

Ranger School Provides Tips for Shaping Training Plans

by COL David G. Fivecoat, CPT Ronnie L. Cunningham Jr. and CPT Sam S. Rieger

The challenges current leaders face on the contemporary battlefield are more demanding than that of our forefathers. Ranger-qualified Soldiers are physically and mentally tough, technically and tactically proficient in small-unit tactics, and able to think, act and react effectively in stressful environments. Producing Ranger-qualified leaders remains a top priority for the Maneuver Center of Excellence (MCoE) at Fort Benning, GA.

Over the past three years, a consistent trend is that Ranger students struggle to successfully complete the Ranger Physical Assessment (RPA), the 12-mile foot march and the land-navigation test during the Ranger Assessment Phase (RAP). In fact, a Ranger class will lose almost 50 percent of its students during RAP week, the first 96 hours of Ranger School.

*(Editor's note: In the upcoming update to Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-3, Chapter 9, **Armor Branch Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management**, second lieutenants assigned to infantry brigade combat teams (IBCTs) and Stryker brigade combat teams (SBCTs) will attend the Army Reconnaissance Course and Ranger School. Second lieutenants assigned to armored brigade combat teams are strongly encouraged to attend Ranger School. Captains assigned to IBCT Cavalry squadrons will attend Cavalry Leader's Course and are highly encouraged to attend Ranger School.)*

The following blueprint provides Soldiers and units assistance in shaping training plans to increase their success at Ranger School.



Figure 1. Ranger Class 4-11 (Feb. 20, 2011) begins the mountain phase by learning lower-mountaineering skills, including rappelling and how to tie various types of knots at Camp Merrill, Dahlonega, GA. (Photo by John D. Helms)

RPA

The RPA is the No. 1 cause for Ranger students to be dropped from the course. Over the course of Fiscal Year (FY) 2015, 862 students – or 35 percent of those who arrived at Camp Rogers – failed one of the RPA’s four events, which consist of 49 push-ups in two minutes, 59 sit-ups in two minutes, a five-mile run in 40 minutes and six chin-ups. To be successful, Soldiers and units should focus their training to ensure all Ranger students can exceed the RPA standards.

The RPA starts at 4 a.m. at the combatives pit next to Malvesti Field near Camp Rogers. All students, regardless of rank, gender or unit, will be placed in one formation. Students will then randomly move to one of 25 Ranger instructors (RI) for push-up grading. On the command “Go,” students will begin executing correct push-ups. A correct push-up is described in the *Army Physical Readiness Training Manual*, Training Circular (TC) 3-22.20, (Appendix A, Page A-6).

A correct push-up is performed when a student bends his/her elbows, lowering his/her entire body as a single unit until his/her upper arms are at least parallel to the ground. The student will assume the “start” position by placing his/her palms on the ground with arms fully extended, body in a general straight line from the shoulders to his/her feet and with feet no more than 12 inches apart. He/she raises his/her entire body until his/her arms are fully extended. The student’s body must remain rigid in a generally straight line and move as a unit while performing each repetition.

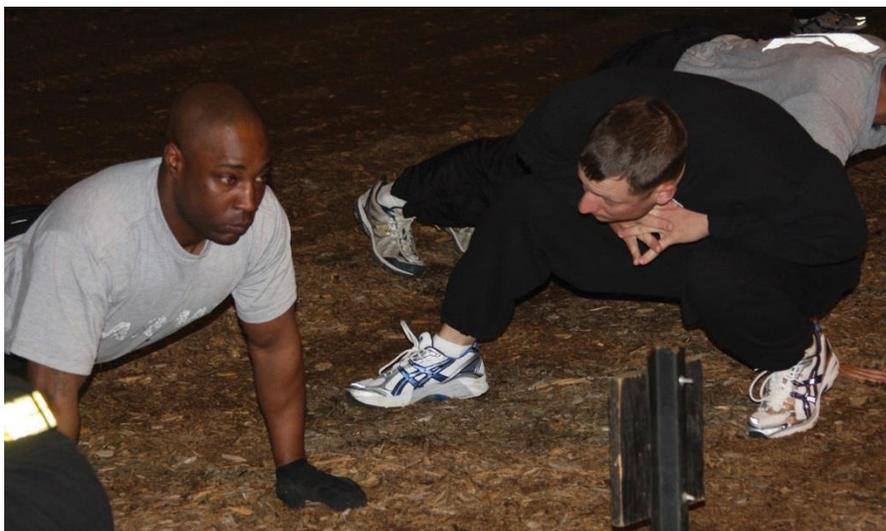


Figure 2. A Ranger student performs push-ups under the watchful eye of SSG Dustin Ketterl, an RI. (Photo by CPT Michael La Rocque)

