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GORUCK Challenge: O-Town Review

“Never in a million years”

Let not the frequency of that term's use dilute its significance. Three years ago, if you asked me if I could finish the 11-hour GORUCK Challenge, I would have laughed and given you that very line.

You see, three years ago I was nothing like the person I am now. Finishing up my engineering degree at UCF, I didn't run, play sports, lift or even know what a “ruck” was. And I also had an unhealthy addiction to World of Warcraft. Yeah, I was “that guy”. It all changed when I saw a cheesy ad for a Warrior Dash. I trained 3 months for that, and the event was easier than the training. I then saw an ad for a Tough Mudder, so I trained for that in the form of the present-day Tough Training Trials (T3) event, and it paled in comparison to what I put myself through in training. My next life-changing goal lied in a subtle, yet tantalizing GORUCK ad. To the protest of a few of my friends and family of who were concerned for my safety, I had to do it. There was no going back from there.

The GORUCK Challenge is a 9-to-12 hour event in which a Special Operations Cadre challenges, teaches and inspires a small team to do more than they ever thought possible. Leadership is taught and teamwork is demanded on missions that involve each member to wear a ruck filled loaded with 35 pounds of bricks. *Never in a million years* did I believe I could accomplish such a feat in my life.

Like a movie that starts with the narrator as the main character – you already know I made it out in one piece. What you don't know, however, is the degree of physical and mental fortitude that was required of me to tackle such an endeavor. My wish is that I can convey the right levels of stress, glory and pride encountered at this event; but I doubt mere words can convey those feelings. For whoever created those words didn't experience what class 390 experienced on that amazing night. My name is Neil Murphy, co-founder of the team “The Regiment,” and this is my review of the GORUCK Challenge, class 390 in Orlando, FL.



Class 390

“EITHER THESE GUYS ARE HOMELESS OR I'M GOING TO SPEND THE NEXT 11 HOURS BUILDING A UNIQUE BOND WITH THEM IN THE MOST CHALLENGING THING I'VE EVER DONE IN MY LIFE”



Rucks are checked and the rules are given. Don't fail the cadre's time hacks and don't let the flag or team weight touch the ground. Break any of those rules and you pay.



United we stand

Shocked into failure

After an inspection of the rucks and a quick rundown of the rules, we were ready to go. The rules were simple: don't let your ruck, the American flag, or a team weight touch the ground and DO NOT fail the cadre's time hacks (finish the task in the allotted time, or you will do good to remember it later on). Our rucks were considered so precious to the cadre that initially we were not granted the 'privilege' of wearing them. Instead we had to keep our rucks above our heads until we were told otherwise. After designating a flag bearer (always the person leading) and the temporary team weight holder, we ventured forward. The first mistake happened almost as soon as we started. The first person to hold the team weight held on to it for far too long. This was the first of many failures. Lesson learned? Don't try to be a badass and work as a team; otherwise, we were going to face dire punishments. Our punishment was fifty ruck squats, of which we could not synchronize at first, so we had to do it over again. By the time we squatted in unison, we could not make it past twenty. Our punishment for failing the squats was the dreaded ruck-lunges.



Ruck lunges – one of the many punishments we incurred for not working as a team.

**“LET’S JUST SAY OUR CADRE
MADE US DETEST THE WORDS
‘PAY THE PIPER’ ”**



The worst part about the flutter kicks is where everybody in the team must simultaneously hold their feet exactly 10 inches off the ground when finished.

After the lunges, we finally earned the privilege to wear our rucks. The next series of tests involved timed tasks ranging from bear crawls, low crawls, pushups and much more, all of which included the tender embrace of my brick-filled ruck and the timed scrutiny of our cadre. We failed all of the time hacks. Even worse, we accidentally let the flag touch the ground. Our cadre made us detest the words “pay the piper”. This head-spinning, vomit-inducing PT session from hell continued for another two hours. There was three times when I wanted to quit: The end of initial PT marked the first time. *Was this the worst of it? How were the next 7-9 hours going to treat me? What did I need to change to make this easier?* These questions flooded my mind and ushered in a deluge of doubt and negative thoughts. All of this...for a GRC finisher's patch?

