*Surviving Spring Break on the Mountain:*

## THE POWER OF

# EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

*Edward Barnard*

# Surviving Spring Break on the Mountain: The Power of Experiential Education

Book Three of "Unexpected History"

Edward W. Barnard

This book is available at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain

This version was published on 2025-12-19

## Also By Edward W. Barnard

# Contents

# Preface

*The Wizard's Lens: Learn to Think Like* AI is large. It teaches a revolutionary way of thinking, which will not be for everyone. This book extracts the adventures to keep it fun, and adds new material so you have additional value.

- Part I, "Navigating Power Imbalance," is new material.
- Part II, "Navigating Physical Mastery," is excerpted from *The Wizard's Lens* and provided to you here at a greatly reduced price.

# Part I: Navigating Power Imbalance

# Chapter 1. Chased By the Bad Guys

The U.S. military Code of Conduct is not the solution for us as software developers. We'll see that it does point the way, however. I'll share my own personal adventure en route to our applying the skills that we've learned.

## Vietnam Experience

The first big test of the new (as of 1955) military Code of Conduct was during the Vietnam experience. The U.S. Prisoners of War (POWs) were mistreated in ways similar to what happened in Korea during the Korean War.

The U.S. Department of State explained "Ending the Vietnam War, 1969-1973" with the infamous "Christmas Bombing." We'll need that timeline.

> On October 11-12 [1972] Kissinger and [North Vietnamese Politburo member] Le Duc Tho reached agreement on a peace settlement, both sides working to reach that end before the U.S. presidential election on November 7. [South Vietnamese] President Thieu rejected the settlement, refusing to accept a peace that left North Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam, and legitimized the Hanoi-controlled Communist shadow government, the Provisional Revolutionary Government. His rejection forced Kissinger to resume negotiations with Le Duc Tho.
>
> Kissinger was unable to find any common ground acceptable to both Vietnamese parties in two renewed rounds of negotiations. Finally, in order to break the deadlock, on December 14 Nixon ordered massive B-52 attacks on the North Vietnamese heartland—the "Christmas bombing." Meanwhile he continued to exert intense pressure on Thieu, threatening to cut off U.S. economic, military, and political support of South Vietnam if Thieu refused to accept the agreement.

BBC Magazine on December 24, 2012, with "North Vietnam, 1972: The Christmas Bombing of Hanoi" summarized:

> The biggest ever bombing campaign by US B-52 aircraft took place over Christmas 40 years ago, when the US dropped at least 20,000 tonnes of explosives on North Vietnam, mostly Hanoi. More than 1,000 Vietnamese died, but some claim the assault may have helped bring about the deal signed a month later that led to an end to US involvement in the war.

The U.S. Department of State continues "Ending the Vietnam War":

Negotiations resumed on January 8, 1973, and the United States and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam initialed the agreement on January 23. Thieu reluctantly accepted the settlement despite his continued misgivings, and the peace agreement was signed on January 27.

The peace settlement enabled the United States to withdraw from the war and welcome the American prisoners of war back home. Neither of the Vietnamese parties abided by the settlement, however, and the war continued.

That gets us to Operation Homecoming, the initial return of U.S. POWs from Vietnam, but we're not done yet:

Nixon had gained Thieu's adherence to the agreement through a series of letters and envoys, all promising U.S. military support in the event of a North Vietnamese violation of the accords. On November 14, 1972, for example, Nixon wrote Thieu that "I repeat my personal assurances to you that the United States will react very strongly and rapidly to any violation of the agreement." Both sides understood this to mean the recommitment of B-52s to combat.

In the end, these commitments were not upheld due to a combination of factors—domestic and Congressional reluctance to re-engage in the war, economic constraints, and finally the Watergate scandal, which weakened and distracted Nixon. Having rebuilt their forces and upgraded their logistics system, North Vietnamese forces triggered a major offensive in the Central Highlands in March 1975. On April 30, 1975, NVA tanks rolled through the gate of the Presidential Palace in Saigon, effectively ending the war.

