



Postcard from San Diego – Training with the Navy SEALs

› Keith W. Strandberg, International Editor

Perched on my knees at the edge of the airplane door, the plane at 14,000 feet, I watched the elite Navy SEAL 'Leap Frog' jump team soar through the thin air. I briefly thought "What I am doing here?" but my musing was interrupted when my instructor tossed me into the abyss. 15 seconds of sheer, abject terror later, I came to my senses, enjoying the sensation of free-falling towards the earth, admiring the views above San Diego. When the parachute canopy opened above me and I was safely descending towards the landing area, I said a quiet thank you to still be alive, and focused on the days ahead – an experience designed by Jaeger-LeCoultre to explain their partnership with the US Navy SEALs. Over the course of the next two days, in addition to jumping out of an airplane, I would be firing all sorts of guns, learning all about SEAL training and tactics, tour the usually off-limits SEAL training centre on Coronado Island, get to know the Navy SEALs testing Jaeger's latest SEAL watch and be driven into the ground by these same gentlemen.

The partnership

Jaeger-LeCoultre decided to develop cutting-edge diving timepieces and to make sure they were doing it right, they approached the Pentagon to involve the Navy SEALs in testing the watches and providing feedback.



As the Navy's elite squad (SEAL stands for SEa, Air and Land), they were in a unique position to put the watches through incredible testing – jumping out of airplanes, diving, shooting firearms, breaking down doors, hand to hand combat, doing covert operations and more.

Jaeger announced the partnership at the 2009 SIHH and I will be the first one to admit I didn't understand it. After all, the SEALs weren't exactly in the position to buy an expensive Swiss watch.

Now, after spending some time with both sides of the partnership, I understand – the SEALs test and provide feedback on the watches, Jaeger gets access to these consummate professionals, benefiting from this association, and watch lovers get an extremely capable timepiece available in very limited quantities.



The training

The SEALs are trained to do it all. Not only is the training claimed to be the most rigorous of any military team anywhere in the world, it is incredibly comprehensive. SEALs are trained to work anywhere and everywhere – they are incursion experts, demolition certified, skilled in all weapons and in hand-to-hand combat and can withstand circumstances seemingly impossible to survive. The six months of SEAL training comes after Navy basic training and includes a week long ‘Hell Week’, with everything designed to force the recruits to eliminate themselves. One active SEAL told me that his class had 240 recruits and the graduating class numbered only 19!

I got the chance to train with the SEALs for a little bit and I came away extremely impressed with their abilities, their knowledge and their skills. They showed me how to shoot handguns, shotguns, AK-47s, M4s and more. Then, the next day, they ran me around on the beach, making fun of me, making me do pushups, team-building drills and then forced me into the freezing waters of Coronado Bay. And I loved every second of it!

The watch

Jaeger-LeCoultre introduced a new watch, the Incursion, which is limited to 19 pieces in yellow and 62 pieces in orange (1962 is the year the SEALs were founded). The timepiece was heavily influenced by the feedback of the SEALs, who wanted a non-reflective case surface, smoother lugs, greater luminosity and more.

“The logic for us was that if we wanted to have the ultimate diving instrument, we wanted it to work with the best, and that was the Navy SEALs,” says Jerome Lambert, President, Jaeger-LeCoultre. “We wanted to develop a watch that was extra shock resistant, we needed to find out what the ultimate test for these watches would be. The SEALs are giving their time and their effort, and we really appreciate this.

“The feedback from the SEALs was crucial to the development of the watch,” he continues. “It was like a report that they would do for a handgun. The watch has been reinforced in the bezel, the strap has lots of different variations and sizes, the Super Luminova is much brighter, the lugs were smoothed out, and they asked for a duller finish, for undercover work.”

The watch, given its capabilities and serious design, should be a hit with collectors and watch lovers the world over.

Working on the development of the watch was no day at the beach, like my SEAL training, but as my SEAL instructor and one of the watch testers, says to his recruits, “The only easy day was yesterday.” <