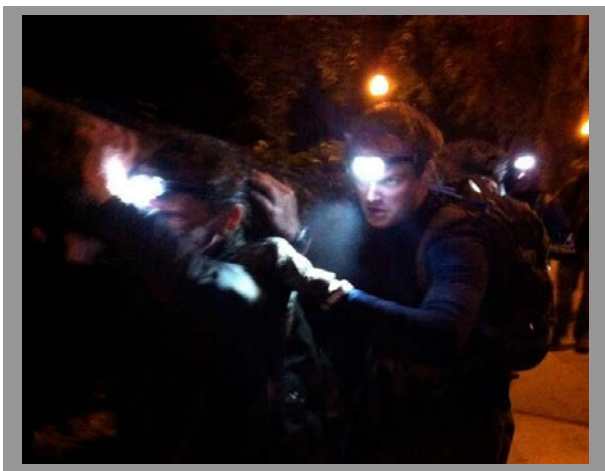
After grinding through the first two hours the message was clear - we either stop trying to show off our individual prowess or chew on the bitter taste of failure for the rest of the night. In GORUCK, teamwork is paramount to success.

Starting to get it

“Embrace the suck”

What makes for a good bumper sticker slogan surely hit home when it's said at a GORUCK. Our first march included casualty carries to a park where we were to become acquainted with an object that slowly became integral to our success (and pain) of our team. It was an awkwardly shaped, immensely heavy log. This hunk of haggard wood immediately caused problems. We couldn't keep it lifted off the ground for more than a block without having to set it down to rest. Now, if you've completed a GORUCK Challenge before, you already know the one word that should not have been said – rest.

Clearly, we spent too much time lowering the log back to the ground to get some rest. It wasn't long before the cadre shark started closing in on its prey. Our punishment was that whenever the log was put down, we were to remain in a half-squat position to facilitate with that whole 'rest' thing. Half squats became difficult, so that turned into pushups. When pushups became difficult, we changed to flutter kicks. We were failing miserably, and there was no getting around this log--it was a turd sandwich--you either have it on toast or you have it on crackers.



As soon as one end of the log dropped below somebody's shoulder height, the weight became unbearable and punishment ensued. Something had to be done differently.



The morning ushered in a cascade of flutter kicks in a frigid lake filled with a generous amount of duck poop.

“IT WAS A TURD SANDWICH, YOU EITHER HAVE IT ON TOAST OR YOU HAVE IT ON CRACKERS”

Trudging forward

After a grueling three miles, the log finally reached what we thought was its resting place. With the log on the ground bear crawls were next on the agenda. When we showed the cadre how pitiful we were at bear crawls, we started to trek back towards another checkpoint in the form of Indian runs. It was about this time when I noticed the horizon started to show color. With the rising sun came the early morning joggers who gave us some of the weirdest looks as they passed us by. In a sense I was honored to get those looks. It set us aside from the common jogger and put our team up to a whole other level that few could come close to reaching.

Shortly after a combat PT session, we made our way to a lake. “About face!” shouted our cadre with a hint of amusement in his tone, as we locked arms and slowly walked into the lake. Yep, it was time for the dreaded flutter kicks. This was one of those exercises that you do NOT want to fail by letting your arms go. Our arms were locked so tightly that my biceps began to violently spasm

Stay Strong, Stay Positive

midway through the kicks. The pain didn't matter. I wasn't going to be 'that guy' again. The pungent aroma of duck feces coupled with the numbingly cold water distracted my mind from the fifty-four-count flutter kicks alongside my screaming biceps. With this flood of senses began the destruction of mental walls that I had put up during my weeks of training to keep myself from succumbing to the pain. I had to focus and I had to smile.

Remember to smile

I remember those words of advice being said before from some of the GORUCK alumni. I didn't fully get it until I was shivering and beginning to lose my mind shortly after the flutter kicks. I was so out of focus that I needed someone to remind me to take my soaking wet gloves off so that I could warm up. This disoriented miasma of suffering marked the second time I wanted to quit. The next several hours were spent doing casualty carries for miles on end. That's right – keep a member of the team lifted off the ground for *miles*. We tried fireman carries, caveman carries and even ones involving three people at a time. No matter the difficulty, we stayed positive and focused on our task. The new day has started which meant that we had to be at least halfway finished, right?