The RI will count aloud and provide feedback to the student on his/her push-ups. If the student fails to complete the first 10 push-ups correctly, the RI will stop the student and explain why he/she is not performing correct push-ups and send the student to the retest area, where he/she is tested again by a different RI after 10 minutes. If the first 10 push-ups are completed correctly, the RI will not stop the student until the two minutes have expired. If the student fails to complete 49 push-ups in two minutes, he/she is sent to the retest area and has 10 minutes of rest before retesting with a different RI. Once the student successfully completes 49 push-ups, the RI will tell him/her to stop, regardless of the amount of time remaining, and he/she will proceed to a separate formation to prepare for sit-up testing.

The sit-up assessment and retest will proceed in the same fashion as the push-up event. Once the last student has completed 59 sit-ups in two minutes, students will be given 10 minutes before the five-mile run begins.

The five-mile run is an individual run to assess the cardiovascular endurance of Ranger students. Students are allowed to wear a watch to pace themselves. Students can fail the five-mile run test for three reasons: failure to reach the 2.5 mile turnaround within 20 minutes; failure to return to the finish line with the popsicle stick given at the 2.5 mile turnaround; and failure to finish the entire five-mile course within 40 minutes. There is no retest for the five-mile run.



Figure 3. SFC William Hall leads Ranger students in the five-mile run. (Photo by CPT Michael La Rocque)

Ten minutes after the 40 minutes expire for the five-mile run, students are tested on performing six chin-ups. When instructed by the RI, students will mount the chin-up bar with palms facing in and arms fully extended. Students are not allowed to wear gloves, cross their legs, swing or rock, and must not touch the RI positioned about 12 to 18 inches in front of the student.

When given the command “Up,” students will pull themselves up until their chin is completely over the bar. Once his/her chin is over the bar, the RI will give the command “Down,” and the student will lower himself/herself back to the start position with elbows locked and feet remaining off the ground. There is no time limit for the chin-up event. If a student fails to meet the standard, he/she will be given a re-test 10 minutes after his/her failed attempt. If a student is unsuccessful for a second time, he/she will be dropped from the course.

The events of the RPA and standards are not a secret. The Army pushup as defined in TC 3-22.20 is the standard and the only standard RIs use to evaluate the pushup. The best way for units to increase success rates and properly prepare students is to hold every Soldier to the Army standard. The Airborne and Ranger Training Brigade (ARTB), which is responsible for conducting the Ranger Course, wants Ranger students and units to know what is expected of them so they are successful.

Another tool to assist a Ranger student’s physical preparation is a physical-training program located on the ARTB Website (<http://www.benning.army.mil/infantry/RTB/>).

12-mile foot march

The 12-mile foot march is the second-highest cause of student attrition from the Ranger Course. In FY 2015, 415 students, or 16.8 percent, failed to meet the standard of the 12-mile foot march. The 12-mile foot march is an individual event that assesses a Ranger student’s ability to move rapidly along 12 miles of uneven terrain within

three hours. For safety reasons, a student must reach the six-mile mark by 100 minutes and the eight-mile mark by 128 minutes, or he/she is dropped from the course.

The 12-mile foot-march course is six miles out and six miles back over hardball and trail roads. The students wear/carry Army combat uniforms/operational camouflage pattern uniforms, boots, fighting load carrier, patrol cap, head lamp, an M4 rifle and a modular, lightweight, load-carrying equipment rucksack. The designated packing list is a 35-pound rucksack with an additional 12 pounds of water, totaling 47 pounds.



