and .50 machine guns, automatic 40mm grenade launchers and Milan anti-tank missile launchers.



HISTORY OF THE SBS

THE HISTORY OF THE SPECIAL BOAT SERVICE

The history of the Special Boat Service began over 60 years ago and since its inception the service has gone through many changes, predominantly from an Army commando unit in World War 2, to an elite sub-unit of The Royal Marines, to its current formation as a highly specialised element of the UK Special Forces (UKSF).

World War 2

The SBS began during World War 2 as the Special Boat Section. Initially it was an Army commando unit that was tasked with specific amphibious operations. Unfortunately, the men who formed part of the early SBS formation were not particularly well trained or equipped. However, their main strengths came from their enthusiasm, resourcefulness and bravery.

They usually worked in 2 man groups often paddling ashore on canoes which were launched from submarine motherships. The teams would then be tasked with seeking out and sabotaging high value targets such as rail and communication lines. The first of such raids took place along the shores of Italy and the Mediterranean islands.

The SBS also developed anti-shipping skills where they used canoes to secretly sneak into harbors and plant limpet mines on the hulls of enemy ships. During the cold winter of 1942, one group of Royal Marines, who were to become known as 'The Cockleshell Heroes', carried out an audacious attack on German shipping, a raid that took them far up the Gironde River where they effectively sank four enemy ships.

Their expertise at carrying out silent infiltration made the SBS the perfect choice for inserting and extracting secret agents in the European theatre and this was a task they carried out many times throughout the course of the war.



HISTORY OF THE SBS

The Korean War

During the Korean War the SBS teamed up with the specially formed 41 Independent Commando Royal Marines and the US Army to create a highly effective joint raiding force. During Operation Double Eagle the SBS, and the fighting force they were a part of, carried out many successful sabotage missions along the Korean coast, launching raids from submarines and warships. Railway lines, tunnels, bridges and general targets were blown up by the collaboration, damaging the North Korean's lines of supply and communications.

Northern Ireland

The conflict in Northern Ireland was an ideal arena for the SBS to operate in. Their main role was to carry out covert surveillance and apart from normal operations, many SBS operators also joined the 14th Intelligence Company who were a branch of Military Intelligence specially created for surveillance ops. The SBS was also used to monitor and stop gun running along the coastline and on inland waterways and lakes.

Protecting the QE2

During 1972 members of the SBS, along with an SAS officer and Army bomb disposal expert, parachuted into Atlantic waters in order to board the QE2 passenger liner which was the centre of a bomb threat. These extraordinary measures proved to not be necessary as the bomb alert turned out to be a false alarm. During 1972 the QE2 carrying a sizable Jewish contingent on a cruise to Israel was put under SBS guard. Tensions were high following the Black September terrorist attacks at the Munich Olympics and the QE2 cruise was seen as a tempting target for Arab terrorists. In the end, the cruise went ahead without incident.

Finally in 1976 another QE2 cruise to Israeli again necessitated the protection of the SBS. Members of the unit posed as tourists aboard the liner, their Browning 9mm pistols concealed under their t-shirts. Some SBS wives even joined their husbands on the trip, adding to the mission's cover. As before, the cruise was completed without incident.



HISTORY OF THE SBS

Counter Terrorism

The seventies saw a huge rise in terrorism throughout the world with politically motivated attacks in the Middle East and Europe. During 1975 Britain resolved to be ready to react to any acts of terrorism against its interests. The Special Boat Service were given the maritime counter terrorism role (MCT) and with this came the responsibility for patrolling and protecting the countries sea ports, ferries, cruise ships and oil platforms. The plan was that the Special Air Service (SAS) would then respond to all other incidents if they occurred. In the event of very large installations being taken by terrorists, such as nuclear power plants, a combined response of SAS/SBS would be mustered.

In 1979 there saw an increase in the development and construction of off-shore oil installations which subsequently prompted the formation of 'Commachio Company'. As a result, 300 Royal Marines trained to respond to terrorist incidents amongst North Sea oil fields. The Special Boat Service provided a section, 1SBS, to Commachio Company, whilst another section stayed at Poole to cover all other MCT responsibilities.

The Falklands Conflict

The Special Boat Service were called into action during the South Atlantic in 1982 when Britain retook the Falklands from the Argentinians. Their main role was to carry out reconnaissance missions weeks ahead of the arrival of the main task force. They would lie up in hideouts which had been cut into the landscape. The SAS were also carrying out similar missions on the islands and there was an unfortunate 'friendly fire' incident when an SBS patrol was mistakenly ambushed by the SAS.

The SBS, along with the SAS and Royal Marines were responsible for retaking South Georgia which turned out to be a great morale boost for both the approaching task force and the British public.



HISTORY OF THE SBS

The Falklands Conflict (continued)

The night prior to the planned landing of British forces at San Carlos, the SBS cleared Fanning Head, a hill that overlooked San Carlos Bay. The Argentinean task force was shelled up by Naval Gunfire whilst the SBS assault force were flown in. After calls for the Argentineans to surrender were answered with gunfire, the SBS attacked, killing twelve enemy soldiers and taking even more prisoners. The Argentineans, who were located on Fanning Head, were manning heavy weapons that could have been brought to bear on the landing force so the strike was seen as a huge success.

Another further important incident occurred when the SBS assaulted an Argentinean spy trawler that had been shadowing the British fleet. The ship had been damaged by bombs and cannon fire from an earlier attack by Royal Navy Sea Harriers and was listing badly when the assault force arrived in 2 Seaking helicopters. Using techniques developed for maritime counter terrorism, the SBS assault team fast-roped onto the deck and quickly secured the ship without any shots fired. Along with the shaken crew, vital intelligence documents were also retrieved and flown back to the fleet. This was the first air-to-ship storming of a hostile vessel in military history.

As the Falklands conflict neared the end, with British forces closing on the capital Port Stanley, a joint SBS/SAS mission was launched against Stanley harbour. The plan was to put in a simple yet effective diversionary attack from the sea in order to draw Argentinean forces and attention away from the main defensive line. The joint assault force approached the harbor on small boats but they were spotted by enemy troops on board the vessel who shone a spotlight onto the teams. Coming under heavy fire from the hospital ship, the SBS/SAS teams were forced to withdraw, managing to escape without serious injury.



HISTORY OF THE SBS

The Formation of M Squadron

The Special Boat Service's counter terrorism role was expanded during 1987 with the amalgamation of two existing SBS sections into M Squadron which now took over the MCT role from Commachio Company.

SBS Renames and Joins UKSF

During 1987, the SBS is renamed as the Special Boat Service and is taken under control of UKSF (United Kingdom Special Forces), an organisation comprising of the SAS, SBS and the 14th Intelligence Company. All three services now come under control of the Directorate of Special Forces (DSF).

Desert Storm

During the month of August 1990, Saddam Hussein's army invaded Kuwait. Whilst awaiting the inevitable military response from the West, Saddam's regime took western civilians as hostages in an attempt to deter any attacks by the United States led coalition. Plans had to be quickly drawn up to rescue the hostages. The rescue force would most likely have been made up of special operations troops from the US, the UK and other countries. The SBS would have played a significant role in any rescue. However, prior to their deployment, Saddam relented and released all of the western hostages. With the human shield crisis now averted, the Special Boat Service was then tasked with cutting the Iraqi's command and control communications lines, which they did successfully.

Other tasks during Desert Storm included scouting potential amphibious landing sites on the Kuwaiti coastline, exploding demolition charges on the beaches to fool the Iraqis that an amphibious landing was imminent and, as the war came to a close, securing the British Embassy in Kuwait City.



HISTORY OF THE SBS

East Timor

In 1999, Marines of the Special Boat Service were the first British forces to be sent into East Timor. They were sent there as part of the United Nations peace keeping operations. News reports back home showed the Special Boat Service arriving at the main airport and venturing out into East Timor. For so many of the British public, these news reports were the first ever glimpse of the secretive Special Forces unit at work.

Sierra Leone – Operation Barras

It was during the year 2000 that the Special Boat Service and the Special Air Service carried out a rescue mission deep in the jungles of Sierra Leone. The so called 'West Side Boys', who were a group of rebels, had captured a group of British soldiers from the Royal Irish Regiment. SAS and SBS troops carried out a secret surveillance mission and began to supply intelligence back to base where other members of the elite Special Forces were planning the rescue.

At dawn, teams of SAS/SBS members were flown into the rebel camp by Royal Air Force Chinook helicopters. The teams fast-roped from the helicopters and quickly began clearing the various buildings, engaging the rebel troops, securing the hostages and finally taking the rebel leader into custody. At the same time, a force of Paratroopers was flown in to attack the rebel base which was located across the lake from where the SAS/SBS mission was taking place.

The fighting was extremely intense but the mission was a huge success. All of the hostages were rescued and the rebel leader was captured. Unfortunately, an SAS trooper was killed in action and several Paratroopers were badly wounded. Apart from the tragic loss of life 'Operation Barras' was a great success. As is often the case, the British media praised the actions of the SAS while the SBS elements of the operation were not mentioned.



HISTORY OF THE SBS

Iraq

The Special Boat Service were at the head of the invasion of Iraq during 2003. SBS troops teamed up with the United States Navy Seals to successfully secure the beaches of the Al Faw Peninsula. This in turn enabled the coalition ground forces to enter safely and quickly. They then secured the southern oil fields which fortunately prevented Saddam Hussein from igniting the wells as he had previously done during the war in 1991.

During the Iraq War a landrover patrol section of the Special Boat Service became engaged in a ferocious fire fight when they were double crossed by their interpreters/guides and silently led into an ambush. In the ensuing mayhem that followed, the SBS fired thousands of rounds at their attackers. The fighting was extremely intense and the SBS were forced to abandon some of their equipment, including a landrover and quad bike. Many conflicting accounts of the incident appeared in the national press with the SBS drawing some criticism from their SAS colleagues about how things were carried out.



RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

INTRODUCTION

The selection process for entry into the SBS, along with the SAS, is undoubtedly the toughest of any of the worldwide Special Forces.

What makes it so tough is the fact that it tests both one's physical and mental stamina over a prolonged period of time. Many other selection processes for different armed forces units are shorter and less rigorous. The reason for the intense difficulty of the process is because it is imperative that the SBS get the right men for the job. There is no room for error during any of their missions and it requires a special type of person to be able to hold down that level of responsibility.

The SBS, until more recently, only recruited from the Royal Marines. Now it is open to any member of the UK Military Fighting Forces including the Royal Engineers, the Royal Artillery and the RAF Regiment. The SBS soldier is both physically and mentally tough. They are certainly not robots or supermen, but instead extremely fit, highly skilled and totally focused on the task in hand. You will never see an SBS soldier bragging in the pubs about the fact that he belongs to the service, nor will you see him fighting with anyone in the streets when the pubs close. They are highly professional and very guarded about the role that they play.

