

From Navy SEAL to Clinical Hyperbaric Medicine – A Special Operators Transition

By: Roque Wicker



I had the pleasure of meeting Kraig Dorner when I was teaching a Diving and Hyperbaric Medicine class in San Diego five years ago. Kraig is a retired SEAL Chief Petty Officer (SOC) at Naval Special Warfare Group One (NSWG-1) Training Detachment (TRADET). His last job was to ensure that every SEAL in all the West coast SEAL Teams were trained properly and ready for deployment. Today Kraig Dorner, CHT owns and operates his own hyperbaric facility called San Diego Center for Hyperbaric Therapy.

I met up with Kraig at the **Phil Bucklew Naval Special Warfare Center** (NSWC, also known as 'The Center') to interview him for this article. I was curious to know how a retired career SEAL within the first year of retirement was able to adjust to civilian life and start a successful business almost immediately and share his story with the rest of the hyperbaric community.

I always hear about veterans having a tough time adjusting to civilian life and sometimes even being held back on promotions because they are “Too Military” in their demeanor – in fact I have heard it said in my presence

numerous times. Of course I would defend any veteran to the death because I myself am one. For those that have never served in the military it would be wise to respect the work that these veterans have done for the security of the United States of America and treat them with the utmost respect no matter what your beliefs about the military are. This article may only speak of one veteran having the ability to successfully adjust to civilian life and the workforce, and there are hundreds of thousands of veterans out there that are very successful and in most cases thanks to the US Military. Veterans can follow orders and execute them with extreme attention to detail whether or not their leader/s are capable. Veterans take pride and ownership of the work that they do no matter what it is they are doing whether it is flipping burgers or running hyperbaric chambers.

About Kraig Dorner: He is a big guy. He is a Navy SEAL. But he is also human and when interacting with patients you just cannot find Navy SEAL Kraig anywhere. He is a gentle giant and I will leave it at that. As the Coronado sun was beating down on us, Kraig and I started the interview with the SEALs view of the Pacific Ocean (this is the view of the ocean from the BUDS compound).



SOC Kraig Dorner hanging out on the beach in Coronado, CA

RW: Why did you want to become a SEAL?

KRAIG: I wanted and needed a challenge, excitement and adventure, and I wanted to contribute to my Country.

RW: At what age did you go to BUDS and get fully qualified as a SEAL operator?

KRAIG: I was 23 years old when I graduated from BUDS; 6 months later I earned my SEAL trident .

RW: Which teams were you in and what position did you hold?

KRAIG:	SEAL Team	5 LPO (Leading Petty Officer)
	VSWMCM	LPO (Very Shallow Water Mine Counter Measure)
	SEAL Team 1	LCPO (Leading Chief Petty Officer)
	NSWG-1 TRADET	LCPO (Naval Special Warfare Group 1)

RW: What did you do while working in NSWG-1 Training Detachment (TRADET)?

KRAIG: The Naval Special Warfare Group One (NSWG-1) training detachment trains all SEALs on the west coast. The last four years of my career I was in charge of all diving for the SEALs. As a diving Officer and Diving Supervisor, I was responsible for planning the dives and required to know what to do in case of an emergency. I was trained to recognize the symptoms of diving related injuries such as oxygen toxicity, arterial gas embolism, DCS 1 & 2, the bends, and many more injuries. I was required to know where the nearest hyperbaric chamber was located and how to operate it.

RW: What was your rate and your special qualifications as a special operator/SEAL?

I was a Special Operations Chief (SOC) US Navy SEAL, My special qualifications are:

- Naval Special Warfare (NSW) Diving Officer
- NSW Diving Supervisor
- Diver Medical Technician
- Hyperbaric Safety Director
- Inspection, Maintenance of Hyperbaric Acrylic
- Certified Hyperbaric Technician (CHT)
- Dive Master
- Scout / Sniper
- Static Line Jumpmaster
- Long Range Marine Ops
- Range Safety Officer
- Enlisted Surface Warfare Specialist
- Survival Evasion Resistance and Escape
- Free Fall Parachutist
- Trunk Operator for Submarine
- Ropemaster
- Castmaster
- Pulmonary Practitioner



RW: How long were you in the Navy?

KRAIG: 20 Years

RW: Why did you get out of the Navy?

KRAIG: After 19 years as a Navy SEAL, the Navy offered me \$150,000 to stay in for 6 more years, but I had already planned ahead and wanted to start my own business two years prior to leaving the Navy.

RW: How are you adjusting to civilian work life so far?

