
Developing the Warrior Spirit In Ranger Training

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Developing the warrior spirit in soldiers is vital to the Army as we move into the 21st century. This is one of the objectives during the Benning phase of the Ranger Course.

What do I mean by the term “warrior spirit”? Above all, it is a state of mind.

A soldier with the warrior spirit thinks aggressively, always seeking ways to close with and defeat the enemy. He is confident that he is tough enough to meet the enemy on any level. He is less concerned for his personal safety and more concerned with inflicting as much

pain as possible on the enemy. In training, this soldier focuses completely on ways to improve his unit’s ability to fight. He draws his satisfaction from continually developing his fighting prowess. He takes it personally when he loses in training because he knows it

is unacceptable to lose in combat. In sum, the warrior spirit drives a soldier to fight and win, or die trying.

Although this is a personal definition, it is close to the doctrinal definition of the "warrior ethos" found in the newest update of Field Manual 22-100, *Leadership*:

The will to win with honor. Despite a thinking enemy, despite adverse conditions, you accomplish your mission. You express your character—the BE of BE, KNOW, DO—when you and your people confront a difficult mission and persevere. The warrior ethos is the will to meet mission demands, no matter what, the drive to get the job done whatever the cost.

In recent years, the focus within the Army has been on technological advances and skills (particularly in relation to its plans for Force XXI and Army After Next). But these advances have brought about a decline in the development of the warrior spirit. The many peacekeeping deployments—with the necessary emphasis on following strict rules of engagement and preventing the outbreak of hostilities—have further contributed to the weakening of the warrior spirit.

This decline in the warrior spirit is hard to measure objectively outside of combat. Part of my analysis comes from personal observations during nine years in infantry units. It is also based on the consensus of the combat arms officers and noncommissioned officers I have talked to on the subject. One objective measure is that most Ranger students, when asked, say they have not done combatives at the unit level.

The question that must be answered, therefore, is: Have we moved to the point that the warrior spirit is not as important as it once was, and will our overwhelming technological superiority negate the advantages of the warrior spirit in future combat? The short answer is that the warrior spirit is more important now than ever and will continue to be important.

The future of warfare for the U.S. Army, particularly for the light infantry divisions, lies, among other things, in military operations on urban terrain (MOUT) and heavily restrictive envi-

ronments. The world population continues to increase and become more urbanized, particularly in third world countries.

Most of our potential adversaries know two things about the United States that they will try to use against us: We are very sensitive to casualties, and our strength is in open terrain, where our technological superiority is at a premium.

They know that one way to gain their political objective is to draw us into a situation or location in which they can inflict excessive casualties. Although military forces will continue to carry out their missions, the American people (through their political representatives) will not tolerate high casualty rates, unless they perceive the enemy as a direct threat to our nation. Somalia is a good example.

Operation *Desert Storm* showed what we can do in wide-open terrain. But, as the North Vietnamese and their allies quickly discovered, if you can get close enough to your opponent, you negate many of his technological advantages. Urban or heavily restrictive terrain puts us at a distinct disadvantage in both of these areas.

We can therefore expect that if a potential adversary wants to gain a political objective he will figure out some way to draw us into such environments. Because of the close, personal nature of these operations and their likelihood in the future, soldiers will have to have the warrior spirit to fight the enemy at close quarters, as in MOUT, and defeat him.

The Benning phase of Ranger school receives an average of 300 small-unit leaders each month. They come from various types of units and with various degrees of warrior spirit. The method I will describe outlines why most students leave Ranger school with the warrior spirit and take it back to their teams, squads, platoons, or companies, where they will have a great effect on the rest of the Army.

Part of the warrior spirit is confidence and physical toughness. For these two attributes, Ranger school does what it has always done—push the students beyond what they thought were their limits. When students are deprived of

food and sleep and physically stressed all the time, they develop physical and mental toughness. Each student learns that he can function and lead under combat conditions. He gains confidence in his own ability to face the enemy in combat operations. He gains confidence in his tactical ability when he is forced to plan and lead patrols to the high Ranger standards.

The major improvement Ranger School has made over the past few years in regard to developing the warrior spirit has been in the use of physical contact events. Up until two years ago Ranger students were taught combatives but without free-play force-on-force. Although they learned the different fighting techniques, they didn't get a chance to actually fight each other. Combatives and knife fighting techniques are still taught. The change is the addition of boxing and pugil stick fighting, which is held in the first nine days of the school.

The pugil stick event serves two purposes: It allows the student to practice the bayonet fighting techniques he previously learned, and it helps him face his fears and gain confidence that he can function under the uncertainty of combat. (Colonel Lewis Millet, Medal of Honor recipient and honorary regimental commander of the 27th Infantry, used to tell his soldiers that they should periodically face their fears in peacetime by doing things that involve an element of risk—such as skydiving, scuba diving, or boxing—to build confidence in their ability to face their fears in combat.) The Ranger instructor referees ensure that the students make an aggressive effort to attack their opponent. If they do not, they are stopped and required to fight again. Each student fights a one-on-one bout three times against the same opponent. The winner is the one who takes the best two out of three. Those who excel are rewarded. The students must be extremely aggressive to win the close fight.

The boxing event serves many of the same purposes as the pugil stick event. Although soldiers are not likely to engage in fistfights during combat, boxing does build their confidence in the ability

to fight without a weapon if it is necessary. This is a real possibility in a MOU environment, where opposing soldiers can be within feet of each other before they know it. The most important thing boxing does, however, is to force the student to confront his fears. More than half of all Ranger students say they have never been in a fistfight, and I would bet that the percentage would be much higher in regular units. Combat is not the place for a soldier to face his fear of confrontation for the first time. During the matches, Ranger instructors stress the same aggressiveness as in the pugil fighting.

Almost all the feedback from the students about boxing and pugil sticks is positive. They say they gained something from it and wish their units did more combative events of this type. Another by-product of the pugil and boxing events is that they build teamwork, and most student feedback confirms this.

Ranger school takes a few safety

measures to ensure that the pugil and boxing events are safe and realistic. First, fighters are medically screened for potentially hazardous conditions. A good example of this is students who have had previous head injuries. Next, students who have less than 20/20 vision are identified so that they fight only each other. In the boxing event, any students who have had a lot of past boxing experience are separated and fight each other. Finally, students are matched in size. All the standard safety equipment (headgear, mouthpieces) is used. Medics are always on site, and the Ranger instructors look for medical problems with Ranger students. With these measures in place, instructors can encourage the students to fight to their utmost potential. With the same precautions, any unit in the Army could conduct force-on-force combatives. The benefits gained through developing the warrior spirit would be worth the small number of injuries.

Even if Ranger students don't make it

through the entire course, they still take back to their units what they have learned. In this way, what is taught in the Ranger Training Brigade affects the entire Army. Developing the warrior spirit is one of the many things Ranger School does, which makes it relevant to the likely future of warfare. In dirty, face-to-face MOU fighting, the victor will be not only the side with the technological advantage but also the side with aggressive, fearless warrior leaders—leaders who have developed the warrior spirit in their soldiers, based on what they have learned in Ranger School.

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