Figure 4. Ranger Course students engage in the 12-mile foot march. (Photo by CPT Michael La Rocque)

Based on Ranger-student feedback, there are two main causes for foot-march failure. The first, and most prevalent, is that students' training plans do not include a weekly scheduled six-, eight-, 10- or 12-mile foot march with a 47-pound rucksack for at least eight weeks before arriving at Fort Benning. Students must have time under the ruck to strengthen their back, legs and shoulders, and to toughen their feet. There is a physical-training plan on the ARTB Website.

The second reason is that unit training plans fail to mimic the cumulative effect of RAP week. The foot march is the last event after the RPA, the combat water-survival assessment, the Malvesti Confidence Course, land navigation and four days with little sleep. Soldiers who are not physically prepared struggle at completing the foot march. Units' pre-Ranger programs should try to mimic the cumulative nature of RAP week by replicating the back-to-back events to truly assess a Soldier's physical and mental endurance.

Land navigation

In FY 2015, 382, or 15.5 percent, of Ranger students did not pass the land-navigation test and were dropped from the Ranger Course. The land-navigation test assesses a Ranger student's ability to successfully locate four out of five points in five hours starting at night and transitioning to daylight. Students have 2.5 hours during limited visibility and 2.5 hours during the day to complete the test using only a pencil, map, compass, protractor and red-lens flashlight. It is a self-correcting course, and distances traveled between points are typically 1,000 to 1,500 meters. The total distance of the course averages five to eight kilometers, depending on the Soldier's navigation proficiency.

The first navigation test is on the morning of the second day of RAP week. If a student fails to meet the standard during this testing period, the retest is on the morning of the third day. The retest is on the same course, but the student is given a different set of points. If the student fails this second evaluation, he/she will be dropped from the course. It is important to note that if he/she meets the standard on the second land-navigation test, he/she will have walked an extra five to eight kilometers, which may impact his/her potential success during the 12-mile foot march the next day.

At Ranger School, students struggle to meet the standard for a variety of reasons. The first, and most prominent, is the Army's shift away from traditional land-navigation skills and reliance on Global Positioning System technology. A second reason is the students' lack of ability to terrain-associate and develop attack points. Potential students should focus on training the basics of land navigation as outlined in TC 3-25.26, **Map Reading and Land Navigation**, and successfully complete at least three tests on land-navigation courses before attending Ranger School.

If resources at the Soldier's home station are scarce, virtual training on land navigation using Virtual Battlespace 2 is available on the ARTB Website.

Additional factors

During FY15, 175 students, or 7.8 percent, of attendees failed patrols. Before attending the course, Ranger students should read and have a solid understanding of Chapter 2, "Operations," and Chapter 7, "Patrols," of the **Ranger Handbook**. Students can obtain the latest version of the Ranger Handbook at the ARTB Website.

If a student can physically succeed at meeting the standards of RAP week, his/her chances at eventually graduating Ranger School substantially increase.

Outsourcing the solution

Fortune 500 companies outsource to maximize efficacy of an organization when organic resources are inadequate. The same can be done for preparation for Ranger School. The Ranger Training Assessment Course (RTAC) is taught at the Army National Guard (ARNG) Warrior Training Center (WTC) located on Fort Benning. The course trains on similar terrain as Ranger School and affords students the opportunity to acclimatize to the Fort Benning weather. This provides an obvious advantage over other division-level pre-Ranger courses. Also, the close relationship maintained by the WTC and the ARTB historically affords their graduates with a 15-percent higher success rate at Ranger School over other division pre-Ranger programs.

RTAC is a free resource for active-duty Soldiers and can be provided at minimal cost to ARNG units.

RTAC is a two-week-long course that concentrates on the high-attrition events of RAP week. Students complete a Ranger physical-fitness assessment (49 push-ups in two minutes, 59 sit-ups in two minutes, five-mile run in 40 minutes and six chin-ups), five days of land navigation, multiple obstacle courses, combat water-survival test and a three-day field-training exercise with patrolling classes. During the course, RTAC cadre focus on push-ups, the foot march and preparation and execution of land navigation – events that historically and currently cause the most failures during Ranger School.



