



MSRT

Preparation Guide

What I Wish I Knew Before Preparing for MSRT

WILL SPENCER

Maritime Security Response Team · United States Coast Guard

Before We Begin

Nothing in this guide guarantees you'll make it into MSRT. No guide can. What it can do is point you in the right direction — and that's exactly what this is.

This guide is based entirely on my own experience as a Direct Action Section Assaulter. MSRT has various support positions — I was not in those roles and cannot speak to those paths. If that's the direction you're heading, this guide may still be useful, but it's written specifically for those pursuing the Direct Action track.

WHO IS WILL SPENCER

9 Years in the Coast Guard

6 Years at MSRT

Direct Action Section Assaulter

Team Lead Medic

EMT

TCCC Certified

Naval Special Warfare TCCC

I was 18 years old with one goal: join the United States Coast Guard and become an MSRT operator. I had the drive. What I didn't have was direction.

I went on to serve 9 years in the Coast Guard — 6 of them at MSRT as a Direct Action Section Assaulter and my team's lead medic. During that time I became an EMT, completed numerous medical courses including Naval Special Warfare TCCC, and had the privilege of training alongside special operations forces and federal agencies — experiences that shaped everything I know about what it takes to get there and stay there.

It's not meant to tell you everything. It's meant to point you toward what actually matters.

Do the work. Be honest with yourself. And remember — the goal isn't just to get in. It's to deserve to be there.

Will Spencer

Direct Action Section Assaulter · Team Lead Medic · MSRT · United States Coast Guard

THE JOURNEY



Understanding the Pipeline

Important note on accuracy

Things change in the Coast Guard — sometimes quickly. I am no longer on active duty and do not have direct access to current information at all times. I will update this document whenever I become aware of changes to the pipeline, but I cannot guarantee that every detail reflects the current state. Always verify with your recruiter or chain of command.

Here's what the path looks like — including how I got there and what I currently understand to be available.

- 01 **Boot Camp**
Everyone starts here. 8 weeks at Cape May, NJ. Nothing about MSRT happens at boot camp — just get through it, stay healthy, and keep your head down.
- 02 **First Unit — Non-Rate** MY PATH
After boot camp you'll report to your first unit as a non-rate. This is where I put my name on the ME "A" School waitlist. The waitlist duration varies and I can't speak to how long it currently is — check with your chain of command. Use whatever time you have well: build your fitness, study the job, and show your command who you are.
- 03 **ME "A" School** MY PATH
Maritime Enforcement Specialist A School. I graduated top of my class, which earned me the only available pick to MSRT-W — going directly from A School to MSRT. That direct pipeline is not currently available, but I recommend the ME rate above all others. It is the most direct funnel to MSRT and the job translates directly to what you'll be doing.
- 04 **DSF Screener** CURRENT PATH
Here's what's current: you can now put your name on the DSF screener as any rate. You don't have to be an ME. If you perform well enough to get selected, you go straight to the Tactical Operators Course (TOC) — 13 weeks long. That said, I still strongly recommend the ME rate. It's the most direct path, the job aligns closest to the mission, and it puts you in the right environment from day one.
- 05 **TOC — Tactical Operators Course** CURRENT PATH
13 weeks. This is your entry point into MSRT. Your fitness, your mindset, and your character will all be evaluated — and so will your marksmanship. Shooting qualifications are a significant part of the process. There are many of them, and your fundamentals need to be solid before you arrive.
- 06 **MSRT**
That's the goal. Everything in this guide is built around making sure that when your moment comes, you're ready for it.

A word on getting accurate information

I always encourage guys to talk to a recruiter and their chain of command for the most current information on the pipeline. That said — be aware that MSRT is something of a hidden gem, even within the Coast Guard itself. A lot of people don't know much about it, including some who should. If you ask the wrong person, you'll get the wrong answer. Make sure you're talking to someone who actually knows what MSRT is.

● My path

● Current path

What MSRT Actually Demands

Most guys come in thinking MSRT is about one fitness test. It's not.

MSRT demands consistent performance — not peak performance on one good day. It demands that you show up ready when you're:

- **Tired** — Not rested. Not fresh. Tired.
- **Wet** — Cold water doesn't care about your PR.
- **Uncomfortable** — Comfort is a luxury MSRT won't offer.
- **Loaded** — Carrying gear changes everything.
- **Problem-solving** — When your body wants to quit, your mind has to work.
- **Part of a team** — Individual performance is necessary. Team performance is the mission.

