

News > Feature - SERE fire circle: 28 new Airmen prove themselves worthy of sage beret

SERE fire circle: 28 new Airmen prove themselves worthy of sage beret

Posted 12/16/2009 Updated 1/13/2010 [Email story](#) [Print story](#)by Senior Airman Emerald Ralston
92nd Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs

12/16/2009 - FAIRCHILD AIR FORCE BASE, Wash. -- *Editor's note: The SERE fire circle is a time-honored tradition of Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape specialists. The fire circle is typically beneath a parachute, an iconic visual of the SERE member in the woods, where they gather to learn and join in the camaraderie of the career after their long days in the field. This is the final article of an eight-part series following the phases of the Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape tech school.*

From the wilderness to the ocean, the desert to a tropical rainforest, enduring and overcoming extreme heat, cold, blisters and psychological obstacles, 28 individuals emerged victorious from the 61 who began the long and arduous journey on the road to becoming SERE Specialists.

These 28 donned the coveted sage beret Dec. 11 at the Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape technical school graduation.

"Sixty-one of you walked in the door in July," said Lt. Col. Christopher Tacheny, 66th Training Squadron commander. "Many of your teammates did not have the desire or ability to face the challenges before them and be here with you today. You didn't have to prove your worth to be part of the families who join you here today on this momentous occasion. But the family you are about to join selected you. You had to prove to them you were worthy - and every day from now until rapture you have to prove you're worthy to remain one of them."

In order to continue to prove their worth, SERE Specialists must encompass certain traits - traits that many do not possess.

"The 28 Airmen you see today represent just one percent of those who start this journey and arrived at basic military training," said Colonel Tacheny. "Too many young Americans lack the wit, integrity, patriotism and strength, but more importantly they lack the endurance. It is my belief the pinnacle trait in a SERE Specialist is endurance and they are charged with imparting their resilience to the Airmen who step foot on the field of training or the field of battle."

Having harnessed their endurance and their drive to succeed, proving to themselves they are capable of much more than they thought possible, the men who sat on the stage during graduation were not the same person who signed on the dotted line at the beginning of their journey.

"You're probably realizing the guy you sent us six months ago is not the guy you see before you," Master Sgt. Joel Emerson, 66th TRS, said as he addressed the families. "He has changed - his attitude, his demeanor - he sticks his chest out a little more. As I like to refer to it, he acts like a man."

Many changes have taken place in these SERE Specialists over the past six months. As the guest speaker pointed out, they abide by a new set of rules that establishes 'normal.'

"SERE psychologists coined a phrase years ago - you have 'normal,' then you have 'SERE normal,'" said Chief Master Sgt. James Phillips, retired SERE Specialist. "For example, these guys can go rock climbing, hunting and watch UFC, then read poetry, walk through the park and drink a latte at the mall, but don't worry, that's just SERE normal."

But, as Chief Phillips pointed out, being part of this elite career field isn't about the individual - it's about the isolated person on the ground and the aircrew members who need the knowledge of how to survive in the event they do become isolated.

"This is about the individual that might find himself on the ground in a foreign land and held in captivity," Chief Phillips said. "It's not about us, it's about them. That's why you went through this training. No matter how cold, how hot, how miserable life might be, you don't eat, you don't sleep, you don't rest until you've found them. We are here that others may live and return with honor."

That selflessness and sacrifice is what makes the SERE Specialist an elite member of America's military.

"You are elite not because you're special, but elite because you've chosen to serve that one person on the ground, that one person in captivity - you're elite because you're part of a proud team, a team that will never leave a fallen comrade," Chief Phillips said.

Following the remarks by the guest speaker, 28 of the Air Force's newest members of this field lined up in front of the stage, faced their families and exuded an aura of excited confidence. Their heads held high, chests out, these 28 received the command to blouse the pants of their dress uniform, then proudly put on the beret they each worked so hard to earn.

Now that graduation has come and gone, Fairchild's newest SERE Specialists will be assigned to the 22nd Training Squadron to continue their training in SERE.