KRAIG: Thankfully I have the support of my loving wife. With her help, civilian life isn't that hard to adjust to. The Navy has excellent transition programs called TAPS (Transition Assistance Programs) for those that need guidance and job placements. Luckily for me, I had certain qualifications that were very helpful in my transition into Clinical Hyperbaric Medicine

RW: What made you decide to go into clinical hyperbaric medicine?

KRAIG: I weighed my options and with the qualifications and schooling I got from the US Navy I figured it would be a perfect fit to do something similarly related to my diving and hyperbaric qualifications. My wife also happens to be a Pulmonary Practitioner and I was quite intrigued by the healthcare industry after hearing about her experiences.

RW: How did the Navy assist you in transitioning into civilian life?

KRAIG: They sent me to the best schools in the US and paid for it all – How great is that?!

RW: What support did the Navy have (if any) in your qualifications/schooling to prepare you for clinical hyperbaric medicine?

KRAIG: I did a lot of on-the-job training and attended numerous schools that worked hand-in-hand with the civilian diving and hyperbaric industry.

RW: What is considered a difficult day as a SEAL compared to a difficult day as a clinical hyperbaric center owner/tech?

KRAIG: Difficult day as a SEAL: Beside the wars that I have been in. There are many difficult days as a SEAL, We train everyday as we are in war and as realistic as possible. But one day in particular that I can remember was when I was up in Kodiak, AK. A storm came in at 44-knot winds and 22-foot waves. We were on the sea, and we flipped out of our 16-foot F-470 Zodiac. We made it back into the Zodiac, and we floated for 8 hours before we got washed up on the rocks. From there we had to climb the side of a cliff.

KRAIG: As an owner dealing with some of the Doctors egos proves difficult. Some of them think they know everything and they don't want to learn anything new also keeping the chambers full at all times. And as a tech keeping the patients happy is number one.

RW: What types of patients do you typically treat at your center?

KRAIG: We treat the following:

- Autism
- Stroke
- Spinal Injuries
- Cerebral Palsy
- Cancer
- RSD
- Lyme Disease
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Parkinson's
- Alzheimer's
- Dementia
- Fibromyalgia
- Chronic Fatigue Syndrome
- Sports Injuries
- Immune System Building
- Crohn's Disease
- Peripheral Vascular Disease
- Recovery from Plastic Surgery
- Arthritis
- Altitude Sickness
- Near Drowning
- Migraine
- Traumatic Brain Injuries
- ADD/ADHD

RW: I heard that some professional football players and Olympic team members come to your center.

KRAIG: We treat many San Diego Chargers and San Diego Padres, but we are not at liberty to mention their names. As for the Olympic team, we have treated Marlon Shirley, the fastest amputee; Brad Walker, who is tied for the US record for Pole Vault and many more Olympics team members.

RW: Do you miss being in the SEAL Teams?

KRAIG: I miss the team members; you get very close to them and you can rely on them as a friend. I still keep in contact with many of them, and we keep each other up to date on various Navy SEAL matters. Once a SEAL, always a SEAL.

RW: What advice do you have for anyone that is either reaching their end-of-service date (EOS) or has already been out of the military and wants to get into clinical hyperbaric medicine?

KRAIG: You need to plan well ahead. If you are not prepared when you get out of the military, it's nobody's fault but your own. The Navy will give you all need; just ask for it. The VA will pay for your schooling and the GI bill is also at your disposal. There is no reason why you can't be fully employed after the Navy and be contributing to society.

RW: What advice do you have for anyone who wants to go into the Navy and be a SEAL?

KRAIG: You need to prepare for it, and understand that it's not all fun and glory. It's a lot of hard work and if you think you can give 100% you better give it 50% more than that.

RW: In San Diego, CA you have a lot of non-hospital centers such as yours competing for the same business. How is the competitive landscape?

KRAIG: You have to be better than your competition. Our facility is exceptionally clean; our staff is knowledgeable, up-to-date and personal; and we comply with all federal, state and county safety regulations.

RW: **Four years ago you had two Sechrist chambers and now you have three. Has business picked up enough to support the 3rd chamber?**

KRAIG: Yes. More people are hearing about the advantages of hyperbaric therapy, and most of the time our chambers are occupied.



RW: **What type of support do you get from your spouse?**

KRAIG: She is the medical person. If we have a question about a medical issue, she can answer it or she will find out about it in detail. She has been very supportive and we work together running our center.









Many thanks to Kraig Dorner, CHT for this interview. The San Diego Center for Hyperbaric Therapy is a freestanding facility dedicated to providing the highest quality care available using hyperbaric oxygen therapy. They are located on 5038 Ruffner Street Suite C, San Diego, CA 92111.

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