

THE 75TH RANGER REGIMENT POST-OEF: ADAPTING TRAINING AND TTPs FOLLOWING 13 YEARS OF WAR

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“The 75th Ranger Regiment is a lethal, agile, and flexible force, capable of executing a myriad of complex, joint special operations missions in support of U.S. policy and objectives. Today’s Ranger Regiment is the Army’s premier raid force.”¹

The Special Operations Training Detachment (SOTD) at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), Fort Polk, La., provides relevant and realistic training for Special Operations Forces (SOF), including the 75th Ranger Regiment. JRTC’s training environment allows SOF elements to refine their skills along the special warfare-surgical strike continuum envisioned in *ARSOF 2022*.² Recently, JRTC Rotations 14.10.5 and 15-06 met Ranger training objectives including surgical strike; SOF/conventional forces (CF)/ joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) interdependence, integration, and interoperability (I3); and SOF mission command.²

Thirteen years of fighting the global war on terrorism (GWOT) has ingrained an Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)/ Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) mindset in all JRTC rotational training units (RTU) in terms of planning and conducting operations. Likewise, Ranger units training at JRTC have had to adapt to a complex environment in which they lack the resources they have become accustomed to during GWOT. The unique challenges and friction of JRTC allow Ranger units to refine their tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) while responding to an adaptable enemy.

During GWOT, the 75th Ranger Regiment developed remarkable skills in close quarters battle (CQB) raids (typical mission in Iraq and Afghanistan). However, with the drawdown of major combat operations, the regiment must re-establish its ability to execute the basics well to respond to unknown threats of the future operating environment (FOE). The Rangers must remain the subject matter experts on the Infantry doctrinal tasks of Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 3-21.8 (formerly FM 7-8, *Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad*) to meet *ARSOF 2022* /*ARSOF Next*



Rangers from 1st Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, as part of a combined Afghan and coalition security force operating in Ghazni Province, Afghanistan, await a CH-47 for extraction. (Photo by PFC Pedro Amado)

requirements while keeping abreast of best practices in an ever-changing geopolitical environment. The 75th Ranger Regiment may be among the first units tasked with combat operations in a future campaign.

In support of these objectives, JRTC provides a vehicle for the Rangers to transform their combat experiences into an enduring set of TTPs in preparation for short-term expeditionary or extended combat operations. Particularly useful for commanders is the situational awareness and external feedback that JRTC provides. JRTC's superb collective training environment allows the 75th Ranger Regiment and other surgical strike SOF units to preserve the lessons of combat, cement the doctrinal fundamentals, cultivate I3, and practice new TTPs in response to an ever-changing FOE.

Evolution of the Ranger Regiment during OIF/OEF

The proficiency of Ranger units is a function of the quality and quantity of training, and Ranger leaders say the best training is combat. During a typical combat deployment to OEF, a Ranger element could expect a continuous find/fix/finish/exploit/analyze (F3EA) targeting cycle. The Rangers removed thousands of insurgents from the battlefield. Combine this high combat operations tempo (OPTEMPO) with junior leaders who take every opportunity to refine their skills, and the result is a level of proficiency that is arguably unmatched by previous generations of Rangers.

Of particular note, the Ranger Regiment is the Department of Defense (DoD) leader in casualty survivability. Factors such as dedicated rotary wing medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) during operations, detailed planning and rehearsals, medical training (such as Ranger First Responder), and quantity and distribution of medically trained personnel in Ranger units have led to the regiment's remarkable record of the combat-wounded surviving their injuries.³

Prior to GWOT, the focus of the 75th Rangers was to be the premier light Infantry unit, with unparalleled joint force entry (JFE) capability. The Rangers specialized in airfield seizures and air assault raids within a 24-hour recall. Going into GWOT, the Rangers were the best at the basics. Consequently, they evolved into a combat-hardened force that became expert in dealing with the unique challenges of Iraq and Afghanistan.