The average SBS member is not 6ft tall with a weight of 16 stone, but is more likely to be around 5ft 8 inches and of a build, appearance and stature of somebody who would quite easily blend into a crowd of people and go unnoticed. Underneath this disguised exterior however, is an immensely fit and skilled person. Ask any SBS soldier and all of them will tell you that they found the selection process difficult. Not one of them will ever say it was easy, because it simply isn't!



RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

SPECIAL FORCES BRIEFING COURSE (SFBC)

Selection starts back at a candidates own regiment, where he must request through his Commanding Officer that he would like to be put forward for selection. The initial phase of selection is for the candidate to attend a Special Forces Briefing Course (SFBC).

The SFBC is run twice a year, over a weekend period. The course is designed to give those candidates who wish to go through selection the chance to taste what life in Special Forces is all about. It also gives the SBS the chance to see if they like you. The weekend SFBC course usually starts on a Friday evening when candidates arrive at the Special Air Service base, Sterling Lines, in Hereford.

During the SFBC you will be given a number of briefings and presentations that are designed to show you what Special Forces life is all about. It will also give you an indication as to what to expect during the tough selection process. On the first evening of the course you will undergo a series of tests that include map reading, map memory test, first aid test, general military knowledge test and an IQ test.

The type of physical tests that you will undertake during the SFBC will not be too difficult although a number of people do surprisingly fail them. Before you undertake the SFBC make sure you can reach at least level 14 on the Bleep Test (contained within this package), you can swim 100 metres fully clothed in under 3 minutes and that you can tread water for 15 minutes. You will also be required to pass the standard Army Basic Fitness Test (BFT), which shouldn't be a problem for any soldier or marine who is on the course. In addition to the BFT you will also be required to pass a Combat Fitness Test, which involves a 2-mile run in 18 minutes and an 8-mile run in 1 hour 40 minutes. Make sure you can pass these with ease.

Whether you are invited back to Hereford to take part in the full selection process will be up to the Special Forces selection team themselves. If they have any doubt about your potential then you won't be going back.



RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

THE SBS SELECTION PROCESS

Selection usually takes place twice a year, either in the heat of the summer or in the cold of the winter. Candidates who are up for selection are usually exemplary soldiers or marines with an unblemished service record to date, a high level of physical and mental fitness and, more often than not, who are specialists in their field. The SBS is full of soldiers and marines who are exceptional at different things. After all, that's what makes a team like the SBS work so well, the fact that its members are not single-minded people. They all bring something special to the unit and are purely focused on getting a job done. The tasks and missions they are presented with are more often than not out of the realms of 'normal soldiering'.

Any up and coming star soldier/marine who asks his Commanding Officer to be put forward for SBS selection is likely to meet slight resistance. After all, why would an CO want to lose such a promising young soldier/marine to the Special Boat Service? Any soldiers who put themselves forward must first of all be fully aware of the high failure rate. The figure is around the 90 - 95% mark and those who fail selection are returned to unit (RTU'd) immediately. They are permitted to try again for selection one more time after a 6-month period has elapsed. The selection process for the SBS is not the same as the regular Army or the Royal Marines. Whilst the process of selection for the Parachute Regiment and the Royal Marines is extremely tough, it is nowhere near as difficult as the selection process for the Special Boat Service.

When candidates arrive for selection in Hereford you would expect them to be greeted with shouts and instructions from a fierce NCO but this is not the case. Candidates are expected, in the majority, to look after themselves and be at a certain place at a certain time. If they are late or put one foot wrong then they are back on the first train home.

The well-prepared candidate for selection will have been training for many months in advance. However, there are many soldiers and marines who start their preparation before they even join the Armed Forces. Some people have a burning ambition to join the SBS before they join the regular Forces and they see their recruitment into the Service as a stepping-stone to joining this elite force.



RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

THE SBS SELECTION PROCESS

It is virtually impossible to pass the SBS selection process without intensive and dedicated preparation, yet still some candidates arrive for selection having carried out little or no preparation. Serving SBS soldiers must be able to fend for themselves and they must have the ability to think for themselves. Nobody will be there to tell you to get up in the morning and nobody will tell you to get your arse down the gym in order to get fit.

The level of fitness required in order to successfully pass the SBS selection process is phenomenal. Having the ability to reach level 16 on the bleep test or being able to bench press 100kg is not the aim of the game. You won't find any muscle bound thugs in the SBS, in fact the exact opposite. Their fitness is predominantly based on the ability to keep going under extreme conditions and for prolonged periods. This requires a different level of fitness than that of the athlete who can run a marathon in under 3.5 hours or the swimmer who swims the channel in record time. It's about prolonged physical and mental fitness such as trekking 50 miles across rough terrain in freezing conditions with a 16kg Bergen on your back before carrying out a difficult surveillance mission in a small hole for days at a time without being spotted.

The average day during selection will commence at around 4am. Most days you'll be required to get up and out of bed yourself. It is totally up to you to get up and make sure you are mustered at the rendezvous point on time and with all of your equipment. If you're not there, then the truck will leave without you and you'll be returned to unit that same day. You cannot afford to make any mistakes during the selection process, which makes it all the more difficult to succeed, especially when you hardly get any sleep. Those who fail are usually glad to go back to unit!

Once on the truck, you will be dropped off at various different points and it is up to you to make your way back to a specific point within a certain time using a compass, your map and the map reading skills you have gained over the years as a regular soldier. This stage of the process takes place in the Brecon Beacons or the Black Hills of South Wales. During this phase of the process you will have to carry a heavy Bergen, weapon and sometimes ammunition boxes over a series of long timed hikes, navigating between different checkpoints.



RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

THE SBS SELECTION PROCESS

Positioned at each checkpoint will be a serving Elite Forces soldier who will not offer any words of encouragement or criticism. These are known as Directing Staff (DS). Once you eventually reach the rendezvous point, which is usually late into the evening, you may then be told that there has been a mistake and the rendezvous point has now changed and is a further 15-mile trek away. As you can probably imagine, at this point many people drop out or resign. It is only those people who keep going without moaning who get to realise that the truck is actually just round the corner or a mile down the road.

It is imperative that the SBS get the people they want during selection and there is no time for moaning or whining. A job needs to be done and every member of the service must be able to operate both individually and as part of a team. If one person lets the team down then the whole mission will fail and this is not acceptable.

The demands of life in a Special Forces unit such as the SBS require each member to be self-motivated and self-reliant; therefore it is imperative that each person can fend for himself.



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INTRODUCTION

Within this section of the guide we have provided you with 10 of the most important tips to follow during selection. This list is not the 'be all and end all' and you will find many other hints, tips and advice within this guide to assist you. However, the 10 tips contained on the following pages are very important and therefore should not be neglected.

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 1 – FOCUS ON YOUR GOAL

Those who fail selection do so for a number of reasons, which range from either a lack of fitness, a lack of determination, being disliked by the instructors, being cocky or over-confident, not listening to the instructors, not doing what they are told or simply giving in.

All of the above are as a result of one thing – failing to focus on the ultimate goal, which is to pass Special Forces selection.

SBS selection is tough and there are certainly no secret formulae to succeeding. Your focus should begin months in advance of selection. Preparing yourself both mentally and physically is the key to your success. How badly you want this is down to you and nobody else.

The first step to passing the selection process is in your preparation. It's pointless turning up for selection having only carried out one month's worth of preparation. If you are determined to be successful then you will focus on your goal many months prior to your selection start date.

Keeping a constant focus on your goal will enable you to condition your mind to what you want to achieve.



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 2 – FITNESS PREPARATION

This is an obvious tip but one that many people who are up for selection fail to take seriously.

Your fitness levels prior to, and during selection are immensely important. Before you attend selection you will have a good idea of what lies ahead, therefore you have the advantage of knowing how to prepare effectively for it.

Read the sections within this guide that relate to fitness preparation and start your training regime at least 4 months in advance of your anticipated selection date. Your fitness training programme should involve a number of different disciplines. Do not make the mistake of simply going out on a number of 'long runs'. You must include a variety of different exercises, each with varying intensity, duration and repetitions, in order to condition your body for the selection process.

Within the 'How to get SBS fit' training guide you will notice that we focus on warming up/warming down exercises, running, swimming and light weight work. The variety included within the guide is for good reason, and is something you should take seriously. A varied exercise programme will improve your fitness, strength and stamina far more effectively than one that is monotonous and single tier.

Variety, in terms of the different exercises utilised and the intensity of each training session, is the key to your success.



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 3 – GET TO KNOW THE BRECON BEACONS

The majority of routes you will endure during selection will be on the Brecon Beacons, which are located in Mid Wales.

The route marches and treks will probably be the toughest thing you will ever experience in your life. Therefore, being familiar with the territory prior to selection is a positive step. Do not get hung up on trying to identify specific routes that you think the SBS will use during selection, but rather get used to the surroundings, the terrain and the inclement weather conditions.

The Brecon Beacons are a lovely place during the summer months but can be a treacherous place during winter and the cold seasons. As detailed within this guide a number of soldiers have already lost their lives on the Beacons and the more familiar you are with the surroundings and more prepared you are in terms of map reading, fitness and equipment selection, the safer you will be. This in turn will increase your chances of success and enable you to pass each test. It is advised that you spend at least two weekends prior to selection walking around the Brecon Beacons to familiarise yourself with the territory and surroundings. The Beacons cover a total area of 1347 sq km (520 sq miles) so you will never be able to predict the exact routes used by the SBS during selection. However, having an understanding of the area's layout and terrain will certainly assist you during selection.

Before you visit the Beacons purchase yourself the Ordnance Survey Map of the area. The map you need is OS Landranger 160 and this can be purchased online by following the link here. The map scale is 1:50 000 (2 cm to 1 km, 1¼ inches to 1 mile), which is usually the same as the one issued to you during selection. Familiarity, both with the Beacons and the map for the area, is good preparation and it will go a long way to helping you succeed.



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 4 – MAP READING COMPETENCE

If you are poor at map reading then you will struggle during selection. The majority of candidates who arrive for selection will not have read a map for many months and they will soon feel the pressure. Map reading is just as important as your fitness and when taking part in the many treks of the endurance phase you will be constantly using your map and compass.

Spend plenty of time learning the basics of map reading and if the opportunity of refresher training exists within your unit, then take it up. If you decide to spend time on the Brecon Beacons, as recommended in tip number 3, you will be able to try out your map reading skills and put them to the test.

Most maps used by the British Army, the SAS and the SBS, are of scale 1:50,000. During selection there are a number of important things to remember and within this section we will look at them individually:

Taking care of your map

Your map is your lifeline to where you want to be and therefore it is important that you look after it and protect it from the elements. One thing that is drilled home to you during selection is that your map must never be marked or written on for any reason. If you were on a mission with the SBS and your map became lost or captured it could give away useful information to the enemy. How you fold your map too is also important, ensuring that you do not create any further 'creases' in addition to the map's original ones. Once again this can give away information to the enemy and must be avoided at all costs.