As the casualty carries continued on, we tried to get clever. We passed by a Publix grocery store and the temptation was just too good to pass up!



He looks happy, right?



Remember to smile! You paid for this, after all.

We snatched a shopping cart and proudly placed our casualty inside the cart for some much-needed rest. If you just caught me the second time again, kudos to you. I used that word again – “rest”. Thinking we outsmarted our cadre (bad idea) we carted our casualty out of the area when the shopping cart wheel lock promptly turned on. What we thought was a break from our labors turned into a burden. To add insult to injury, our shopping cart was turned into a new casualty-- meaning we had to carry it as well!

**“THE DAY HAS STARTED WHICH
MEANT THAT WE HAD TO BE AT
LEAST HALFWAY FINISHED,
RIGHT?”**

We Gotta do WHAT?!

It gets worse

After hours of casualty carries, each member of our class slowly realized that we were marching towards the area where we last dropped off our log. Secretly I realized it had to be done. We wouldn't have just dropped a gigantic log off in somebody's yard and expect the burden of removing it to just float away. My last glimmer of false hope was the fantasy that the homeowner noticed a new log in his or her yard and immediately chopped it up and hauled it away. That silly internal dialogue disintegrated as we turned the corner and saw that tree trunk still there. There were three times that I wanted to quit, and this was the third. Our whole team felt a sense of dread. If we spent over four hours on a full tank of energy in the wee hours of the night carrying a log that destroyed us then, what hope did we have now? We stared at it in disbelief as if our prolonged staring would magically waft away the weight of this beast that lay before us. Strangely enough, my mental focus began to return as I realized that others shared in these feelings of despair. Misery loves company, right?

We tried brute force to lift the log. Exhausted, we struggled to keep it moving along for even twenty yards. The sense of despair was strong. It was enhanced even more in the form of punishment flutter kicks, pushups and half squats whenever we let the log sit on the ground for too long. Our cadre paralleled the frustration of our team as he calmly said in a disappointed tone, "You've given up on yourselves". It's true, we had given up on ourselves, and that needed to change or else. The story couldn't end here. We had made it this far and we knew we had to do what a select few before us have done. We had to embrace the suck.



The second log carry started off rocky, but we eventually found an efficient way to lug it through town.

"WE HAD GIVEN UP ON OURSELVES, AND THAT NEEDED TO CHANGE OR ELSE"

Teamwork pays off

Eventually we found that carrying the log on our backs was the key to finishing the challenge. We leveraged the bulky backside of our rucks and used them to distribute the weight on our bodies with minimal stress to our already-destroyed shoulder muscles. We finally began to succeed as a team, and our cadre recognized it! So much that we were allowed to drop the log off earlier than expected. We I used my time to tend to the log-induced blood streak that spanned my shoulder area. The end was near, but it wasn't going to be easy.

The next few miles included more casualty carries. We messed up our timing again and had to stop for pushups, but otherwise it went pretty smoothly. Slowly but surely, we realized that we were making progress back to where we began — where half a day ago I met a complete group of strangers that were now my best buddies. We just had to keep a hold of what little focus we had together. Don't fall out of line, don't be 'that guy'...



Class 390



Pure bliss

After one last excruciating team exercise, we were finally done! *Never in a million years* did I believe I could have done this. But you know what? Doubt kills more dreams than failure ever will. Everyone hurt. What kept me in the game was the fact that others felt the same hurt as I did but they were still standing. The pain of discipline is a much easier pill to swallow when compared to the agony, regret and shame in quitting. The lessons learned in those fateful hours will forever kindle my courage, my motivation and my strength. I followed a goal that nobody said would be easy, yet everybody said was worth it. Years ago I remember reading a quote that said if you do the easy things, you tend to live a hard life. Do the hard things, and enjoy living a good life. It is no wonder to me now that the slogan for GORUCK is "Good Livin'!"

Want to experience the challenge? Learn more at GoruckChallenge.com !