

MILITARY
CAREERS

Careers in the US Special Forces

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Navy SEALs

What Does a Navy SEAL Do?

At a Glance: Navy SEALs

Minimum Educational Requirements

Enlisted: high school diploma or GED; officers: bachelor's degree

Personal Qualities

Mature, resilient, intelligent, self-motivated, eager to take on challenges, confident yet modest, trustworthy, good team player, dedicated to serving one's country, adaptable, self-disciplined, physically fit

Certification and Licensing

Combat medic, sniper, parachute jumpmaster, advanced marksman, diving supervisor, intelligence specialist certifications

Working Conditions

Oceans, rivers, mountains, jungles, deserts, urban areas

Salary Range

Monthly salary depends on pay grade and years of service

Number of Jobs

About 2,450 active duty and 600 reserve SEALs in 2015

Future Job Outlook

Continuing need for SEALs

SEALs are part of the best-known Naval Special Warfare (NSW) division. The acronym *SEAL* stands for Sea, Air and Land. The SEALs grew out of the Navy's underwater demolition teams formed during World War II. These teams cleared underwater mines. During the Vietnam War, the role of the SEALs expanded to include beach and coastal reconnaissance (intelligence gathering) along Vietnamese rivers. Today SEALs perform missions that include land warfare, counterterrorism, foreign internal defense (training and helping foreign military forces defeat insurgents and terrorists), reconnaissance, and unconventional (guerrilla) warfare. SEALs also perform many missions at sea. For instance, after Somali pirates kidnapped the captain of the commercial ship *Maersk Alabama* off the coast of Somalia in 2009, three SEAL snipers aboard the navy destroyer *Bainbridge* killed the pirates, who were pointing

AK-47 assault weapons at the hostage's head. Other SEALs quickly arrived in inflatable boats to rescue the captain.

There are nine main SEAL teams plus the highly secretive team that killed terrorist Osama bin Laden in 2011. That team, which is so secretive that it is not listed on SEAL organization charts, specializes in counterterrorism and hostage rescue missions, such as the multiagency rescue of Private Jessica Lynch in 2003 after Iraqi forces captured her during an ambush. The book *The US Special Forces: What Everyone Needs to Know*, by John Prados, calls this team “an elite within an elite.”

All SEAL teams operate in sixteen-man operational task units that are assigned to specific missions. These task units often split into smaller units for specific missions. For instance, when SEALs swim or dive, they operate in two-man teams to assist and protect each other. Each SEAL on the sixteen-man teams specializes in medicine, communications, weapons, or reconnaissance, along with being cross trained to excel in all of these fields.

How Do You Become a SEAL?

Schooling, Group Activities, and Volunteer Work

Navy personnel who screen SEAL applicants stress that high academic and sports achievements in high school vastly increase the chances of being selected. Thus, taking rigorous college-prep classes in high school in all subjects, including math, science, English, and history, is encouraged. Since SEALs are sent throughout the world, classes in foreign languages, geography, political science, and world cultures are also valuable. Participation in team sports such as water polo, rugby, lacrosse, wrestling, and swimming increases the chance of being selected and succeeding as a SEAL, as does a two- or four-year college degree. Indeed, those with a degree are nearly twice as likely to become SEALs as those without a degree.

Participation in ROTC to gain an understanding of how the military operates and trains its people can also be valuable. Organizations such as Boy Scouts, which teach self-reliance, wilderness survival, and team-building skills, can also be helpful. Volunteer work in

wilderness areas, with immigrant populations, or in any capacity that develops organizational skills and requires interaction with people may also be beneficial.

Skills and Personality

SEAL applicants must be dedicated to serving their country, physically fit, mentally sharp, resilient, mature, self-motivated, trustworthy, self-confident yet modest, and eager to take on challenges.

Qualifications

The SEAL program accepts applications from enlisted personnel who are new to the Navy or are already in the Navy assigned to another unit. Personnel in another service branch may apply to be a SEAL by notifying their existing commander and the NSW Command. Enlisted candidates must achieve certain minimum scores in areas such as mechanical comprehension, electronics information, and general science on the ASVAB to be considered for the program.

Candidates must then pass the Computerized Special Operations Resilience Test, which assesses mental and emotional strength and resilience, and the Physical Screening Test (PST), which includes swimming 500 yards (457 m); doing push-ups, pull-ups, and curl-ups; and running 1.5 miles (2.4 km). Those who achieve a minimum passing score can begin training with an NSW mentor, but they cannot earn a SEAL contract until their score improves. Those with an optimum PST score are more likely to be given a SEAL contract right away.