The very next summer (summer is SERE season at the Air Force Academy), in 1975, the USAFA responded (Figure 1.1, "New, improved SERE") with fresh training based on the now-closed Vietnam experience:

S.E.R.E. This year, with the many experiences engraved on the minds of our P.O.W.'s returned from North Vietnam, SERE took on a new meaning. With expanded facilities, the program became more rigorous, realistic, and controlled than ever. The new ideas and facilities combined to bring a new dimension to the value of freedom. The SERE student, by grueling tests and training, learns how to resist capture, confinement, and interrogation. He gains the freedom of his innermost self, even when all other freedoms are lost. The SERE graduate will know the self-respect a P.O.W. needs to return a free man.

# S.E.R.E.

This year, with the many experiences engraved on the minds of our P.O.W.'s returned from North Vietnam, SERE took on a new meaning. With expanded facilities, the program became more rigorous, realistic, and controlled than ever. The new ideas and facilities combined to bring a new dimension to the value of freedom. The SERE student, by grueling tests and training, learns how to resist capture, confinement, and interrogation. He gains the freedom of his innermost self, even when all other freedoms are lost. The SERE graduate will know the self-respect a P.O.W. needs to return a free man.
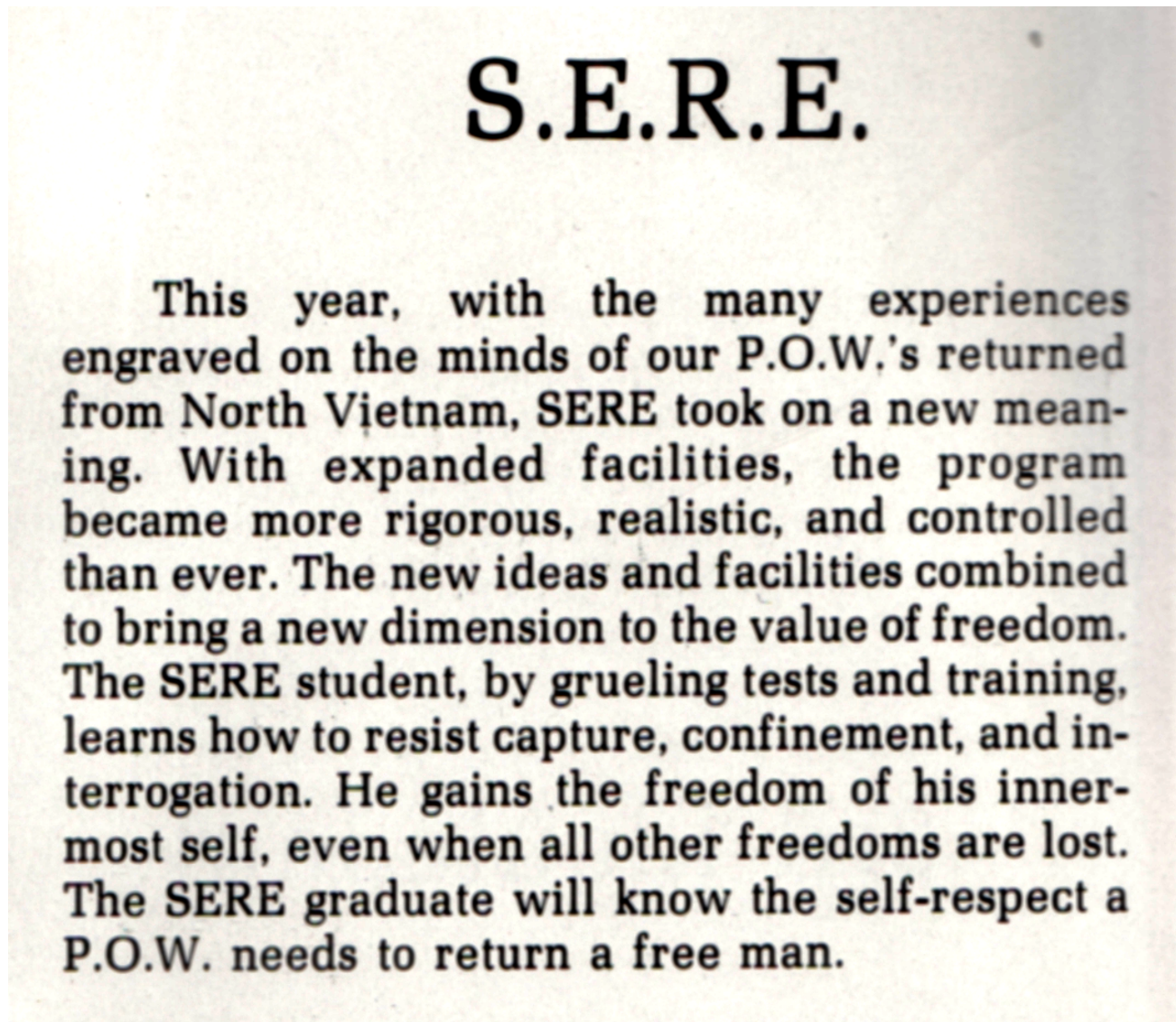
**Figure 1.1. New, improved SERE**