**Train for the mission.
Not just the test.**

The Five Pillars

01 Strength

Be strong enough — not just big. Functional strength that moves with you under load, through water, over obstacles. If your strength doesn't transfer to the field, it doesn't count.

02 Endurance

Build your engine. The ability to recover quickly is what separates guys who can go one day from guys who can go five. Aerobic capacity is the foundation everything else sits on.

03 Water Confidence

Comfort in the water creates performance in the water. If you're fighting the water, you've already lost. This is non-negotiable. Start early if this is your weakness.

04 Recovery

The guys who stay healthy train the longest. Training hard means nothing if you're always hurt. Sleep, nutrition, and active recovery aren't soft — they're strategy.

05 Mindset

Discipline beats motivation every time. Motivation is a feeling. Discipline is a decision. You won't always feel ready. Train anyway.

The Biggest Mistakes I See

I've watched a lot of guys prepare for MSRT. These mistakes show up every time.

X Only doing bodybuilding

Size without function is dead weight.

X Skipping cardio entirely

Your engine will fail before your muscles do.

X Avoiding the water

MSRT is a maritime unit. Swim. Period.

X Training hard every single day

Recovery is where adaptation happens.

X Ignoring mobility

Stiff bodies break under load and under stress.

X Chasing social media workouts

Instagram fitness isn't MSRT fitness.

X Comparing yourself to everyone else

Your only competition is who you were yesterday.

If I Started Again Tomorrow...

If I woke up tomorrow at 18 years old with MSRT as my goal — here's exactly how I'd spend the first 90 days. Not a full program. Just priorities.

MONTH 1	MONTH 2	MONTH 3
Build the Foundation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus entirely on aerobic fitness — run easy, run often Clean up nutrition — food is fuel, not comfort Master bodyweight movements: push-ups, pull-ups, dips, squats Get in the water — even if it's uncomfortable 	Build the Engine <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase running volume gradually — protect your joints Begin structured swim sessions — technique before distance Add strength work — compound lifts only Introduce rucking — low intensity, progressive load 	Build Durability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Combine everything — start stacking sessions Simulate fatigue — train when tired on purpose Practice gear work — weighted carries, wet clothes Sharpen the mental side — discomfort is the training

My Biggest Lessons From MSRT

None of these are about fitness. The guys who make it understand this.

Be Coachable

The fastest way to fail is to think you already know. Shut up, listen, and implement.

Be Dependable

Show up. Every time. No excuses, no drama. Your team needs to trust you before they need to like you.

Take Ownership

If something goes wrong, it's yours. Not your gear, not the weather, not your teammate. You.

Stay Humble

The moment you think you've figured it out, you've stopped growing. There's always more to learn.

Help Your Teammates

Individual achievement matters less than you think. Make the person next to you better.

Be Early

Early is on time. On time is late. Late is unacceptable. This is not an exaggeration.

Control Your Emotions

You will be uncomfortable, frustrated, exhausted, and doubting yourself. That's the test. React less, respond more.

This Is Just the Start.

This guide gives you the foundation. Where you go next depends on how serious you are.

If you aren't serious, I'd actually recommend you don't purchase any of these. These are designed for people who are committed to putting in the work.

If you're looking for more structure, these are the next steps I've put together.

The MSRT Blueprint

\$50

Understand the path.

The complete reference guide covering every pillar of MSRT preparation — the what, the why, and the how, explained in full. You read it, you understand it, you build your own plan from it. Best for the self-directed guy who needs to know what matters and why.

[Training](#)[Running](#)[Swimming](#)[Nutrition](#)[Recovery](#)[Pistol & rifle drills](#)

12-Week Preparation Program

\$200

Follow the path.

Every single day mapped out. Sets, reps, distances, paces, rest days — all decided for you. No guesswork, no programming decisions. You open it and execute. For the guy who doesn't want to think about what to do — he just wants to be told and trust the process.

1-on-1 Coaching

Contact me directly for pricing

Walk the path with someone who's been there.

Everything included — the Blueprint, the 12-Week Program, and direct access to me. I look at your specific situation, your weaknesses, your timeline — and we adjust accordingly. You get both products plus accountability, feedback, and someone in your corner who's been there. Limited spots.

MY PROMISE

- I'll never guarantee you'll make MSRT.
- I'll never claim there are shortcuts.
- I'll never sell you false hope.

What I will do is give you the best guidance I can based on the path I've already walked.