After passing the PST and several other physical and mental fitness tests, the candidate can submit a SEAL application to his navy career counselor. If selected, he will receive orders to attend the NSW Preparatory course.

Officers who wish to become SEALs begin by taking the PST. Those who achieve an optimum score then attend the SEAL Officer Assessment and Selection program, which involves high-stress physical, mental, psychological, and behavioral evaluations for two weeks. Candidates' leadership abilities and language and cultural skills are also assessed. NSW Command usually selects seventy to ninety officers to undergo SEAL officer training each year.



US Navy SEALs prepare to board a yacht in the Gulf of Mexico off of Key West, Florida. SEALs perform missions on land and at sea; they are involved in counterterrorism, in training foreign military forces, and in guerrilla warfare.

All SEAL candidates must be US citizens, obtain a secret clearance, have vision that is correctable to 20/25, and may not be color blind. Candidates must not have been convicted of any felonies involving drugs, weapons, violence, or sex, and they must be seventeen to twenty-eight years old (though highly qualified applicants aged twenty-nine or thirty may receive a waiver). The official NSW website states that SEALs must also commit to remaining “morally, mentally and physically qualified.”

Navy Training and Education

Qualified enlisted and officer SEAL candidates begin the rigorous yearlong training program known as Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL (BUD/S) training, which starts with the NSW Preparatory course that enhances their physical fitness. The preparatory course ends with a modified PST that includes challenges such as completing a 1,000-yard (914 m) swim with fins in twenty minutes or less and doing at least seventy push-ups in under two minutes. Those who fail are dropped from training.

Interview with a Green Beret

Major Anthony Aguilar is an Army Green Beret who is currently deployed to Dushanbe, Tajikistan, where he is in charge of coordinating Army Special Forces missions and serving as a liaison to the US embassy. After graduating from the US Military Academy at West Point, New York, he served as an infantry officer for three years before qualifying as a Green Beret in 2008. Aguilar spoke with the author about his military career.

Q: Why did you join the Army?

A: My desire was to attend West Point so I could serve my country and also have the military pay for my college education. I didn't plan to make it a long-term career, but after I received my commission and realized I gained satisfaction from contributing to making the world a better place, I decided to stay. Now I'm in it for the long haul.

Q: Why did you become a Green Beret?

A: Mainly for the challenge and excitement of being part of an elite force and for the opportunity to do things most people don't get to do. As a Green Beret you are deployed to parts of the world no one else in the military gets to go to, and you have the opportunity to do a range of challenging missions. Another big plus is the camaraderie. I get to work with great people I can trust and depend on.

Q: How did you train to become a Green Beret?

A: The training program is long and challenging. We were trained in combat, leadership, physical fitness, weapons, technical issues, how to negotiate, how to plan and execute operations. There was foreign language training, intelligence training, training in managing mission finances, and survival training so you can survive on your own or with a team wherever you may be. The training is tough because you are being trained to be a flexible, adaptive individual who can go into and succeed in any situation anywhere in the world, whether in a hut in the jungle or in an office at headquarters. When

Find Out More

Naval Special Warfare/Naval Special Operations (NSW/NSO)

website: www.navy.com/careers/special-operations.html

This website contains detailed information about NSW/NSO missions, specialized units, training, and requirements.

Today's Military

website: <http://todaysmilitary.com>

This Department of Defense website has information about military branches, how to join, training, job descriptions, and benefits for those interested in learning about military careers.

US Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC)

website: www.afsoc.af.mil

The AFSOC website contains information about special forces missions, qualifications, and training.

US Army Special Operations Command (SOC)

website: www.soc.mil

The Army SOC website has detailed information about all army special operations units, including history, job descriptions, requirements, and training.

US Coast Guard Deployable Specialized Forces

website: www.uscg.mil/hq/cg5/cg532/pwcs.asp

This Coast Guard website contains information about the Coast Guard Deployable Specialized Forces teams, their history, and missions.

US Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command

website: www.marsoc.marines.mil

This Marine Corps website has detailed information about its special operations units, missions, and qualifications.

US Special Operations Command (SOCOM)

website: www.socom.mil

SOCOM oversees all US special operations forces except those in the Coast Guard. Its website has information about SOCOM's role and about each military branch's special forces units.

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