During selection, and whilst on the Brecon Beacons, your map should be protected in a suitable waterproof bag and properly sealed to prevent water making its way in. You will be tasked with completing many long distance treks. During these treks you will come across a number of different 'checkpoints', which are manned by the Directing Staff. They will ask you details about where you have been before telling you where you are going next. Make sure you listen to what they are telling you, as they will not repeat the information. Being able to concentrate whilst under extreme pressure is all part of the selection criteria.



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 4 – MAP READING COMPETENCE

Reading your map

Any soldier or Royal Marine who puts himself up for selection should be a competent map reader. However, there are still a number of useful and simple tips that can help you increase your timings during selection. Simplicity and repetition is the key, or in other words - keep your map reading simple and repeat the same process every time you refer to your map.

First, you need to determine your bearing (the direction you want to travel). Use the following procedure to obtain an exact travel direction towards your desired destination. The procedure will work if the magnetic North-South lines are drawn on the map.

- a) Place the compass on the map so that the long edge connects the starting point with the desired destination.
- b) Make sure that the direction arrows are pointing from the starting point to the place of destination (and not the opposite way).
- c) Hold the compass firm on the map in order to keep the base plate steady.
- d) Turn the rotating capsule until the North-South lines on the bottom of the capsule are parallel with the North-South lines on the map.
- e) Be sure that the North-South arrow on the bottom of the capsule points to the same direction as North on the map.
- f) Hold the compass in your hand in front of you. Make sure that the base plate is in horizontal position, and that the direction arrows are pointing straight ahead.
- g) Rotate your body until the North-South arrow on the bottom of the capsule lines up with the magnetic needle, and the red end of the needle points in the same direction as the arrow.



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 4 – MAP READING COMPETENCE

Reading your map (continued)

h) The directional arrows on the base plate will now show your desired travel direction.

Now that you have determined your necessary bearing, you need to make sure you maintain an accurate bearing. First, you should find a suitable target in the distance (e.g. a tree, bush or other suitable landmark) towards which the direction arrows point. Walk towards the chosen object without looking at your compass. When you reach your target, find a new object that is aligned with your bearing, and repeat the process.

Tip: Sometimes the compass capsule may get turned accidentally while you are walking. Remember to check from time to time that the capsule has not deviated from the direction that had been set on the compass.

How to locate a Grid Reference

All Ordnance Survey maps (and the majority of others) contain vertical and horizontal grid lines known as Eastings and Northings. If the lines, which are light blue in colour, were to be drawn on the ground, they would be exactly one kilometre apart.

On the map itself, the grid lines are 4cms apart on the 1:25,000 scale and 2cms apart on the 1:50,000 scale.

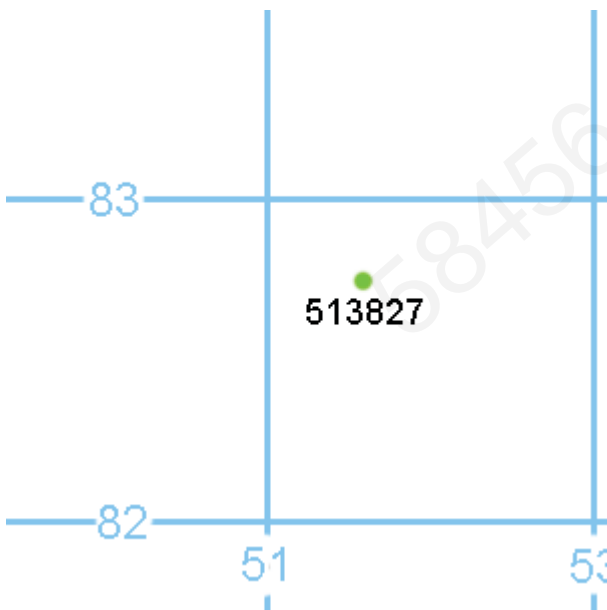
The grid numbers on the east-west or horizontal axis are called the Eastings, and the grid numbers on the north-south or vertical axis are called the Northings. When a grid reference is provided the Eastings always come first. For example, take a look at the map section on the following page:



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 4 – MAP READING COMPETENCE

How to locate a Grid Reference (continued)



Grid references are usually indicated by a 6-figure number.

The green dot indicated on the diagram above is located at grid reference 513827. Remember that the Eastings are provided first, which in this instance are '513'.

The '51' identifies the grid in which the green dot is located and the '3' indicates that the green dot is 3/10ths along the grid.

The same rule applies for the '827' of the grid reference, only the difference this time is that these three numbers are referring to the Northings. In this instance the '82' refers to the location of the green dot in the grid and the '7' indicates that the green dot is 7/10ths up the grid.



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 4 – MAP READING COMPETENCE

Staying on track

There is a good possibility that you will lose your direction on the Brecon Beacons, especially during the middle of the night and also during poor weather conditions. You will need to complete the majority of treks and tabs under a specific time limit and apart from your fitness level there are other ways to improve your timings.

One of them is having the ability to understand where you are going without having to constantly refer to your map and compass. The most effective method for reducing your timings is to take your reading and then focus on a prominent point, object or landmark, as far in the distance as possible that is also visible on the map. Then, have the confidence to progress to that point without checking your map or compass. Once you reach the landmark then take a further reading and repeat the process.

Finding your way without the use of a compass

There may be times during selection where you will need to find your way without the aid of a compass. The majority of candidates on selection are competent in 'way finding' without the aid of their compass. However, for those who are not competent, here are a few tips and hints to help you:

The Shadow-Tip Method

1. To begin with you will need to find a straight stick of thin branch approximately 1 metre in length. Place the stick upright into the ground so that you can see its shadow. Make sure the surface you have placed the stick into is as flat as possible.
2. Now mark the tip of the shadow using a suitable object such as a small stick or stone. Make sure you take the time to mark it as accurately as possible.



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 4 – MAP READING COMPETENCE

The Shadow-Tip Method (continued)

3. Now wait for approximately 10-15 minutes. The shadow will move from west to east in an arc.
4. Now mark the new position of the shadow's tip with another small stick or stone. During the 10-15 minute period the shadow will only move a short distance but this should be sufficient time for you to take a reading.
5. Draw a straight line in the ground between the two marks. This line is called the 'east-west line'.
6. Finally, stand with the first mark (west) on your left, and the other (east) on your right. You are now facing approximately true north. (Accuracy improves as your location approaches the equator, and as the time of year approaches either equinox.)

Watch Method: Northern Hemisphere

Make sure that your watch (the kind with hour and minute hands) is set accurately. Now place it on a level surface, such as the ground, or you may prefer to hold it horizontal in the palm of your hand.

1. To begin with, point the hour hand at the sun. You can use a stick to cast a shadow to aid in your alignment if you wish but this is not necessary.
2. Bisect (find the centre point of) the angle between the hour hand and the twelve o'clock mark. The centre of the angle between the hour hand and twelve o'clock mark is the north-south line. If you don't know which way is north and which is south, just remember that no matter where you are, the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. In the northern hemisphere the sun is due south at midday. If your watch is set to daylight saving time bisect the angle between the hour hand and the one o'clock mark instead.



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 4 – MAP READING COMPETENCE

Watch Method: Southern Hemisphere

1. Using your watch as above, point the watch's twelve o'clock mark toward the sun again. If your watch is set to daylight saving time, point the one o'clock mark toward the sun.
2. Bisect the angle between the twelve o'clock mark (or one o'clock mark if using daylight saving time) and the hour hand to find the north-south line. If you're unsure which way is north, remember that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west no matter where you are. In the southern hemisphere, however, the sun is due north at midday.

Using the Stars: Northern Hemisphere

Locate the North Star (Polaris) in the night sky. The North Star is the last star in the handle of the Little Dipper constellation as indicated below.

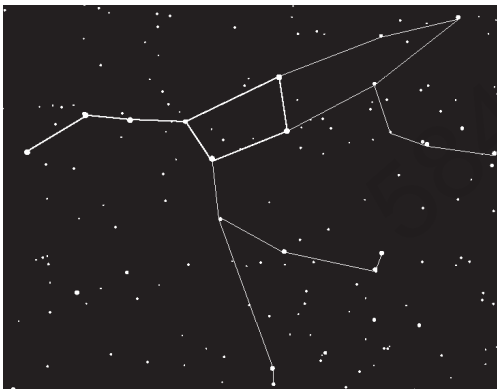


TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 4 – MAP READING COMPETENCE

Using the Stars: Northern Hemisphere

If you have trouble finding it, find the Big Dipper instead which is indicated below.



The two lowest stars in the Big Dipper (the outermost stars of the cup of the dipper) form a straight line that 'points' to the North Star. You may also find the constellation Cassiopeia, which is always opposite the Big Dipper. The North Star is located about midway between the central star of Cassiopeia and the Big Dipper.

Draw an imaginary line straight down from the North Star to the ground. This direction is true north, and if you can find a landmark in the distance at this point, you can use it to guide yourself.

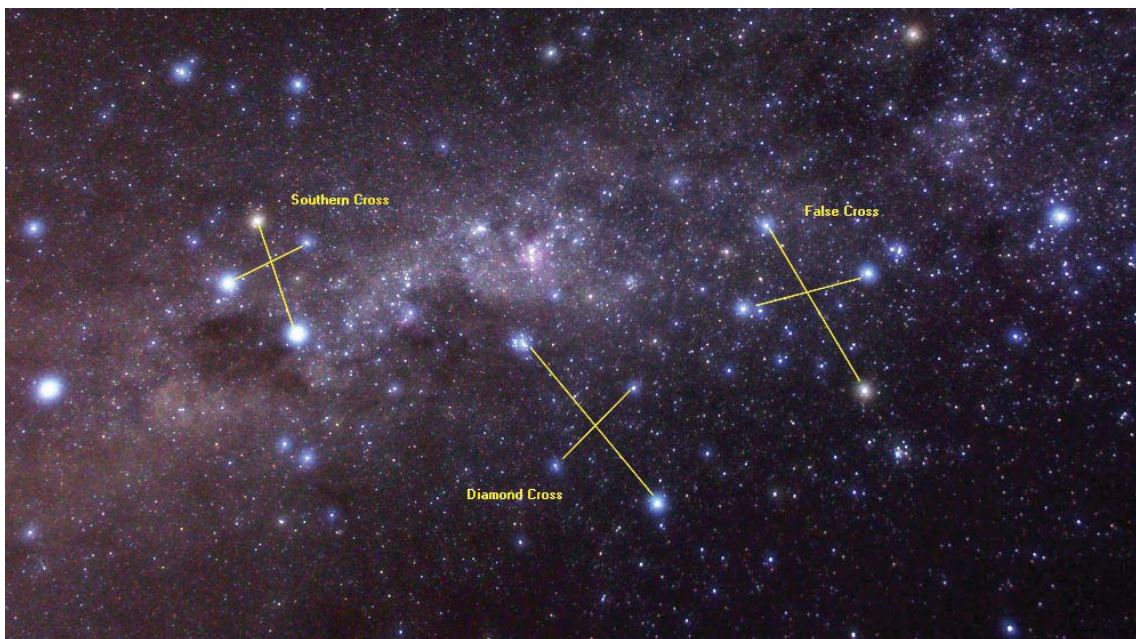


TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 4 – MAP READING COMPETENCE

Using the Stars: Southern Hemisphere

Find the Southern Cross constellation, which is indicated in the diagram below.