Do you see how the game is played here? The Wikipedia page says that people erroneously think SERE training was based on abusive Chinese brainwashing. In fact the document said it was political indoctrination rather than brainwashing, explaining that "brainwashing" was a misused term at the time. For people unfamiliar with the exact background, but familiar with the term "brainwashing," the subtle deflection is easily missed.

The Wikipedia page, for the rest of the section, focused on reports of CIA interrogation stuff. That's a distraction. Look! Squirrel! Torture is bad!

Why do we care? Why in the world am I dragging you through this obscure piece of trivia?

Let's suppose, just for fun, that there was some discussion regarding Communist China. That is, the government and its intentions and practices. Is it the same country, established October 1949 with Chairman Mao? Yes. So, you might ask, how is their track record? Can history shed any light?

Well… there was this Korean War. There was this big scare about Americans being brainwashed and there seemed to be some sort of Chinese Communist connection. So perhaps Communist China is not to be trusted–or so you might be thinking.

But you'd need to be pushing age 75 to directly remember that. Or maybe it was discussed in your presence later… but you'd still have to be of Baby Boomer age.

More likely you'd choose to look online. You know what I mean. Check Wikipedia! Sure enough, Wikipedia says that No, it's the CIA that did us wrong. It seems that the U.S. Government has been lying to us–especially about torture.

Kristen Weir explains for the American Psychological Association in "Why we believe alternative facts" that:

> It takes more information to make you believe something you don't want to believe than something you do.

If you, the Wikipedia page reader, are inclined to believe the negative stuff about the CIA as presented, you'll be even more inclined to take the "origins of SERE techniques" information at face value. It's a well-crafted deflection. When we hear what we want to hear, we're more likely to believe– no matter that it's a different topic.

So, being suspicious that maybe Communist China is not a friend, and checking on the history, we find out that there is a history–but that it's been the CIA lying to us all along. All that stuff about military honor and Return With Honor? It's all based on a lie. But now we see the lie is a lie.

It's an obscure historical reference. Who would look? But the *topic* is propaganda and disinformation. It's about political indoctrination, to use the 1956 term.

So now it's time to ask. What if that's not an isolated example? What if there's more than one example out there on Wikipedia? Who would notice?

When you do a web search on a topic, what usually shows up first as an authoritative answer? The relevant Wikipedia article. What if tiny bits have been twisted here and there, to deflect away from the truth? Just the tiniest nudge–to deflect.

I didn't have articles or click bait sending me to that SERE section. I went there on purpose on my own. So it must be legit, unsullied, right? That's how sleeper cells (so to speak) work. Plant the land mine and let the forest overgrow it.

This one's subtle. How did I find it? Because parts of SERE are classified. Parts were classified as of when I took the course. Thus I can't question what's on Wikipedia. I can't disclose classified information in rebuttal. So the page editor is safe from me.

At various times I've searched online SERE information to find out what is public. I can safely reference whatever is online without specifically saying that I observed or experienced it. I can say "this is what's online over there." So I wanted to see what's public knowledge.

