

MUD, SWEAT AND CHEERS



The Dallas Morning News: Jim Mahoney

From left: David Ennis, Jeff Hearn and Jim Lesoine are among those standing at attention at the edge of White Rock Lake as former Navy SEAL David Casale

dismisses the class after its third morning of workouts. Mr. Casale developed the two-week fitness course based on principles of motivation and camaraderie.

By Christine Wicker
Staff Writer of The Dallas Morning News

They gather slowly under the cold light of an early-morning moon, silent and a little afraid.

"I needed a kick in the butt," says David Ennis, explaining why he's here.

He paid \$250 for it, and former U.S. Navy SEAL David Casale is just the man to give it to him.

Mr. Ennis, a customer-service representative who recently turned 40, and 11 other "recruits" stand at rigid attention on the shores of White Rock Lake at 5:15 a.m., waiting for Mr. Casale to make them miserable.

Sixteen people paid for this two-week "boot camp," modeled on SEAL training.

Former Navy SEAL gets paid to push group beyond limits

Four didn't show up.

Lessons begin with a bellow. "You will address me as Instructor Casale for the duration of this course. About face!"

Confusion visits the ranks.

"That means turn around," shouts Mr. Casale.

Then it's hit the dirt and give him 20. "Heads up. Butts down. Quality is everything," barks the 31-year-old, who

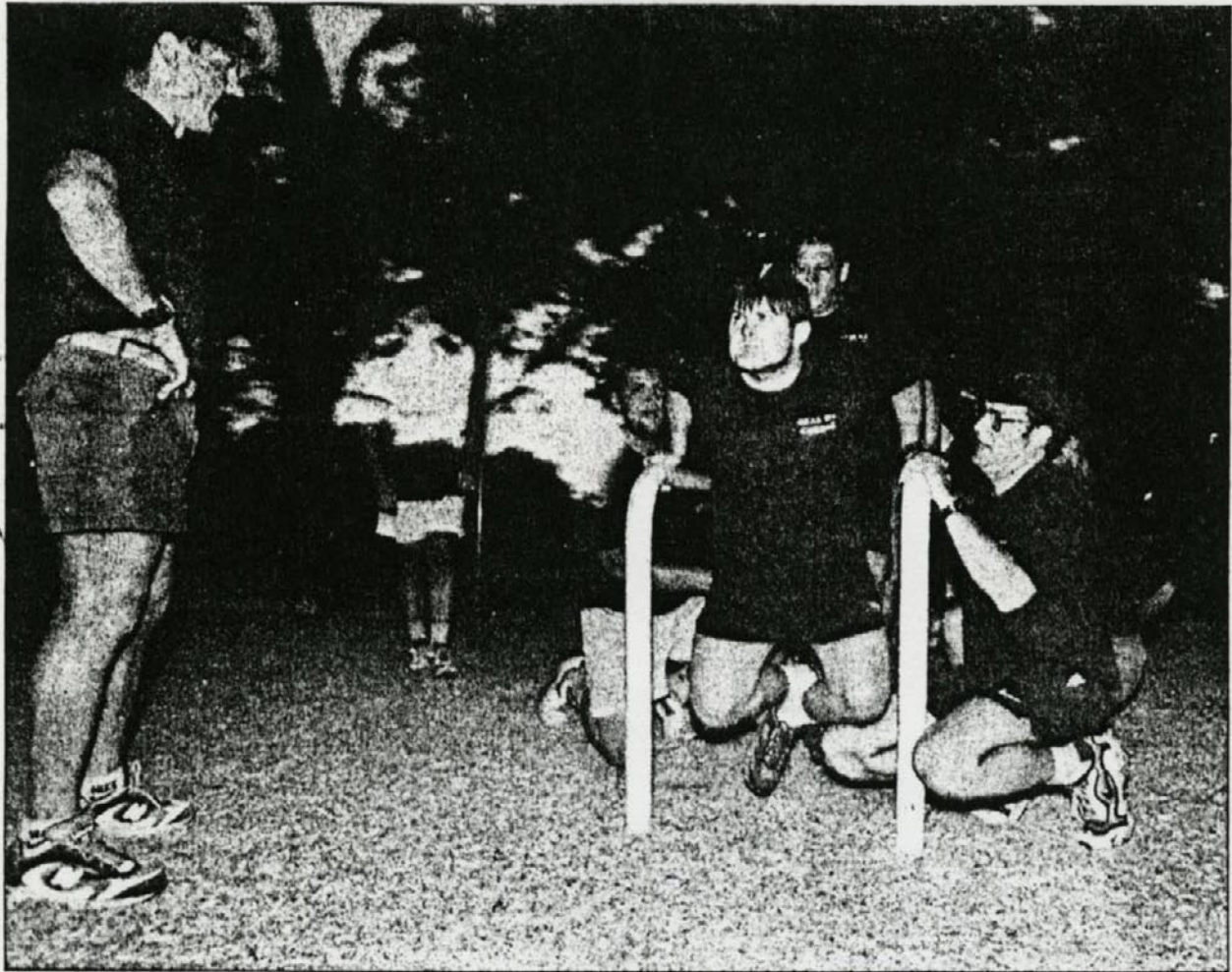
served five years in the Navy's elite SEAL (Sea, Air and Land) commandos corps and helped start a private fitness company, the Original SEAL Physical Training in Houston a year ago.