In the southern hemisphere, the North Star is not visible, and no single star always indicates north or south, but you can use the Southern Cross as your guide. This constellation is formed by five stars, and the four brightest stars form a cross that is angled to one side.

1. Identify the two stars that make up the long axis of the cross. These stars form a line that 'points' to an imaginary point in the sky, which is above the South Pole. Follow the imaginary line down from the two stars to five times the distance between them.
2. Draw an imaginary line from this point to the ground and try to identify a corresponding landmark to steer by. Since this is true south, true north is directly opposite it (behind you as you are looking at the point).



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 4 – MAP READING COMPETENCE

Using the Stars: Southern Hemisphere

Another method using the Southern Cross is to also find the Pointers. This is a pair of two stars that point toward the Southern Cross in a fairly straight line. As above, find the two stars that make up the long axis of the Southern Cross. As well, look at the Pointers, imagine a line between them. Find the point in the middle of this line, and draw an imaginary line from that point at a right angle to the line.

Where the line from the Southern Cross and the Pointers meets is true south, so again true north is directly opposite.

Moon Method

1. Observe the moon. If it is not a full moon and rises before the sun sets, the illuminated side is west. If the moon rises after midnight the illuminated side is east. This is true everywhere on Earth.
2. Approximate north and south based on the rough east-west line of the moon. No matter where you are, if you are standing with the west side to your left, true north will be straight ahead.



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 5 – BE PREPARED FOR THE ELEMENTS

The time of year that you are on selection will determine the type and severity of weather conditions you will be faced with.

The major problem with selection during the winter months is that there is the risk of hypothermia and frostbite. These usually occur during temperatures below freezing and with the 'night treks' that are guaranteed during selection the risk will increase.

The danger presented, in terms of frostbite and hypothermia, can be decreased if you take a number of precautions. You must take care of the areas of your body where heat is most likely to escape. These include your hands, feet, neck and head and it is important that these are covered up and kept warm as often as possible. Early signs of frostbite include a 'pins and needles' sensation, which is often followed by numbness. Frostbitten skin will be hard, pale, cold and there may be early throbbing or aching in the affected areas, but later on the affected part becomes insensate (devoid of feeling).

When the affected area has thawed out, it becomes red and painful. With more severe frostbite, the skin may appear white and numb, which usually indicates that the tissue has started to freeze. Very severe frostbite can cause blisters, gangrene (blackened dead tissue), and damage to the deep structures such as tendons, muscles, nerves and bone can occur.

When faced with severe inclement weather conditions you will need to keep checking for signs of the above. If you suspect frostbite or hypothermia then you must take immediate action to prevent the condition from deteriorating.



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 5 – BE PREPARED FOR THE ELEMENTS

Treating hypothermia

The first step for treating hypothermia is to preserve your body heat and prevent any more from being lost. This means changing out of any wet clothing and covering up affected areas. Move out of the cold as much as possible and try to find a suitable shelter. You will find that the steep contours of the Brecon Beacons will afford you some protection from the severe wind, thus helping to reduce the wind chill factor.

If you suspect a colleague is suffering from the effects of hypothermia then you can use your own body heat to help them increase their body temperature. Hugging them or placing their hands under your armpits or in between your groin area can help transfer essential heat where it is needed the most.

If possible try to eat carbohydrates, which will provide you with much needed rapid energy, or fats to provide prolonged fuel for your body. Obviously what you can eat will be determined by how much food and the type of food you are carrying in your Bergen or rucksack. Think ahead prior to the trek and pack the right foods and drinks.

Treating frostbite

The simplest and most effective way to treat frostbite is to move your fingers or toes in order to increase circulation. Do not rub or massage the area, as this can be extremely painful. Keep the whole body as warm as possible and immediately remove any wet clothing.

If it is possible, gradually re-warm the area affected using warm water for approximately 30 minutes. If warm water is not available (which it won't be on the Beacons) wrap the affected area in warm clothing or a sleeping bag.



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 5 – BE PREPARED FOR THE ELEMENTS

If you get lost

During SBS selection it is unlikely that you'll get lost but there are procedures in place to rescue you if the unfortunate circumstance occurs.

The main thing to remember if you do get lost is that you will be found by the search team that is sent out to rescue you.

All you need to do is focus on your survival. If you do get lost the risk from hypothermia or frostbite increases, so try to understand each of the conditions and take the necessary precautions to prevent them from happening.



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 6 – YOUR CLOTHING AND PERSONAL HYGIENE

During selection it is important that you take the right steps to protect yourself from the elements. One of the biggest problems you will face, especially out on the hills and Beacons, is that of wind chill.

Wind chill is the apparent temperature, which describes the cooling effect on exposed skin by the combination of temperature and wind and is expressed as the loss of body heat. Increased wind speed will accelerate the loss of body heat. A wind chill factor of -30 degrees or lower on exposed skin will result in frostbite in a very short period of time. As an example, a 5° day with a wind speed of 15 miles per hour will feel the equivalent to a -13° day. Therefore, the precautions you take to protect yourself from wind chill are of paramount importance if you are to survive the elements during SBS selection.

Taking precautions from wind chill

The clothing that you will be supplied with by your regiment, and that you will be wearing during selection, will be of a high standard. Try to keep your clothing as clean as possible throughout selection as the dirt will deteriorate the protective qualities of the garment. At the end of each session spend time preparing your kit for the following day. It is easy to let your kit go by the wayside but always remember that the state and repair of your clothing and equipment could save your life in a survival situation.

The wet weather will always be one of your biggest problems. Again, at the end of each day make sure you dry your clothes adequately in preparation for the following day. If you do not then you will be increasing the risk of wind chill. The cold weather will just sap the heat from your body and the wet clothing will no longer act as a protective barrier to the elements.

The most effective method for protecting yourself from the cold weather is the three-layer system. This is a well known, tried and tested method used by many professional hill walkers/mountaineers in their pursuit to avoid the perils of the elements.



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 6 – YOUR CLOTHING AND PERSONAL HYGIENE

Taking precautions from wind chill (continued)

The three-layer system utilises a base layer, an intermediate layer and an outer layer. The **base layer** is the first layer of clothing you put on and it is in direct contact with your skin. During SBS selection it is very likely that you will be sweating, cooling down, sweating, cooling down etc over prolonged periods. The base layer will enable you to cool down quickly whilst still maintaining a level of warmth and protection.

One of the problems faced during any strenuous outdoor exercise is that of 'post-exercise chill'. Certain clothing/material types, such as cotton T-shirts, will absorb any sweat and moisture that you produce during and following exercise. The problem with this type of material is that it will retain that cold moisture instead of transporting it away from your body. This in turn will force your body to increase its heat production and the cold, wet cotton T-shirt could cause your body to under-cool.

The types of material you use as a base layer should not retain the moisture but rather transport it away from your body in order to counteract the post-exercise chill.

The Insulation Layer

The second layer of clothing, after the base layer, is known as the insulation layer. The insulation layer is the second layer of clothing, which is put on top of the base layer. The insulation layer is used to retain your body heat by means of creating a layer of dead air around your body. This dead air will have the result of decreasing the heat exchange between your body and the outside elements.

The insulation layer should consist of a material that has the ability to stand up and effectively trap the air inside the fibres. Such materials are usually found in the form of fleece jackets or shirts.



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 6 – YOUR CLOTHING AND PERSONAL HYGIENE

Taking precautions from wind chill (continued)

The Outer Layer

The final Layer in the three-layer system is called the outer layer. This is the only layer to have direct contact with the outside elements. The outer layer is designed to:

- Protect you from the external elements such as snow, sleet and rain.
- Disperse body moisture.

Outer layers are usually waterproof and have the ability to protect you from wind chill if constructed from the right material. How waterproof the outer layer is will be very much dependant upon the type of material used in its construction. The breathability of the outer layer is dependant upon the size of the outer shell layer material membrane. The 'pore size' of the material used should be bigger than a water vapour molecule yet smaller than a water droplet. During 1976, Gore-Tex was developed, which is a membrane of a petrochemical polymer called polytetrafluorethylene (PTFE). Since 1976, many different variations of Gore-Tex have been developed that fall under the category name of PTFE laminates. Gore-Tex is an ideal material for forming an outer layer of the three-layer system.

Using the three-layer system will give you the best possible protection from the outdoor elements that you are likely to face during the SBS selection process. In most cases, the three-layer system pertains to upper body clothing. The torso and neck area are the most important things to insulate as they protect your body core. In extremely cold conditions, however, this three-layer system can be used for full body protection and you may find this of use during selection, depending on the weather conditions you are presented with at the time.



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 6 – YOUR CLOTHING AND PERSONAL HYGIENE

Looking after your feet

If your feet are in poor condition then don't expect to get too far during selection. Think about it logically – if the tyres on your car are worn down and in a poor state of repair then you are likely slide around the road surface and the possibility of you getting a puncture will dramatically increase. A similar rule applies to your feet – if you protect them with wet or dirty socks and you wear the wrong boots then you will soon realise that you cannot go much further. Throughout selection make sure your socks are clean and dry at all times and that you carry a spare pair with you in your Bergen so that you can change them whenever necessary. Remember to clean and thoroughly dry your feet first before changing your socks.

Selection requires you to trek many hundreds of miles over a lengthy period across some very difficult terrain. On top of this you will be carrying heavy weights in the form of your Bergen, rifle and sometimes ammunition boxes. Therefore the weight that is distributed to your feet greatly increases. Make sure your boots are in good condition, worn in and feel comfortable. One of the biggest mistakes you can make during selection is to arrive with a brand new pair of shining boots! Whilst you may look the smartest you will soon be sporting a number of 'selection ending' blisters.