This scope of operations led to many changes over the GWOT timeframe. In 2006, the regiment added **mobility training** to the original "Big Four" training tasks — **marksmanship, physical training, medical training, and small unit tactics**.⁴ Also during this period, OIF deployments refined Rangers' CQB abilities while OEF deployments cultivated an unprecedented level of competence in Ranger weapons squads and mortar sections.

Learning from GWOT to Prepare for the FOE

GWOT allowed the Rangers to enhance CQB expertise, the F3EA cycle, and air assault proficiency, among other skills that have laid the groundwork in preparation for any number of threats the FOE may present. Like many conventional units — and despite their traditional use as a unilateral force — the 75th developed a limited capacity to train international forces in a geographically confined area. However, ARSOF 2022 places the 75th Ranger Regiment firmly on the surgical strike end of ARSOF's critical capabilities spectrum.

Like mission creep, a decline in combat operations may have caused a decline in direct action proficiency. Meanwhile, budgetary constraints reduce the opportunities for privately contracted training, causing the Ranger Regiment to face the challenge of sustaining its elite force using internal and big Army-resourced training. Fortunately, the competitive environment in the 75th Ranger Regiment fosters leaders at all levels with an intrinsic desire for mastery, and these leaders demand the same from the men they lead. Thus, the unit itself is capable of developing and executing highly effective training without relying on the private contractors of the past, especially if the 75th incorporates low-cost, high-yield collective training opportunities like those JRTC provides.

Collective Training Post-OEF

The 75th Ranger Regiment can no longer solely focus on the CQB raids and the airborne and air assault operations of the past decade in Iraq or Afghanistan. Instead, the regiment faces varied regional threats of the FOE. Thus, an important question for Ranger leaders is: "How do the Rangers continue to remain the elite Infantry force in this unpredictable threat environment?" One Ranger officer's answer was simple: "Preserve quality through training and repetitions at places such as JRTC." JRTC offers a resourced, immersive training environment that the Rangers are unable to replicate at their home station.

As much of the Army draws down in Afghanistan and units across the Army become regionally aligned, the Ranger Regiment remains a global response force and must prepare for a breadth of threats in anticipation of the next conflict. While senior leaders refine the Ranger mission essential task list (METL), the “Big Five” will remain fundamental to Ranger training. Combat Training Centers (CTCs) such as JRTC will continue to provide the Ranger Regiment a unique venue to sustain and improve its marksmanship, medical skills, physical endurance, tactics, and mobility skills.

In addition to the Ranger “Big Five,” elements from the 75th accomplish a range of other ARSOF 2022 training priorities at JRTC. These include executing the fundamental Infantry patrolling tasks and battle drills of ATP 3-21.8 and the *Ranger Handbook* that will ensure the Rangers are adaptable to any environment. Additionally, Rangers must shape the operational environment through an organic F3EA process. Training at JRTC is multi-echelon — from fire team to mission command. Units operate within fully developed human terrain, facing realistic threats interspersed with civilians, among whom they must discriminate. Thus, JRTC’s scenarios allow SOF units to train ARSOF 2022 priorities, light Infantry skills, and CF/SOF/JIIM I3 tasks throughout their rotations.

Recent Ranger rotations commenced with company live fires in which Rangers employed and synchronized direct and indirect fires as well as air assets for fire support and MEDEVAC. Following the company live fire, the Rangers conducted compressed timeline planning for the force-on-force (FOF) decisive action training environment (DATE). During rotation 15-06, Rangers executed an airborne infiltration followed by an all-night movement to conduct a raid and detainee transfer. Next, they established company area ambushes with decentralized platoons for 36 hours.

To make matters more challenging, the JRTC scenario forced the Rangers away from the Iraq/Afghanistan model of conducting missions from a secure forward operating base (FOB). Instead, Rangers had to secure their own command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence (C4I) element while conducting sustained offensive operations. The JRTC field conditions and scenario are arguably as mentally and physically intensive as any apart from combat itself.