About 800 people have taken the company's boot camp classes. This is the first Dallas class.

A blond woman in glasses makes it halfway to the ground before her arms give way. Her body hits the earth with a thump. The air whooshes from her chest. She doesn't quit. Humphft. Humphft. Humphft.

Mr. Casale, who has the lean, hard look of a man who uses his muscles more than he pumps them, stands over her glowering. She moans once.

"Ma'am, you're being way too theatrical. Please see 'RECRUITS' on Page 34A.



Above: Gregg Snyder looks at instructor Jack Walston for approval while working the

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course at White Rock Lake. The regimen consists of 1½ hours of military calisthenics.

'Recruits' hire former Navy SEAL to push them beyond their limits

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for me," he growls.

Another woman sits up in defeat. "Ma'am," says Mr. Casale, who is invariably polite to ladies, "down on your belly like everyone else."

The trainees include a doctor, business owners, a nurse, a former artist, a psychologist, a student and two former military men.

They are paying him to push them past their limitations, says Mr. Casale, and he will not fail in that mission.

"If you can't do it, quit," he says. "But we don't want to hear a bunch of talk about it."

A woman who has been told to run passes him, moving at a walk.

"I have asthma," she gasps.

Mr. Casale doesn't even blink.

"I'm very familiar with asthma. If you're having an asthma attack, I'm concerned. Asthma, I'm not concerned about," he says.

The 1½-hour regimen of military-style calisthenics is designed to be a lesson in how to live, he says.

"If you react to pressure by making excuses or cursing the people around you, that's probably how you react every day in the office," he says. "I don't care how many push-ups you can do, I care what kind of human being you are."

At the end of the two weeks, some will be invited to continue in an ongoing "lifers" class. Those who don't get invitations can probably blame their bad attitudes, Mr. Casale says.

"Look for somebody to help out," he hollers on a day when the recruits are running cross country, passing 14-pound "medicine balls" from one to another.

"For some of you selfish people, that's going to be hard."

Dori Shoss, 44, is lagging behind, stumbling and clutching the ball to her chest. Fellow recruit Jim Lesoine, 34, jogs alongside her, shouting encouragement.

"I'm going to throw up," she says, her voice wispy.

"That's OK," he says. "Throw up on the ball. I'll carry it anyway."

By Thursday morning of their first week, the initial soreness has passed.

"I'm taking eight Advil a day," says Kiki Simpson, 27, an occupational therapist. "I have to



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The expression on the face of Dori Shoss, who is taking part in the physical training program, reflects how intense the workouts can be.

have a nap every afternoon, or I can't make it."

"I'm still sore, but you can touch me now," Ms. Shoss says.

Peri Schenkler-Saggi sprained her ankle and is grimacing as she wraps it.

"I have to be here," she says. "I have severe osteoporosis. I need this."

She holds up during the first easy exercises and the first run, but Mr. Casale starts the next set of exercises with one he calls his favorite, "chase the rabbit." The trainees bend over, touch the ground, stiffen their arms and run in place. Every time they finish, their instructor demands that they hit the ground for push-ups.

"Not fast enough," he shouts. "Chase the rabbit."

It happens three times, before they are allowed to do their push-ups. Ms. Schenkler-Saggi is hardly moving when Mr. Casale's partner, ex-SEAL Jack Walston, spots her.

Mr. Walston, who can blast out 130 push-ups in 2 minutes, moves close. She makes an excuse. He cuts her off. She grabs her mat and stalks toward the parking lot.

"I have a sprained ankle. I'm not going to kill myself," she says, uttering an expletive.

"I'll be back tomorrow."

"Are you feeling sorry for

"If you react to pressure by making excuses or cursing the people around you, that's probably how you react every day in the office."

— David Casale, former U.S. Navy SEAL

yourself, or are you getting stronger?" Mr. Casale asks the panting group after putting them through a couple of hundred leg lifts.

The course includes a number of elements not usually seen at the gym. The recruits sing "God Bless America." Between the sit-ups and jumping jacks, Mr. Walston sprinkles short lectures on honor and integrity.

"What country are we in?" he demands after one run.

"The United States of America," shouts Mr. Lesoine, standing lodge-pole straight with his nose in the air.

"That's right," Mr. Walston snaps. "In Third World countries, they throw trash on the ground. We do not allow that in the United States of America. I'm giving you 10 seconds to clear all the trash on the ground around here."

They scatter and fall back in. "Now," he says, sounding satisfied, "that's the kind of thing you can do with your families."

This class doesn't include the most impressive physical specimens he has ever seen, but all in all Instructor Casale is pleased.

He won't show it, of course. But his recruits like him anyway.

"These are great guys," one of them says as she grunts her way through pre-class stretches.

As the week moves on, the trainees still huff and puff. They struggle and moan, but they're starting to catch on.

One morning, Mr. Walston has them run a race. When they return to formation, he asks, "Who won the race?"

Even this early in the morning, they aren't the class of fools they once were.

"Sir," they shout. "We all won."