There are a number of ways that you can increase the life of your boots and also protect them during selection. The first and most obvious method is to ensure that your boots are kept clean whenever possible. Do not simply place them under a hot running tap, but meticulously clean off the dirt and mud carefully with just enough hot water so that you don't 'over wet' your boots. Following on from this your boots should be kept dry. During selection it will be up to you to make sure your boots are kept dry. Remember to keep bootlaces clean and dry too as constant dampness can cause them to rot. If you are out on a long trek then the last thing you need is your laces falling apart on you. Take the time to change your laces every night after returning from each trek and keep them as clean and dry as possible. Also carry a spare pair of laces with you in your Bergen just in case you need them.



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 6 – YOUR CLOTHING AND PERSONAL HYGIENE

Looking after your feet (continued)

All this extra time and effort spent looking after yourself and your clothing may seem to be a pain in the arse but it is definitely worth the effort. Many people on selection choose to take gaiters with them to further protect the boot from the ingress of dirt, snow and moisture. Whilst not essential you may find this to be a good option and it will save you some time cleaning and drying your boots every night. Finally, take with you a protective boot wax, which will add to the waterproofing of the footwear and help to keep your boots supple and comfortable.



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 7 – BE PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY PREPARED FOR THE ROUTE SELECTION STAGES

If you are preparing for selection then you will no doubt be aware of the route selection phase. Designed to push any man to his limits, the route selection phase is as mentally tough as it is physical. If you fail to prepare properly for this stage of selection then you will almost certainly fail.

During selection the SBS selection staff will test you relentlessly over a large number of often long and difficult timed hikes, predominantly over the Brecon Beacons. The type and distance of the routes used by the SBS varies each year in order to prevent them becoming known by the candidates who are on selection. If the routes were to remain the same then soldiers would be able to practise them prior to selection and therefore unfairly increase their chances of success.

During a separate section of this guide we made reference to the importance of familiarising yourself with the Brecon Beacons and recommend that you spend some time on them becoming accustomed to the climate and the environment. Putting into practice your map reading skills on the Beacons is also a very important part of your preparation and it will go a long way to making you feel more at ease during the endurance stage.



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 8 – LEARN TO LIVE WITH YOUR BERGEN

Carrying a Bergen, especially over long treks across rough and often difficult terrain, is an arduous task. Add 50lbs to the equation and it's even harder! During SBS selection your Bergen will become a part of you and it is important that you look after it, pack it correctly and learn to carry it using the correct technique.

Packing your Bergen

Learn to pack your Bergen carefully and methodically, taking the time to ensure that the most used and important items are easily accessible. The item you will need access to the most is your water, so therefore it should be available at all times. The last thing you want to have to do is stop to take off your Bergen each time you want a drink. Start off by creating a list of everything you intend keeping in your Bergen and tick each item off in order of priority. The lowest numbers should be packed first and placed at the bottom of the Bergen, such as your sleeping bag or spare clothing. Time spent on this important area during preparation will reduce your timings on the hills during the selection process.

If you are not used to carrying a Bergen or you are out of practice then get some in before you attend selection. At times your Bergen will weigh 50 pounds or more so you must get used to carrying it over long periods and distances. During your time spent on the hills you will get wet so make sure everything you pack that is porous (i.e. soaks up water) is placed in plastic bags or another suitable waterproof lightweight container.

How to carry your Bergen correctly

The Bergen should be carried high up on your back so that the weight is evenly distributed and the amount of strain on your back is minimised.

If you have carried out the right type of training prior to selection, and practised carrying a Bergen, then your leg muscles should be strong enough to take the load.



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 8 – LEARN TO LIVE WITH YOUR BERGEN

How to carry your Bergen correctly (continued)

Before you put on your Bergen, first loosen the shoulder straps and all other tensioning straps. Put the rucksack on your back and fasten the hip belt (if relevant) so that its upper edge sits comfortably over the top of your hip bones. Finally, pull in the shoulder straps and tighten the tensioning straps to a tension point that allows freedom of movement.



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 9 – BE PREPARED FOR ESCAPE & EVASION AND TACTICAL QUESTIONING

If you make it far enough through to this stage of selection then you have done extremely well. Escape & Evasion and Tactical Questioning is one of the toughest parts of selection. This cannot be over emphasised.

The interrogation phase of selection does not differ from the kind of treatment that terrorist suspects complained about in Ulster during 1971, and which was studied by the Compton Commission. At the commencement of interrogation, soldiers on selection will be totally exhausted and will have already been subjected to physical hardship and sensory deprivation. This occurs in the form of a dark hood placed over the head for many hours at a time. In addition to this, white noise and psychological torture are used in an attempt to force the soldier to reveal his name and also the regiment that he is from.

During a real life scenario, the aim is for the soldier to hold off giving any information away that could compromise a mission or put other people in danger. The type of person who usually fails at this stage is of no particular type – it can happen to anybody. No matter how hard you try to tell yourself that it is only part of selection, you can only feel the realness of each interrogation session and the 'realness' that those issuing out the punishment add to the situation. That said, there are a number of coping techniques one can employ to ease the pain and discomfort, which we will discuss later.

Those who have successfully passed selection have previously stated that they were interrogated for different lengths of time, which included an intense half-hour period, an eight-hour period and finally a 24-hour period. The SBS will use white noise, bright electric lights, flashing lights, shackles, chains, dogs and other methods in their attempts to make you crack. There have been times when candidates have been secured to a wooden plank and placed under water for a number of seconds, once again to try to break them. This method, from an interrogator's point of view, works well. Even though the candidate knows that the interrogators are not trying to drown him, there will always be that fear that things could go wrong. It is at this point that many candidates give in.



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 9 – BE PREPARED FOR ESCAPE & EVASION AND TACTICAL QUESTIONING

An SBS interrogator will also use other fear tactics in order to make you break. Whilst being interrogated in one room, candidates can often hear another person being beaten in a separate room along with the cries for help and also the sound of vomiting. Whilst these are only being acted out by the interrogators, they are enough to put considerable added strain on an already tired soldier.

Probably one of the most frightening of experiences used by the SBS in the past is that of a railway line and a train. Candidates are placed blindfolded on a track and handcuffed to the rail. A member of the interrogation team will shout out that a train is approaching nearby and a frantic rush ensues as they try to locate the keys to unlock the candidates. Of course they find the keys and the train that is approaching is on a separate line close by. The wise candidates place their hands either side of the track with the handcuff chain braced over the line hoping that the train will break the chain and they can escape. Unsurprisingly many candidates break at this point and shout for the interrogators to release them. Another method used by the interrogation team is to leave candidates out in the cold totally naked. A woman is used as part of the team and will make jokes about the size of a candidate's penis, which will have shrunk due to the cold weather! Very embarrassing for most men but for the candidate who is totally focused on his aim this will not deter him in the slightest. Women interrogators are also used as part of a 'softening' approach. Men respond differently to women, who can have more persuasive powers when used in the right manner. This type of approach will also have the effect of confusing the candidate who is under interrogation and they can often crumble under the pressure. In a real life interrogation situation a soldier is likely to need skills of evasion in the following situations:

- When escaping from a POW camp (Prisoner of War);
- When he becomes lost from his troop during a mission;
- When escaping from a situation when he and his troop are surrounded, either as a team or on his own.



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 9 – BE PREPARED FOR ESCAPE & EVASION AND TACTICAL QUESTIONING

If you are captured then it is a requirement of law that the capturing body informs a protection power such as the Red Cross. This is the only reason for providing your captor with your name, rank, number and date of birth. It is highly unlikely that your captors will actually inform the protection power, especially if you are captured by a terrorist unit.

How to behave during capture and interrogation

One of the first and most important things to remember if you are captured is to remain calm. Easier said than done, but anything other than this will give your captor the impression that you are willing to assist them and provide them with information. This will have the detrimental effect of prolonging the interrogation. The best form of behaviour is to keep in the background as much as possible and only speak if spoken to. Do not be rude or try to antagonise the interrogator. Be polite and courteous but do not shout or become aggressive, no matter how much you want to. The British Armed Forces are renowned worldwide for their professionalism and conduct and the interrogator will know this from the offset. If he/she gets the feeling that you are unlikely to break then this will work in your favour. An interrogator will want to know how intelligent you are and he will get a good indication of this from your attitude. If you tell him to 'piss off' when being asked a question he will feel the aggression within you and see this as a weakness that he can attack and break down. If you are polite and calm the interrogator will have his work cut out and he will be aware of this.

One of the first steps used by a skilled interrogator is the 'softening up' technique. This can be achieved in a number of ways including rough treatment, sleep deprivation, solitary confinement or alternatively an attempt to get you on side. He may offer you food and warm drinks, gifts, cigarettes and even a plane back home to your family. If you are placed in solitary confinement, which is highly likely, then do not become afraid. Focus on your goal and try remembering the reason why you are there. Remember that the longer the interrogation and bad treatment goes on, the weaker you will become. If you know this then you will be far better placed to deal with it.



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 9 – BE PREPARED FOR ESCAPE & EVASION AND TACTICAL QUESTIONING

How to behave during capture and interrogation (continued)

Interrogators often use repetition techniques in order to break you. Imagine sitting in a cold dark room having to listen to a dreadful song over and over again for eight hours. This type of treatment is designed to break you down, ready for further interrogation. Added with the fact that you will be hungry and thirsty, your will and determination to beat the interrogators will be stretched to the limit. One of the most effective methods for resisting interrogation is that of a focused mind and steady breathing. You must focus your mind on a positive image or thought and keep going back to it when you feel the need. In order to achieve this state of mind you must employ a steady and shallow breathing technique. Concentrate on breathing in and out through your nose and try to relax your muscles.

Whilst under interrogation you will feel nervous, frightened and anxious. In turn these feelings will create tension, which will waste away all of your energy. A concentrated breathing technique will help you to counteract these negative thoughts and preserve energy.



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 10 – UNDERSTAND THE WEATHER

You may think we are mad for saying this but an understanding of how the weather changes and reasons for it will help you during selection and whilst on the Brecon Beacons.

Fog

Fog and mist are both made of tiny water droplets that are suspended in the air. The main difference between the two is the density of the droplets. Fog is denser than mist and so contains more water droplets. The official definition of fog is when visibility reaches less than 1000 metres. This limit is more appropriate for aviation purposes, but for the general public and motorists an upper limit of 200 metres is a more realistic distance. However, whilst on selection you are likely to have even lower distances of vision, which will only serve to disorientate you. That's why your map reading skills are very important.

The atmosphere is made up of many different gases and one of these is water vapour. It can hold a certain amount of water as invisible water vapour at any given temperature. If air is cooled it can hold less water and becomes super saturated. At saturation point, some of the water has to condense to form water droplets, which in turn forms cloud.

There are four different types of fog in the UK: radiation fog, advection fog, hill fog and coastal fog. The type of fog you will be presented with during selection will be hill fog, depending on the time of year that you are on selection. Hill fog or upslope fog, as it is otherwise called, is formed as the mild moist air is forced to ascend a hill. As the air moves up the windward side of the mountain it cools down, and again if the air becomes saturated then a cloud is formed, which creates fog if it is below the top of the hills.