Here are some inputs from our newest SERE Specialists about what they gained from their training:

"People who really want something badly enough will stop at nothing. - Tech. Sgt. Patrick Cozad

"Most of what we learn is common sense, but it doesn't seem that common until our instructors told us. Then I would think 'why did I never think of that?' I never realized I could push so much mentally - coming from the Marines I thought the Air Force would be a breeze, SERE proved that to be way off." -Airman 1st Class James Long

"I learned things can always get worse, how to bounce back from failures and to change your socks." - Airman 1st Class Neal Troyer

"The opportunity to learn to be self-sufficient and pass on that knowledge, and getting away from a desk job is why I joined SERE." - Airman 1st Isaac Houston

"I learned the body can still function well enough without sleep, water, food, energy or really anything. You can run solely on motivation. I wanted to take advantage of an opportunity to be part of something big with the sense of accomplishment that takes a

Photos



The newest members of the Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape career field stand before their families and friends at the SERE graduation here Dec. 11. (U.S. Air Force photo/Senior Airman Emerald Ralston)

[Download HiRes](#)

Related Links

- [SERE fire circle: Dehydration, delirium and determination in Desert training](#)
- [SERE fire circle: Getting familiar with survival](#)
- [SERE fire circle: Learning to teach the art of survival](#)
- [SERE fire circle: Remaining mobile through the mountains](#)
- [SERE fire circle: Students meet exotic locale in tropics phase of training](#)
- [SERE fire circle: Students put it all together in final phase](#)
- [SERE fire circle: Undercurrent of pride, respect swells through Coastal phase](#)

Inside Fairchild AFB

Search

[Advanced Search](#)

[View All RSS](#)

little more than filling out an application." -Airman 1st Class Anthony Fischer

"[There was a time I felt like giving up] in every phase, every task. It's an ever-present demon. Quitting, however, is not who I am. I remembered the people who believed in me to stay motivated to press on." - Airman 1st Class David Owens

"I learned that I have a lot of will power and that my limits are much higher than I thought." - Airman 1st Class Brett Charity

"Mobile was my favorite phase. Even though it was the most physically demanding of the phases, it was the most rewarding. You put in a hard day's work rucking but it was all worth it when you were standing at the top of that peak." - Staff Sgt. John Hawley

"I am looking forward to teaching people everything I know, the awesome training opportunities and being out in the woods." - Airman 1st Class Caballero-Perez

"It all started to come together in Mobile on top of all the peaks we hit. It makes you think why you're there and what purpose you serve. I wanted to teach our soldiers and hopefully save their life if they do ever need it." - Airman 1st Class Samuel Neitzer

"It takes a special type of person to do this job. That is something you are either born with or you aren't." - Airman 1st Class Caleb Williams

"I learned that just because you rock doesn't mean you're made of stone. We fall so we can learn to pick ourselves back up. (A great man said that. That man was Batman's father.)" - Airman 1st Class David Scarlett

"I look forward to having an awesome job and being able to teach. And I want to say good luck to the winter class." - Airman 1st Class Antony Pinque

"I never felt like giving up. My wife and daughter kept me moving." - Staff Sgt. Timothy Henry Jr.

"I wanted to join SERE to be outdoors and become part of something bigger than myself. I learned my heart and will can get me through any situation." - Senior Airman David Jones

"I joined SERE to be part of a career field that had a true, visible impact on the Air Force mission." - Staff Sgt. Henry Hoegen Jr.

"I learned I can survive anywhere and anything is possible." - Airman Douglas Hemmer

"I learned I'm tougher than I thought. There was a point in almost every phase where I felt like quitting, but the guy next to me wasn't quitting." - Airman 1st Class Joseph Dahlbacka

"I've learned a great deal through the whole experience but mostly my own physical abilities." - Senior Airman Matthew Swift

"Cool hats." - Airman 1st Class Benjamin Domian

"Each phase has varying levels of 'suck' for different reasons, so you can't really pick one that was the worst. But I learned to have confidence in everything and never give up." - Airman 1st Class Luke O'Banion

"I learned how to deal with stresses and certain situations that others could not deal with." - Airman Cory Dilport

"I learned that I'm capable of a lot more than I realized and that I can endure something if I really want to." - Airman 1st Class Ryan Fisher

"One of the most important things I gained from this experience overall is to bounce back. Nobody is perfect and we will all fail at things, not just in this, but in life. The important thing is to not get down but learn from it and grow." - Airman 1st Class Ryan Dawson

"I learned I can live without sleep and food but I can't be successful without my teammates backing me up. This tech school requires you to give 100 percent all the time and if you are not prepared to give that, then this career field doesn't need you. For those willing to sacrifice everything, there is a light at the end of the tunnel." - Airman 1st Class Isaac Ottaway

Comments

2/1/2010 4:59:15 PM ET

Congratulations to the newest members of the SERE programThe very best to you and thank you for serving our countryAmy Bowden an Airmen Mom

Amy Bowden, Savannah GA

12/16/2009 2:08:19 PM ET

You guys are superstars. I am so proud of my son David and all his team mates. What an accomplishment WOOT WOOT

Momma Jones, Spokane Wa

[Add a comment](#)