Best Practices Observed at JRTC and Recommendations

JRTC not only provides the best venue for tactical-level training the Rangers need but also provides CSA-directed I3 opportunities. At JRTC, the Rangers train as they will fight: side-by-side or in close coordination with joint, interagency, CF, and other SOF units. Thus, the Rangers practice the SOF truth, “most Special Operations require non-SOF assistance,” while implementing Abram and Odierno charters by sharing Ranger standards, doctrine, TTPs, and esprit de corps with the Army.⁵

In real time, JRTC requires Rangers and CF to establish interoperability in order to exchange information between diverse systems.⁶ Rangers and CF must also create interdependence by maximizing the complementary and reinforcing effects of one another’s capabilities.⁷ Last, they must integrate by synergizing their respective support activities and operations to ensure a unified purpose and effort.

During Rotations 14-10.5 and 15-06, 2nd and 3rd Ranger Battalion leaders leveraged pre-existing relationships with the 82nd Airborne Division to effectively synchronize logistics, operations, targeting, and information sharing. Hasty establishment of the battalion and company tactical operations center was a key factor that contributed to mission success. It facilitated communication with CF and with the SOTF and set the conditions for a successful F3EA targeting process. Placing an experienced Ranger liaison officer (LNO) with the conventional brigade tactical operations center (TOC) further advanced these and other SOF/CF I3 training objectives.

The challenges of JRTC demonstrate that doing the basics well in an austere environment is difficult even for elite forces. However, doing the basics better than the enemy is an effective strategy; the Rangers in recent rotations adapted quickly and inflicted significant enemy losses. While understanding the capabilities of other SOF units is important for I3, the Rangers do not need to be experts in special warfare tasks like foreign internal defense (FID) or unconventional warfare (UW). Instead, the Ranger Regiment can preserve its elite strike capability by continuing to focus on the “Big Five” and light Infantry fundamentals. A limited mission scope allows the regiment to be the best light Infantry, with precision CQB capability, fully prepared for the next direct action or JFE mission the nation calls on it to conduct.

Conclusion

Overall, JRTC can meet the 75th Ranger Regiment's annual collective training requirements and can provide a venue to certify Ranger collective training tasks. JRTC can support an entire Ranger battalion training with assets it might have in combat, such as the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR). JRTC can also support complex, full-spectrum operations including mission ready exercises (MRX) and multilateral airborne training (MLAT). With the staffed and supported live-fire and force-on-force training at a single venue, JRTC allows the Rangers to focus on their mission tasks rather than backside support.

Ultimately, Ranger leaders who demand excellence make the 75th Ranger Regiment the Army's premier Infantry force. High training standards translate to effectiveness in combat. Such was the case with the Rangers for Rotations 14-10.5 and 15-06. The Rangers maximized the JRTC collective training opportunity while cementing lessons from 13 years of combat in the minds of the younger generation. The 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 75th Ranger Regiment adapted the basics to defeat an evolving enemy threat. If Ranger leaders continue to inculcate the value of adaptive solutions and realistic training — like those JRTC provides — the 75th will remain the Army's premier raiders and force of choice for surgical strikes.

Notes

¹ 75th Ranger Regiment website, <http://www.benning.army.mil/tenant/75thRanger/>.

² ARSOF 2022, U.S. Army Special Operations Command, http://www.soc.mil/Assorted%20Pages/ARSOF2022_vFINAL.pdf.

³ Marine GEN James N. Mattis, Memorandum. Subject: Killed in Action (KIA) Reduction Initiative, 18 January 2013.

⁴ 75th Ranger Regiment website, <http://www.benning.army.mil/tenant/75thRanger/>.

⁵ U.S. Army Special Operations Command website, <http://www.soc.mil/USASOCHQ/SOFTruths.html>.

⁶ Joint Publication 6-0, *Joint Communications Systems*, 10 June 2015.

⁷ Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations*, 11 August 2011.

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