It is possible to anticipate fog when there is moisture in the air and there is a difference in temperature. Common places to find fog are in low-lying areas or deep valleys and near bodies of water. Remember that fog can collect very quickly. Light fog can rapidly become thick fog and surround you, causing navigation problems.



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 10 – UNDERSTAND THE WEATHER

The change between day and night

The length of a day changes as the year progresses. This occurs because the earth spins at a tilt. If the earth did not tilt, then the days and nights would all be the same length. The length of day and night very much depends on whereabouts you are on Earth, with the extremes being at the North and South Poles. Planet Earth rotates around a line that is approximately 23.5 degrees to the poles. The southernmost line where the sun is directly overhead is called the Tropic of Capricorn and the northernmost line is the Tropic of Cancer. Due to the tilt of planet Earth, the North Pole will sometimes point towards the sun, whilst the South Pole points away. When this situation occurs the North Pole will have 24 hours of daylight for approximately 6 months of the year, whilst the South Pole remains in total darkness.

Following this, the North Pole then tilts away from the sun. On the equator line, the sun is always nearly overhead, so therefore the days are more constant with approximately twelve hours of daylight and twelve hours of darkness each day. In the United Kingdom, the day length obviously depends on where you are. The UK is located north of the equator, in the south there is less change, but most places still have a longest day of over sixteen hours, and a shortest of under eight. The longest day of the year is known as the summer solstice, and occurs on the 21st of June. On this particular date the sun is directly overhead at its nearest point to the UK, above the Tropic of Cancer. Conversely, the shortest day of the year is on the 21st of December, when the sun is furthest away, directly overhead at the Tropic of Capricorn.

The tilt of the earth is not only responsible for the changing day lengths, but the change in seasons as well. When the Earth is tilted with the northern hemisphere pointing towards the sun, the sun's rays hit the UK more directly. A more intense sun gives days that are warmer, as well as longer. This is called summer. When the earth is tilted away from the sun, the sunlight then has to pass through more of the Earth's atmosphere before it reaches the ground. During this situation the sun is weaker. This then gives us the cold, short days of winter that we are all too familiar with in the UK.



TOP 10 INSIDER TIPS AND ADVICE

INSIDER TIP NUMBER 10 – UNDERSTAND THE WEATHER

The change between day and night (continued)

The three mountain ranges that constitute the Brecon Beacons are fantastically green and pleasant. However, this can give a false sense of security.

The weather often changes rapidly during the course of each day. This will make a big difference to your progress whilst on selection in the hills and it will also place you in greater danger. Keep an eye on the weather and listen to each brief before you set off. Mist, snow, rain and wind can quickly confuse your sense of direction.



SELECTION - PHASE 1

PHASE 1 – ENDURANCE WEEK 1

BATTLE FITNESS TEST

The first 3 weeks of Special Forces selection are known as the 'endurance' phase. The main aim of the endurance phase is to test a soldier's physical fitness and mental stamina and it is at this stage of the process where most people drop out.

During a soldier's initial recruitment training he is often provided with encouragement and the mere fact that he is being shouted at to get a move on will drive him forward.

The SBS selection process is somewhat different and there is nobody there to shout orders or in fact any words of encouragement. This makes it a very lonely place and the SBS believe that if you want to be a part of their service then you will not need any encouragement to pass their tough selection process.

In order to pass this stage of the selection process a soldier/marine will need to be highly determined and have the ability to look after himself. The first part of the selection test requires candidates to pass the standard Army Battle Fitness test (BFT). Surprisingly, this test will lose between 5 and 10% of the candidate group who are returned to unit immediately. It is imperative that the SBS marine is capable of looking after himself and he should therefore, not have to be told what level of fitness he needs to maintain. If a candidate who puts himself up for selection cannot pass the standard Battle Fitness Test then understandably he will not proceed any further. The BFT consists of a 3-mile run – the first half must be completed within twelve and a half minutes and for the remainder there is no time limit. The BFT is carried out whilst carrying a 40lb Bergen and a rifle. The remainder of week 1 is comprised of map revision, orienteering lessons, plenty of gym work, beatings, 5-mile runs, 8-mile runs and the Fan Dance.



SELECTION - PHASE 1

PHASE 1 – ENDURANCE WEEK 1

MAP REVISION

During the first week you will be provided with a basic map reading course. Make sure you take notice during the lesson and listen carefully to what you are being told. As you progress through this guide you will realise that your ability to read a map quickly and accurately is essential. See Insider tip number 4 for more information and tips in relation to map reading.

SWIMMING TEST

During the first week you will need to pass a basic swimming test, which is performed at a local swimming pool. You will be required to swim around the outside of the pool whilst wearing combat clothing and trainers. Once you have completed the circuit you are then required to tread water for up to 15 minutes. Once this stage has been successfully completed you are required to swim a length underwater. See your 'How to get SBS fit guide' for a structured swimming programme.

ORIENTEERING

During selection you will be required to take part in a number of orienteering exercises. Orienteering derives from the Swedish word "orienteering" and the term was first used to describe the sport in 1918 by Major Ernst Killander who was then the President of the Stockholm Amateur Athletic Association. Orienteering originated in Scandinavia and was used as a military exercise during the late 19th century. Orienteering is basically a running sport that involves navigation with a map and a compass. The traditional form involves cross-country running, although other forms have evolved such as 'ski-orienteering'.

During selection you will be required to pass a number of orienteering exercises, which normally take place in the Forest of Dean. Each exercise is timed and you will complete them with at least one further soldier who is also on selection.



SELECTION - PHASE 1

PHASE 1 – ENDURANCE WEEK 1

ORIENTEERING

You will be required to carry a 40lb Bergen during the orienteering exercises, which can be difficult if your orienteering skills are not up to scratch.

The aim of the orienteering exercises is to navigate round all of the points on the provided map in the correct order and in the fastest possible time. You will be encouraged to improve your time at each checkpoint. In order to obtain a good time during the orienteering exercises you will need to be a fast runner (if you are up for selection then you should be anyway), with strength and stamina. You will also need good concentration levels in order to navigate your way through the terrain. At each checkpoint along the course there will be Special Forces Directing Staff (DS) to check that you have passed through that particular point. The DS at each checkpoint will record the time you checked in at so that at the end of the exercise, all your times can be added together to determine whether or not you completed the course in sufficient time.

PHYSICAL EXERCISE SESSIONS

Physical Exercise sessions, or 'beastings' as they are more commonly known, are a common part of Armed Forces life and whilst they are frowned upon in the public eye, they are an important way to assess a soldier's ability to withstand constant and relentless physical and mental pressure.

During the SBS selection process you will succumb to a number of highly physical exercise sessions that can last up to 2 hours and involve many different exercises. During these sessions you will carry out hundreds of press ups, sit ups, star jumps, shuttle runs, sprints, running up steep hills, you name it, you'll be doing it!



SELECTION - PHASE 1

PHASE 1 – ENDURANCE WEEK 1

THE FAN DANCE

During the first week comes the 'Fan Dance'. The 'Fan Dance' is where each of the remaining soldiers has to climb and then descend the dreaded 3,000ft Pen-y-Fan Mountain without stopping within 4 hours. Whilst carrying out this arduous task they are also required to carry with them a 40lb Bergen and rifle. What makes this task so difficult is that they are on their own with no assistance or encouragement.

The SBS will not abandon the task because of torrential rain, sleet or snow. The task must be carried out and completed within a set timeframe regardless of the conditions. To complete this successfully takes a very special type of person. Not only is it physically unbearable, but the mental fatigue on a candidate's mind is something they will have never experienced before.



SELECTION - PHASE 1

PHASE 1 – WEEK 2

At the beginning of the second week you will begin the first of up to six hard testing treks across the Brecon Beacons. This is where the hard work really begins and those people who are left will begin to see the light at the end of the tunnel. It is important not to become complacent with your performance so far as the first week is relatively easy compared to what is to come. You will feel tired and drained at this point and this is where your mental attitude is just as important as your physical fitness and stamina.

At the beginning of each day you will board a truck and be driven off to various starting locations around the Beacons. There will be a series of timed hikes during the second week, where you will have to carry a Bergen weighing up to 40lb along with your rifle. The hikes get progressively harder as you progress through the week. At the beginning of each hike your Bergen will be weighed and, if it is below weight, bricks will be added until the specified weight is reached.

It is important to pack your Bergen with the right items (see Insider tip number 8) as this can save you valuable time on the treks. The last thing you want is to be searching for an important item that you have packed incorrectly.

Make sure you fill yourself up with the right sort of calories on the morning of each trek in order to give yourself plenty of much-needed energy. It may seem obvious but also make sure you visit the toilet and empty your bowels! Taking a dump during treks is ok but it will just add time to your journey. With that in mind, ensure you pack toilet roll in your Bergen, wrapped in a plastic waterproof bag.

At the beginning of each trek listen to the DS and learn to remember your grid references, as these won't be issued twice. On your way to each rendezvous point get some sleep in the back of the truck and learn to conserve energy at every opportunity.



SELECTION - PHASE 1

PHASE 1 – WEEK 3

The final week of selection is termed as 'test week' and this is where all the hard work that has gone before will seem like nothing compared to what is to come. This is the ultimate test for any soldier and the number of candidates still left for selection at this point is usually about a third. During test week candidates are required to swim across a river totally naked whilst still carrying their Bergen and rifle. It also involves a number of 24-64km marches, all over the Brecon Beacons. Over the years and since the inception of the selection process as it stands, a number of people have lost their lives.

One of the more commonly known incidents is the tragic death of Mike Kealy in 1979. Mike Kealy was already serving in the SAS and was returning for a stint of operational duty as a Major in command of his own squadron. He was determined to prove he still had the required fitness to be an operational SAS soldier at the age of 33 and on the 1st of February 1979 he joined a batch of SAS recruit hopefuls. He embarked on a 40-mile tab in the early hours of the morning and in treacherous conditions. The conditions were said to be so bad that you could only see a few yards in front of you due to the driving sleet, rain and snow.

This length and type of tab is extremely difficult in normal conditions let alone in the conditions that Mike faced. In total there were approximately 30 soldiers attempting the treacherous 40-mile tab that night and they all moved off from a specific point on the Beacons in two groups of fifteen. Pretty soon into the tab the two groups began to get smaller and smaller until there were a number of small groups consisting of 2-4 soldiers. However, Mike Kealy decided to go alone. Whilst this may have been surprising to many it was obvious that a current serving senior SAS officer would not want to march with a bunch of potential recruits. There was in fact no need for him to perform the 40-mile trek and the only pressure put on him to successfully complete the march came from him.

This attitude is typical of the elite SAS soldier – never shying away from any challenge and wanting to make sure he is fit enough for any mission or operation regardless of the conditions or climate.