I saw that paragraph on the origins of SERE techniques and knew it contradicted a major premise of what I was taught. I was rather ticked off to find out I'd been lied to. But then I began to check my facts… and the years didn't match. I knew what to look for (Korea) because I had *not* been lied to.

This brings us to another lesson: It sometimes takes specialized knowledge to identify disinformation. Something might be a "red flag" for you and not to me because I don't have the background.

Therefore if someone you trust notes a red flag in an area where they do have the specialized knowledge or experience, consider that the warning may be legitimate. Proceed accordingly.

The next lesson is more subtle. It's what I call finding the pattern in the noise. I caught that something was "off" but it took a while to recognize the actual problem and to articulate it. That comes with practice.

For me it's the same skill as with debugging software—finding the pattern in the noise. I doubt many would call it the same skill, but for me it is! And practice counts.

## Victory Garden

Now for a bit of whimsy: Victory gardens. Several people, while at home in April 2020, have discussed planting gardens to help with their personal food supply, calling them victory gardens (Figure 1.2, "Victory garden"). Do it! I have a story.

**Figure 1.2. Victory garden**

SERE, in my case, included a multi-day hike in the woods, which is pretty awesome (Figure 1.3, "Hike in the woods"). It was a gorgeous area just outside Rocky Mountain National Park. But we're talking about victory gardens.

Survival left little time for resting.

**Figure 1.3. Hike in the woods**

In my group of six, both Paul and I had prior knowledge of growing things. That hike through the woods was without any food–or water, which becomes something of a problem.

But my childhood knowledge of what growing things are edible becomes a useful life skill. In my case it became useful at a weird point in time–but if you have children immerse them in all phases of your victory garden!

**Figure 1.4. Evasion**

So much for gardens. That hike through the woods (which was awesome) included "bad guys" searching for us. That's the first "E" in SERE, "Evasion" (Figure 1.4, "Evasion").

**Figure 1.5. Escape**

We noticed a "pattern in the noise" which allowed us to have a bit of fun with the bad guys. We had already escaped (Figure 1.5, "Escape") from the resistance training (Figure 1.6, "Resistance"). So by this point a hike through the woods was great.

**Figure 1.6. Resistance**

The "evasion" treks, with our teams of six (Figure 1.7, "Survival"), involved getting from point "A" to point "B" and checking in with the "good guys" at point B. Two of us could navigate and travel quite well. The six of us tended to reach the check-in point long before schedule. We observed "good guy" arrival, setup, and so on. We began to realize the bad guys' patterns and strategy. We hadn't eaten in days and were dehydrated but the views were amazing.

**Figure 1.7. Survival**

We noticed that the bad guys tended to search for us on the direct line between point A and point B, just before point B. A lot of guys (all participants were male) got caught that way, blundering into the opposition (Figure 1.8, "Simulate getting caught").

A group of prisoners is lead to their new "home" in the SERE compound.

**Figure 1.8. Simulate getting caught**


## Final Checkpoint

The final checkpoint was to be early the next morning. We had a full day to get there. We quickly traveled to the area the day before and discovered the checkpoint was near a dirt road. The dirt road was slightly past the checkpoint. We were confident we knew the bad guys' pattern.

We had arrived in the afternoon, and check-in was not until the following morning. Did we really want to spend the night near the check-in location with the U.S. Army (who acted as the "bad guys") searching for us all night?

How far away would we need to travel to be safe? We'd not eaten in days, were very low on water, tired and sore (poor me). If we took an easy route into hiding, we'd likely get caught coming back along that easy route in the morning.

Should we climb up the hill? High in the Colorado Rockies, a hill is a *hill*. Have you ever tried sleeping in the open on a steep hill? No, that would not be a good answer for us. Meanwhile the all-night searches didn't bode well for us. Trekking somewhere safely distant and back might not end well (Figure 1.9, "Evasion").

