
Fw: Explanation of Team Bonding on Fairchild AFB

From Allen, Travis <tallen16@ewu.edu>

Date Sat 8/30/2025 3:57 PM

To Porco, Joey <jporco@ewu.edu>

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From: Joe White <coachwhite@ewueagleshockey.com>

Sent: Saturday, August 30, 2025 3:46:04 PM

To: Allen, Travis <tallen16@ewu.edu>

Subject: Explanation of Team Bonding on Fairchild AFB

The US Air Force Water Survival Training stands as a testament to both the Air Force's commitment to excellence and its unwavering dedication to the safety of its members and community. A closer examination reveals that this program is not only effective, putting 3,800 trainees through the class per year, but—contrary to some misconceptions—exceptionally safe.

Participants are not simply thrown into the deep end; rather, they are gradually introduced to increasingly complex scenarios, each step monitored by highly trained Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE) instructors and medical personnel. This incremental approach ensures that trainees are comfortable and confident as their skills progress, reducing both the physical and psychological risks associated with such training. At all times rescue swimmers are positioned at bottom of the pool wearing scuba equipment and must maintain radio contact with surface instructors. Along with the instructors on the surface and bottom of pool, there are also two overwatch instructors and two combat medics observing training. All individuals involved are always on radio communications with each other while students are in the water.

The phases of Water Survival Training are:

1. Classroom instruction
 - a. Class overview
 - b. Safety procedures
 - c. Equipment familiarization (life rafts, life preserver unit, pool)
 - d. Equipment issue (flight suits, closed-toed shoes, life preserver, helmet)
2. Pool swim test – All students must wear life preserver units and helmets at all times.
 - a. Swim test is used to aid SERE Instructors in identifying weak or non-swimmers.
 - b. Weak or non-swimmers are watched and escorted as necessary to ensure confidence in the water.
3. Scenario #1
 - a. Students all enter the pool and deploy life preserver unit and must link up.
 - b. Students using link up swimming techniques must all make it to a life raft and using crew techniques, must safely enter life raft and follow emergency checklists.
4. Scenario #2

- a. Students must complete the exact same procedures as before but now with a more real-world feel. A wave machine along with low-light conditions and a wind machine provide a good real-world condition to test students on teamwork and confidence in the water.
- b. If all requirements are met, students are then “recused” using an over water hoist.

Water survival training is as much about building mental resilience as it is about mastering physical techniques. The Air Force understands that confidence is a cornerstone of safety. Trainees are never shamed or ridiculed for voicing discomfort or for opting out of a particular drill. Instead, they are encouraged to express concerns, which are addressed seriously and respectfully. This approach fosters an environment where trainees feel empowered to learn at their own pace, further reducing the risk of panic-induced accidents.

In summary, as someone who is a prior 20-year Air Force SERE Instructor, I can personally vouch for how serious we take instruction of students, Air Force or special guest students. The US Air Force Water Survival Training program exemplifies how rigorous preparation and an unwavering commitment to safety can coexist. Through scientific design, expert instruction, comprehensive protocols, and a culture of continuous improvement, the Air Force delivers water survival training that is not only effective but extraordinarily safe. The goal of sending the team through such course is to one, let them see that an individual can still perform in a stressful environment and two, everyone must rely on their teammates to complete the overall course goal.

Lastly being a veteran, it is important to me for the military to have a close relationship with the university and surrounding community. The Fairchild AFB Base Commander is interested in and supportive of this, and Base Public Affairs is planning on doing a story about our team while we are at the training.

Please feel free to reach out to me to further discuss my plans for building a new culture with the hockey team and any concerns that you still might have. Thank you.



Joe White | Head Coach

Eastern Washington University Eagles Hockey Team
(509) 991-6811