Figure 5. Ranger students test themselves on the Darby Queen confidence course. (Photo by CPT Michael La Rocque)

In addition, WTC's medical staff will review and correct as many deficiencies as possible in a student's medical records during this time. Upon successful completion of RTAC, students take a three-day pass prior to in-processing into Ranger School.

More information on RTAC can be found at <http://www.benning.army.mil/tenant/wtc/pr.htm>.

Improving pre-Ranger courses

Installation pre-Ranger courses can take advantage of several resources at the ARTB. Division-level pre-Ranger courses can visit ARTB, observe RAP week events and visit the Ranger Instructor Training and Education Program to get the latest classes taught at Ranger School, and maximize time with RIs to understand lessons-learned.

Another avenue of approach is for division-level pre-Ranger courses to request a visit from ARTB cadre to enhance and standardize their existing course structure. In this instance, if training and manning requirements allow, the ARTB will send a cohort of senior RIs to a division's pre-Ranger program and provide feedback on current course standards to ensure students are well prepared to succeed. To coordinate a visit, contact the ARTB S-3 at (706) 544-6602 or usarmy.benning.tradoc.mbx.artb-s3-operations@mail.mil.

Finish strong

Units and Soldiers can increase their success at Ranger School by focusing pre-training on being successful during RAP week. This includes strictly executing push-ups during the RPA, sustaining the mental and physical toughness to meet the three-hour standard on the 12-mile foot march, and honing the basic navigation skills required to pass the land-navigation test on the first attempt. A proven method to increase success at Ranger School is to take advantage of the WTC's RTAC. Units can improve their home-station pre-Ranger course by reaching out to the ARTB and either visiting Fort Benning or requesting a visit.

"Without a doubt, Ranger School is the most physically and mentally demanding course in the U.S. Army," said MG Scott Miller, MCoE's former commanding general. "By using the assets described in this article and focusing pre-training on the top three events that students fail, Soldiers and units will increase their success at Ranger School."

COL David Fivecoat commands ARTB at Fort Benning, GA. Previous assignments include J-35, the Joint Staff, U.S. Central Command Division chief, Washington, DC; commander, 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, Fort Campbell, KY; and commander, Company C, 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, Fort Bragg, NC. His military schooling includes Ranger, air-assault and airborne schools. He holds a bachelor's of science degree in military history from U.S. Military Academy, West Point; a master's of arts degree in military arts and science from U.S. Army Command and General Staff College; and a master's of arts degree in national security strategy from the National War College. His awards and honors include four Bronze Star Medals, an Army Commendation Medal with V and a master parachutist tab.

CPT Ronnie Cunningham is an assistant operations officer at Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment (HHD), ARTB. Previous assignments include rifle-platoon leader, Company D, 2-27 Infantry, Schofield Barracks, HI; observer-controller, Tarantula Team, National Training Center, Fort Irwin, CA; company flight safety noncommissioned officer (FSNCO), 1-37 Armor Regiment, Giessen; Germany; and company FSNCO, 3-325 Airborne Infantry Regiment, Fort Bragg, NC. His military schooling includes Maneuver Captain's Career Course, Infantry Basic Officer Leader's Course, Joint Forward Observer Course, Officer Candidate School and air-assault, Jumpmaster, Ranger and Pathfinder schools. CPT Cunningham holds a bachelor's of science degree in finance from Hawaii Pacific University. His awards and honors include a Bronze Star Medal with V, Bronze Star Medal, Purple Heart and Meritorious Service Medal.

CPT Sam Rieger is an assistant operations officer at HHD ARTB. Previous assignments include chief of optometry, U.S. Army Health Clinic-Katterbach; project manager, U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine-North, Fort Meade, MD; and brigade environmental-science officer, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division. CPT Rieger's military schooling includes Army Medical Department (AMEDD) Captain's Career Course, AMEDD Basic Officer Leader's Course, Expert Field Medical Badge and air-assault and airborne schools. CPT Rieger holds a bachelor's of science degree in biology from Wake Forest University and a doctorate of optometry from University of the Incarnate Word Rosenberg School of Optometry.