Building shelters was an essential part of SERE.
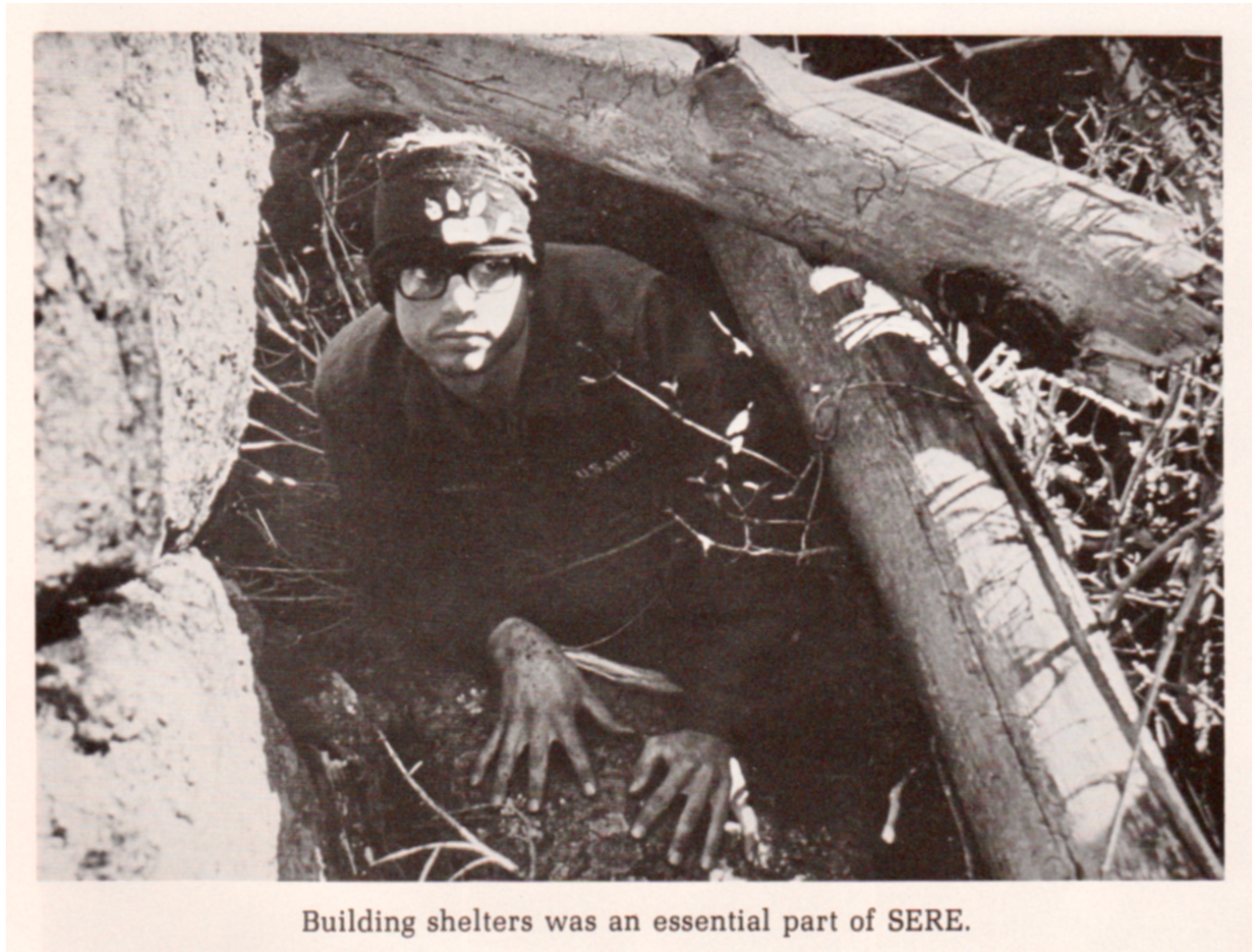
**Figure 1.9. Evasion**

But we knew the situation would get worse. We were the vanguard of several groups heading to the same checkpoint. We certainly did not want to get swept up with the stragglers. The teams with the worst scores (due to getting caught or missing check-in) would be staying behind to wash the mud off the jeeps and ton-and-a-half trucks while the rest of us were on leave. Losing a day or two from the three weeks' summer leave was a big deal.