SELECTION - PHASE 1

PHASE 1 – WEEK 3

One of the problems for Major Mike Kealy was that he decided to weigh down his backpack with bricks to the weight of 55lbs instead of weighing it down with clothes and food. He did not pack sufficient waterproof clothing including a storm proof suit, which is issued to the novice soldiers before each trek. Although he did carry gloves he chose not to wear them. As soon as he started the trek he began to lose essential body heat through his soaking clothes and it wasn't long before his condition began to deteriorate. A number of novice soldiers on the trek decided to veer off the normal path due to the deteriorating weather conditions in search of some shelter and they noticed Mike Kealy carrying on along the treacherous route in the driving sleet and rain. After about an hour into the trek Kealy needed help and a number of novice soldiers offered him this, which he refused. Further assistance was offered in the form of gloves and a storm proof suit but again Kealy refused to accept any help.

It wasn't until 7 hours into the trek, at approximately 9.30am, that a Captain and Corporal who were also taking part in the trek noticed Kealy slumped in the snow. They managed to locate a faint pulse in his neck and they immediately dug a snow hole to afford him some protection from the elements. The Corporal provided Kealy with a sleeping bag and then began to provide first aid and warmth from his own body heat whilst the Captain went off in search of help. It took a further two hours before the alarm was raised at the Brecon Police Station at approximately 1.55pm. The Police never became involved in the search and rescue mission, nor did the mountain rescue team, as the SAS insisted that the military authorities would deal with the incident, something that was later criticised by the Coroner acting in the investigation into Kealy's death.

Eventually, some 19 hours after the Captain and the Corporal first noticed him, Kealy's body was airlifted by Helicopter off the mountain. Special Forces standard operating procedures dictate that they only move at night. Therefore, it is imperative that any potential recruit is capable of moving at night under difficult conditions. During the tabs, those on selection have to keep up with the DS (Directing Staff) and anyone who is lagging behind will receive a warning. After that first warning there will be no more and a soldier will then be returned to unit.



SELECTION - PHASE 1

PHASE 1 – WEEK 3

There are usually 5 intense and difficult hikes during the third week. These vary greatly from course to course but the following gives an idea of what those on selection have to go through:

- 2 x 25km marches on the Brecon Beacons whilst carrying a 55lb Bergen.
- An intense 'heavy drag', which involves a 15-mile march across the Beacons whilst carrying a Bergen of up to 50lbs and then an additional heavy weight of some description.
- The 'Long Drag' involves a 40-mile hike across the Brecon Beacons whilst carrying a 55lb Bergen and rifle. This must be completed in 24 hours.

Many people drop out during the third week for obvious reasons. Not only do they have to endure the long and relentless distances, but they have to also tackle the elements.

Soldiers who have successfully passed this phase of the selection process often describe it as the hardest thing they have ever had to go through. On paper the selection process may not seem much but when you are the one going through it day in, day out and night after night, it soon takes its toll. Only the fittest, both physically and mentally, make it through the selection process.



THINGS TO CONSIDER

THINGS TO CONSIDER DURING SELECTION

During selection you will be under constant assessment. Whilst this may not come as a surprise, there are a few important factors to consider that can all go a long way to helping you improve your scores and increase your chances of success.

1. It is possible to successfully complete the entire selection process yet still fail. If the SBS recruitment staff dislike you then you will not be joining them no matter how fit or intelligent you are. The best way to approach selection is to do as you're told and keep your head down.

Do not try to stand out from the rest of the candidates during selection, but rather aim to complete each test with high marks without licking arse, showing off or bringing undue attention to yourself.

2. Listen very carefully to everything you are being told. The Directing Staff will provide you with orders every day, which you must listen to, and follow strictly.

You will notice that the DS appear to be rather relaxed about the whole process and they will give the impression that they do not care whether you pass or fail. Whilst this is true they are still watching you very carefully and will be constantly feeding back to their superiors on everything they see and hear. They will be asked their opinion about your performance, so stay focused and follow every instruction. For example, whilst on the Brecon Beacons you will be required to make your way to a number of checkpoints.

When you arrive at the checkpoint listen to what the DS say, as they will only tell you once. If you fail to listen to the information provided you could find yourself without a new grid reference to make your way to.



THINGS TO CONSIDER

THINGS TO CONSIDER DURING SELECTION

3. The SBS selection process is extremely tough, as you already know. However, it is important to maintain a positive attitude and presence throughout. The SBS are looking for people who can successfully pass each stage of the process yet still be fresh and ready for more action.

If you complete a tab or section of the selection process and are on your knees, exhausted and can no longer go any further then you are no use to anyone. Yes, you will feel absolutely shattered and exhausted at times during the process but always try to stand up straight, look as smart as possible, be focused and ready for more.

4. Make sure your map reading skills are good and you are familiar with the Brecon Beacons territory. As stated in a separate section of this guide, put in the commitment and spend some time on the hills using your map and compass practising your navigation skills.

If you are poor at map reading and navigation you will find yourself following other groups in the hope that they know where they're going. Do not rely on other people but have confidence in your own abilities.

5. Blisters are generally caused by friction between the skin and another surface, whether it be your socks, your boots or a combination of the two. Before we look at how to prevent and treat blisters consider the following points:

- Do your boots/training shoes fit correctly and are they wide enough, deep enough and long enough to accommodate your feet comfortably?
- Are your laces secured tightly enough to prevent your feet from moving around inside your boots or shoes?
- Kick the heel of your foot back against the boot/running shoe heel before lacing them up.



THINGS TO CONSIDER

THINGS TO CONSIDER DURING SELECTION

- Make sure you wear socks with your training shoes. Try wearing two pairs of thin socks rather than one pair of thick socks so that the friction occurs between the layers of socks rather than under the foot.
- If your feet sweat more than normal then this can increase the chance of blisters. Make sure you keep your feet clean and dry whenever possible. Foot care should be an important part of your preparation.

During selection there is a strong possibility that you'll encounter blisters. As you already know, blisters are excruciatingly painful so during your preparation, before you attend selection, you should learn how to deal with them, but more importantly take precautions to prevent them from happening in the first place.

Hill walkers, especially in the early days of their walking career, will encounter blisters. However, after a few tough walks in a pair of suitably fitting 'worn in' boots the skin will harden and the blisters will appear less frequently. This should be one of your aims during your preparation time - to harden the skin and experience the blisters before you attend selection. The only way to achieve this is to get out there training, both in the form of running and fast walking on rough terrain.

Once a blister heals, the skin will harden and the chance of you getting a blister in the same area again will be unlikely.

Another way to harden your skin and help prevent blisters is to use tannic acid or tea soak. Apply a 10% mixture of tannic acid to your feet or soak them in tea soak at least twice a day for a 3-week period prior to selection.

If you do experience blisters during selection then here's what to do:

If you suspect a blister may be about to appear then it needs to be treated straight away. Remove your boots or footwear and clean your feet before drying them thoroughly.



THINGS TO CONSIDER

THINGS TO CONSIDER DURING SELECTION

Apply a special moleskin plaster to the affected area. Moleskins can be purchased from most good pharmacy stores and you should carry a few of them with you at all times whilst on the hills. Once you have stopped walking remove the special moleskin, clean and dry the affected area and allow the air to get to the affected area, helping it to recover. Before you set off again the following day make sure you apply the moleskin plaster once more.

Treating severe blisters

If the blister is filled with fluid then you should take a sterilized needle or sharp blade and pierce the blister close to the base/side, allowing the fluid to drain away. If the skin is still intact then do not remove it, as it will provide protection for the blister as it recovers. Now cover the affected area with a moleskin plaster.

During selection you may come across a time when you have to either run or trek with a painful blister. Unfortunately this is all part of selection and it will be up to you to fight through the pain and continue on your way. The most effective tool you have against blisters is to use the weeks and months building up to selection wisely. During this time you should take steps to prevent blisters from occurring!

6. Whatever exercise you are taking part in, whether it is a 20-mile hike, orienteering exercise, swim, the Fan Dance or one of the endurance marches, try to finish in a good time and near to the front of the group.

If you are completing an exercise in a group, then try to finish near the front. It is possible to complete the SBS selection course and still fail! Whilst the SBS do not like a show off, they do like to see someone complete each section of the course with energy to spare and in a position that is somewhere that is near to the front of the pack. The only way you can achieve this is through high levels of fitness and determination.



THINGS TO CONSIDER

THINGS TO CONSIDER DURING SELECTION

7. This is the most obvious, yet most ignored tip of all. During SBS selection you will notice four different types of people:

- Those who are there as an escape from their normal posting;
- Those who are ill-prepared;
- Those who are there for the bravado and macho element so they can say 'I went through SBS selection';
- Those who are well prepared, focused and keep their heads down.

It doesn't take much to work out which category you need to fall into. Surprisingly, this category is the least represented on selection.

Do not draw unnecessary attention to yourself and do not arse lick the Directing Staff. Failure on the course can come as a result of many different things – your actions, what you say, your attitude, laziness, a lack of preparation or a simple dislike for you by one of the DS will all have you returned to unit.

Don't join the drinkers down the town, even if you get a day off. Use your time wisely to rest and prepare and always remember - walls have ears!

After all that

At the end of the initial selection process approximately 5-10% of the original applicants are left. They will then go forward to the Special Boat Service leader who will issue them with the coveted 'By Strength and Guile' beret. As a newly badged member of the Service they can feel justly proud. They are not out of the woods yet, however, as they will now go on to continuation training and they will be on probation for a long time.



SELECTION - PHASE 2

PHASE 2 - CONTINUATION TRAINING

Once a soldier has successfully passed selection he will then go on to what is known as 'continuation training'.

During continuation training he will learn the skills that are required to become a competent member of the SBS. This will include training in weapons, standard operating procedures, jungle training, parachuting, patrolling, and escape and evasion training. All members of the SBS must be able to swim competently and also dive. The squadron will teach a soldier how to do these competently during continuation training.

As previously stated in this guide, the SBS operate to a number of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). These are a set of rules that the SBS operate to and they are there as both a safety net and also as a method for ensuring that everyone adheres to the same principles. During continuation training you will learn the SOPs inside out and you will spend many hours learning them and putting them into practice.

Continuation training is more of a training phase rather than a 'test' phase and whilst you will still be on probation, very few soldiers get returned to unit at this point.

Jungle Training

Jungle training will take place deep within the heart of the jungle in Belize. During this stage of the selection process soldiers/marines will have to learn the basics of surviving in these difficult conditions.

In addition to surviving they will also have to carry out numerous arduous patrols in a four-man team for a total of 4 weeks. They will also be provided with limited rations. The purpose of this phase is to determine who is capable of looking after themselves and their kit whilst living and operating with three other members of the team. This type of testing places untold mental pressure on an individual in addition to the physical pressure.



