

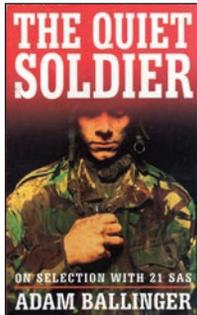
The Quiet Soldier

On Selection With 21 SAS

Ballinger, Adam. *The Quiet Soldier: On Selection With 21 SAS*. Orion Books, Ltd.: London, United Kingdom, 1992. Paperback, 240 pages. ISBN 1-85797-158-2.

Review by COL (Ret) Warner "Rocky" D. Farr, MD, MPH

This is a story of British Special Air Service (SAS) selection and assessment performed as a territorial force soldier (a reservist). Adam Ballinger had an Oxford degree, a steady girlfriend, and a well-paying job in London. He liked to travel and mountain backpack. One day, while traveling, he encountered a man who gave him a phone number to call and told him he could make it through selection.



At age 26, he faced a selection and assessment program just as rigorous as that of the 22 SAS, the active duty regiment, but was required to maintain his own fitness while meeting every weekend. He was obliged to go through this and at the same time worry about (and ignore) his girlfriend/fiancé and his London day job. He sees that the numbers of those with him who make it through are exceedingly few, and those who do have problems in their civilian lives from spending so much of their time maintaining their conditioning and meeting every weekend for 48 or more hours per weekend. They are often required to spend a week undergoing training and then slip back into their lives without telling anyone what they are attempting. None tell their employers what they are doing.

For anyone who has gone through any kind of Special Operations selection and assessment, this makes an interesting read as this program is the grandfather of them all. Soldiers like

then Captain Charlie Beckwith and other early American Special Forces exchange officers derived much of American Special Forces selection and assessment from this course brought back across the Atlantic.

Ballinger, an educated man with a steady job, a serious girlfriend, and no knowledge of what he is getting himself into, becomes a man with a tenuous hold on his London job and a fiancé he does not get to see much. To the end he still does not understand what has driven him to keep going, while others either quit or the regimental selection team sent them packing. Some of his fellow candidates have military backgrounds, some, including him, do not. Ultimately, all who partake in the experience are changed by it and that is where Ballinger shines. He describes in detail the changes in both himself and in those around him brought on by the grueling process of selection.

This is an interesting read, penned by a thinking man who did complete the selection program and was badged by the 21 SAS. Some will consider this book an inspiring Soldier's tale of growth, while others may feel threatened, that a peace-loving and intelligently thinking man can endure far tougher training than they ever would or could. A must read for anyone facing or running a Special Operations selection program.



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