We had decisions to make. We did not want to get caught, not on the last day (Figure 1.10, "The opposition").

**Figure 1.10. The opposition**

So what did we do? We looked both ways (so as to not get caught) and crossed the road.

We found a fairly flat meadow on the other side just out of sight. It was only a few yards off the dirt road.

We really should have moved farther off the road. There were jeeps and big trucks up and down that road all night catching other teams. The noise kept waking us up. That was our mistake; it was

annoying.

But, sure enough, the bad guys only searched for people near the checkpoint, and before the checkpoint, not after the checkpoint. We were sleeping in the open, just barely out of sight of the road.

Then, in the morning, small groups of good guys walked through the middle of our camp. There were far too many to be manning a single checkpoint. We realized that *all* SERE students must be checking-in somewhere in the area. No wonder there was so much noise in the night!

It so happened that we were camping on their trail to their check-in points. They walked through our camp headed towards and across that dirt road. They ignored us as they passed, so we ignored them and went back to sleep each time. It had been a long noisy night of other people getting caught.

Finally one traveler announced, "It's about time to get up, guys" as he continued on his way toward the road. So we did. We had scoped out a safe route to our check-in the afternoon before, so we knew our travel route.

As we checked in, the "good guy" wore a bit of a smirk on his face. He'd been through our camp that morning. But we had checked in and we were now safe. Our survival and evasion phases were complete. The views were awesome.

The *Denver Post* interviewed 1986 SERE graduate Troy Calhoun in 2008 as the USAFA head football coach (see Figure 1.11, "POW training"):

> When Troy Calhoun was an Air Force Academy student, all cadets had to spend part of one summer going through a three-week program labeled "SERE"−or Survival Evasion Resistance Escape. They were downed pilots, attempting to avoid capture, and regardless of their skills in the program, they eventually were "interned" behind barbed wire.
>
> "It was one of the most miserable 20-day periods of my life," Calhoun, the AFA's second-year head coach, said Wednesday at the Falcons' media day. "The 48 hours in the simulated POW camp… when you're going through it, you're thinking, 'there is nothing worse than this.' And yet I'd also tell you that it was one of the greatest sources of pride in my life, too."
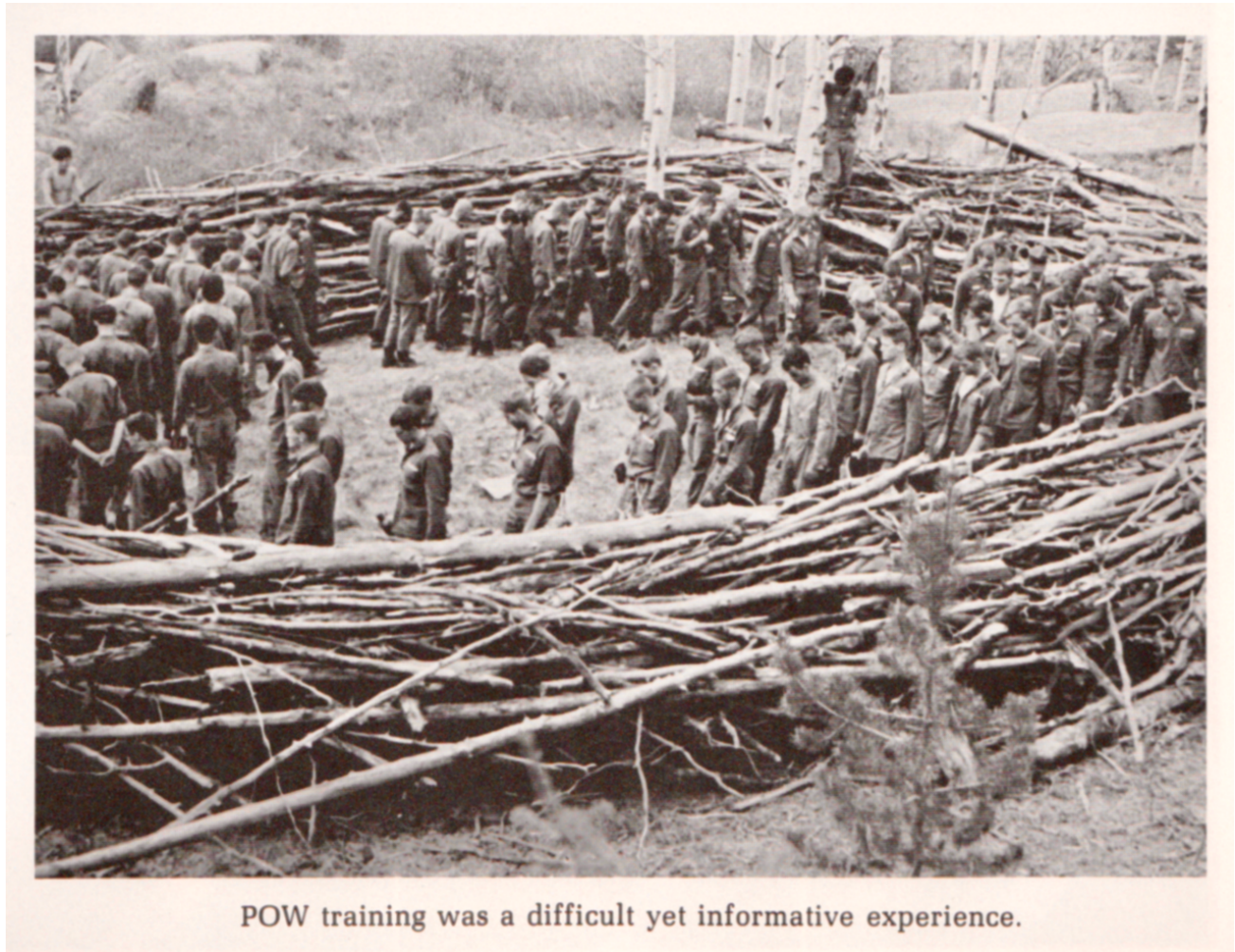
POW training was a difficult yet informative experience.