SELECTION - PHASE 2

PHASE 2 - CONTINUATION TRAINING

During this type of assessment a candidate's ability to get on with the rest of the team is under scrutiny. Imagine living in such conditions for 4 weeks with somebody whom you don't particularly get on with. Their annoying habits will soon begin to take their toll on you. However, it is essential that candidates continue to stay focused on their goal of maintaining their place in the elite force of the SBS.

Escape & Evasion including Tactical Questioning (TQ)

The nature of Special Forces operations means that soldiers and teams will often be working behind enemy lines. Therefore the risk of being captured is quite high. The SBS want to recruit soldiers who have the ability escape and evade capture and also resist any interrogation.

For this phase of the course, the remaining candidates are given brief instructions on relevant techniques. This will usually involve talks with ex prisoners of war or current serving soldiers who have experience in this field. Once soldiers on this phase of the course have been briefed they are then let loose into the countryside, where they will have to escape capture from other soldiers for a three-day period. Those who are caught are then taken in for tactical questioning. If a soldier is skilled enough to escape capture he will still have to endure the difficult TQ anyway once the three-day period is up.

During tactical questioning each soldier is put through a very difficult period of intense interrogation. This will include being treated roughly by the interrogators whilst stood in awkward positions, often naked, cold and hungry. The interrogators will use a series of techniques to attempt to break down a candidate's determination. They will use 'white noise' in an attempt to disorientate the candidate and act in a friendly manner, again, in an attempt to get some information out of them. On the other hand they may be verbally abusive and shout extremities about a candidate's mother or girlfriend in an attempt to antagonise them. If the candidate breaks, then they will fail the whole course.



SELECTION - PHASE 2

PHASE 2 - CONTINUATION TRAINING

Escape & Evasion including Tactical Questioning (TQ) (continued)

They are briefed only to answer any questions with their name, rank, service number and date of birth. Any other questions should be answered with 'I'm sorry, I cannot answer that question'.

Days and days of harsh interrogation can take its toll on any soldier but the SBS are looking for men who can withstand such treatment long enough so that the effects of revealing any operational information they might have can be reduced. Continuation training doesn't stop here and those who have made it this far will still be under constant observation. The SBS have found from experience that it takes one type of person to make it through the selection process/continuation training and another to become a fully competent soldier in the regiment. It is possible for a soldier to be fit enough to pass every stage of the process and training but subsequently lack the intelligence to operate effectively.

It takes approximately two years to fully train an SBS recruit. During this time the recruit SBS soldier will go through many tests, both physically and mentally, in an attempt to prove his worthiness of staying with the service. During the two-year training period each of the new recruits will start off by learning very basic infantry techniques. Many of them will already be specialists in their field and will have to master the basics in order to become a fully competent SBS member.



POST SELECTION

After the Joint Selection process

Once the joint UK Special Forces selection is completed only a few will remain. Those who have been successful from the SAS candidates are given their beige beret and then assigned a particular squadron and troop. SBS candidates then have to go onto more selection tests which are ultimately designed to test their ability in the water.

Swimmer canoeist (SC3) training course

The SC3 course is extremely intense and involves training in diving in all conditions, canoeing (often over very long distances), underwater demolitions, beach reconnaissance and surveying techniques. A candidate that has successfully reached this stage of selection is technically in the SBS but is still considered under probation and subject to being RTU'd if he fails to meet the stringent expectations.

The Special Boat Service is now open to any member of the Armed Forces but in the majority it is still manned by Royal Marines. Becoming a Royal Marines Commando is certainly the best initial step to take in your pursuit to joining the Special Boat Service.

If you are considering a career as a Royal Marines Commando then please visit our website at www.how2become.co.uk to purchase the 'How to become a Royal Marines Commando' CD-Rom guide.

As already stated, qualification as an SBS swimmer/canoeist involves an extensive training course which is designed to build on the skills which have already been gained during joint selection at Hereford. Further Training includes the following:

- Diving - both closed and open circuit. This will involve swimming underwater for many miles usually in poor visibility and claustrophobic conditions. Whilst swimming candidates will be required to complete complex navigational tasks and exercises;



POST SELECTION

Swimmer canoeist (SC3) training course (continued)

- Static line parachuting;
- Demolition exercises;
- Infiltration of ships, in harbour and whilst under way, and also on oil platforms;
- Canoeing – The use of the Klepper canoe during selection is highly extensive;
- Further survival training;
- Beach reconnaissance including photography;
- Maritime Counter-Terrorism activities.

Those candidates who are skilled and fit enough to successfully pass the selection course will qualify as a Swimmer Canoeist (SC3). They are now probationers and advancement to Corporal and Sergeant is usually predicated on qualification as an SC2 and SC1 respectively.

Advancement to Sergeant also requires completion of the Senior Command Course at Commando Training Centre Royal Marines, mandatory for all Royal Marines at this stage.

Unlike the soldiers of the Special Air Service, members of the Special Boat Service continue to wear the commandos green beret.



SECTIONS OF THE SBS

SECTIONS OF THE SPECIAL BOAT SERVICE

Maritime Counter Terrorism (MCT)

The Special Boat Service has the ultimate responsibility for responding to the constant threat of terrorism against any of the UK's maritime interests. The SBS and its elite 'M' Squadron uses many different methods for rescuing hostages from oil rigs, ships and other off-shore vessels and infrastructures. The Special Air Service is often in the limelight when the press decides to glorify rescue missions but it is often the work of the SBS that goes unnoticed. They often train on and around the North Sea oil rigs and if you use your imagination to work out how cold the sea is up there then you will begin to realise how tough they are. The North Sea surface temperature is rarely above 0 degrees Celsius and combined with virtually no visibility it takes an immensely skilled, brave and elite kind of person to work competently in these conditions.

The SBS counter terrorism unit, M Squadron, has been successful in developing methods of rescuing hostages on oil rigs, cruise ships and cross-channel ferries. Imagine how difficult it must be to carry out a rescue operation on a North Sea oil rig when your only means of access is from the ice cold seas below. Although it usually the SAS who take the limelight it is often the SBS that has a more challenging task on their hands!

The SBS regularly practice assaults on all kinds of vessels and installations. Some of these exercises are carried out at the Fire Service College, Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire. It is from here that the SBS are able to practice on ships aircraft and trains, high rise buildings and chemical plants.

Many of the SBS, Marine Counter Terrorism operations involve simultaneous assaults from the air and sea. Chinooks, Seakings and Lynx helicopters are used to deliver SBS MCT teams onto the target. SBS snipers fly aboard the helicopters in order to provide protection for the troops whilst they make their way in. The SBS also practices with the Special Air Service on a regular basis for many of the large-scale operations. Such situations will often include a terrorist takeover of a Nuclear Power station or the simultaneous takeover of multiple sites.



SECTIONS OF THE SBS

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During exercises and real life missions the SBS wear special assault clothing which includes:

- flame-retardant nomex suits
- flame-retardant balaclavas
- inflatable life jackets
- SF10 respirator
- Kevlar helmets

Assault gear / weapons include:

- mp5 a3 9mm sub machine gun
- sig sauer p226 9mm pistol
- Knife
- flash bang / stun grenades

Drug Running Interception

Due to their skills, abilities and methods used to successfully combat terrorism, the SBS are also suited to boarding potentially hostile drug-running cargo ships on the seas. The SBS, on such missions will often work alongside HMS customs officials and also the Metropolitan Police firearms Unit.

During such missions the Special Boat Service will use the same techniques and wear the same gear as they do for the Maritime Counter-terrorism role. To date, wisely, upon finding their vessels swarming with heavily-armed, black-clad SBS operators, smugglers have all given up without resistance.



SECTIONS OF THE SBS

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Anti-Shipping Tasks

The SBS are highly capable at sabotaging different ships, oil rigs and harbour installations.

The SBS divers and swimmers will start off by infiltrating the target area usually with assistance from mini-submarines. Once in place, the operators will then carefully attach magnetic limpet mines to the ship's hulls or the infrastructure of the rig or installation. The fuses on the limpet mines are delayed to enable the SBS to withdraw to a safe distance. If the fuses were not armed with this time-delay capability then the SBS teams would get caught up in the explosions. The SBS can also be used to attack ships at sea, boarding hostile ships either from fast rigid inflatable boats (RIBs) or 'fast-roping' down from helicopters. Such attacks are less likely in these days of the global war on terror although the various clandestine methods of infiltrating harbours may still be used to plant tracking devices to suspect vessels.

Sabotage

The Special Boat Service is highly trained in effectively infiltrating deep behind enemy lines. Once behind enemy lines they then carry out ruthless sabotage missions against vital enemy installations such as oil pipelines, ammunition dumps, bridges and communications installations.

In order to carefully infiltrate behind enemy lines, the SBS will use any of the following methods:

- Boat;
- Klepper canoe;
- Submarine;
- HALO/HAHO parachute insertion;
- Helicopter.



SECTIONS OF THE SBS

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Sabotage

During HALO insertion (High Altitude, Low Opening) the SBS parachutist will drop from approx 1000 metres and free fall progressively whilst controlling their direction with hand and arm movements that act in the same manner as the surfaces of an aircraft.

DZ markings (Drop Zone) are used to indicate the landing point. This means that the parachutist is then able to make the necessary alterations to his directional fall.

The SBS, throughout their entire history and since their inception, have carried out many successful sabotage missions and even as recent as the 1st Gulf War. Beach Reconnaissance

The SBS are often used to carry out reconnaissance missions of beaches and shorelines prior to the amphibious landings of their Royal Marine colleagues. During the reconnaissance mission the SBS will survey the area and report back with the numbers and location of enemy soldiers. They will also look for suitable landing points and will check the consistency of the sand to ensure that it can take the heavy weight of a landing craft.

Most recently, during the second Gulf War, the SBS secured the beach-heads of the AL Faw Peninsula. The SBS also carried out beach surveys prior to the main landings at San Carlos during the 1982 Falklands Conflict.



SECTIONS OF THE SBS

SECTIONS OF THE SPECIAL BOAT SERVICE

Covert Operations

On rare occasions, the Britain's Secret Intelligence Services (SIS) will use men from the SBS for very secret and covert operations. In these circumstances the SBS soldier selected will temporarily leave the service until his duties with the SIS are completed.

The type of duties that an SBS soldier detached to the SIS carries out, are as follows:

- Inciting unrest and revolution amongst the populations of hostile countries;
- Terminating specific individuals who are of danger to the institution;
- Training foreign military organizations;
- Protecting secret agents on active duty.

For some time now there has been speculation that the SIS draws, on demand, the cream of UK Special Forces operators away from their regiments to form a unit known as 'The Increment'. This ultra-secret unit is supposedly specially trained for black operations and acts as the SIS's secret army. To this date, no official recognition of such a unit has been disclosed.