**Figure 1.11. POW training**

## Personalize the Concept

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## Summary

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

# Chapter 2. The Train Wreck

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at [https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain](https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain).

## Day of Death

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at [https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain](https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain).

## When Safety is Optional

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at [https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain](https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain).

## 35 Fewer Employees Killed

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at [https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain](https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain).

## Immoral Profit Strategies

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at [https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain](https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain).

## Our Code of Ethics

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at [https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain](https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain).

## Unsafe Power Imbalance

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at [https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain](https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain).

## WhatsApp and Signal

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## Walk Away?

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## Summary

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

# Part II: Navigating Physical Mastery

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at [https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain](https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain).

# Chapter 3. Jolene's Story

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## The Beta

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## Nepal

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## Grand Teton

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## Audition

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## Experiential Education

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## Standard of Judgment

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

# Summary

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at [https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain](https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain).

# Chapter 4. The Mountain

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## The Cliffhanger

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## Preparation and Practice

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## Guide Your Own Interest

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## Alpine Start

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## The Teenage Mountaineers

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## Willi's Toes

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## Trip Leader

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## Summary

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

# Chapter 5. College Spring Break

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## The Goal

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## Practice Climb

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## Crevasse Rescue Training

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## Up the Mountain

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## What Goes Up Must Come Down

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## 40 Years... and Back

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## Summary

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

# Chapter 6. Planning, Preparation, and Practice

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## Guiding Yourself

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## Climbing Mount Rainier

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## Planning and Preparation

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## Visit the Park

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## Physical Preparation

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## Practice

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## Keep Learning

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## Transferring Perspective

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

## Summary

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain.

# Chapter 7. Mastering the Craft

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at [https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain](https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain).

## Deliberate Practice

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at [https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain](https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain).

## Nathaniel Bowditch

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at [https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain](https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain).

## Navigation

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at [https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain](https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain).

## John Harrison

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at [https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain](https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain).

## Extending the Craft

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at [https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain](https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain).

## Summary

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at [https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain](https://leanpub.com/sere-mountain).

# Index