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# Mountaineering and Leadership

## The 5th Ranger Training Battalion

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The mission of the 5th Ranger Training Battalion, Ranger Training Brigade (RTB) is to train small-unit leaders on mountaineering skills and to further develop their combat leadership and functional skills. The brigade accomplishes this mission by requiring Ranger students to perform individual and collective tasks in a tactically realistic mountainous environment, under mental and physical conditions approaching those found in combat.

Although the mission has not changed in more than 40 years, the methods and techniques the battalion uses have evolved along with doctrine and technology. Individual success is still defined as earning the Ranger tab. The course's success is defined as an infusion of those intangible leadership skills and strength of character a warrior develops in order to get other warriors to do what they do not want to do.

The mountain phase implemented a new program of instruction (POI) in August 1997 that still develops mountaineering and leadership skills.

The most recent changes involve content and course structure and equipment. The significant changes in content include a tactical scenario for insertion into Camp Frank D. Merrill (in the north Georgia mountains), a reintro-

duction of squad and section patrolling and improved mountaineering instruction, and a five-day platoon level field training exercise (FTX). This phase is still 21 days long.

Along with the changing structure of the Mountain Phase, the RTB has upgraded the equipment issued to the students. Ranger students use AN/PVS-7D night vision devices during section and platoon training to assist their night movements. Both the Ranger students and opposing force (OPFOR) personnel wear MILES (multiple integrated laser engagement system) equipment, which gives the Ranger Instructor (RI) information that is critical in after-action reviews (AARs). Ranger patrols use the global positioning system (GPS) as an enhancement to pinpointing a location (the GPS is not authorized for use in movement as a navigational aid). Students now carry the M4 rifle; both the M240G machinegun and the SINC-GARS (single-channel ground and airborne radio system) are slated for issue to the brigade in the near future.

Transitions from one phase to another are based on a tactical scenario introduced on the first day of the course. The continuity of the tactical scenario sustains the students' focus and provides a battle rhythm for the Rangers

throughout the 61-day course. Under the old POI, Rangers traveled to Camp Merrill by commercial bus. Transition from the Benning Phase to the Mountain Phase now begins with an air assault and an infiltration of more than eight kilometers. In this cadre-led mission, the Ranger students watch a battalion operations order given by the battalion commander and his staff and observe as their company commander conducts a compressed planning process. Then they participate in rehearsals.

Within 24 hours the battalion accomplishes two major training objectives: First, the instructors demonstrate the standard for planning, rehearsing, and executing a Ranger mission. Second, they introduce the students to mountainous terrain, which gives them an opportunity to teach necessary navigation skills and route selection techniques. Finally, the mission identifies any Ranger students who may have difficulty with the physical demands of the phase.

Upon conclusion of the infiltration, the students get a period of about 12 hours to refit and in-process. Then they move directly into section operations—two days of combat techniques training followed by a four-day FTX.

The Ranger students learn the fun-

damentals of patrolling with a focus on planning, task organization (with particular emphasis on the "mission" and "troops available" factors of METT-T), supervision, navigation, and squad and section unit-size tactics and techniques.

The company commander starts the planning process for the FTX by issuing an order. The section FTX begins with squad reconnaissance missions of enemy air defense artillery (ADA) and cache sites, followed by a link-up of two squads to form a section element. For three days, the Rangers execute raids and ambushes to eliminate enemy ADA capabilities and open flight corridors to support to Camp Merrill.

The final mission of the FTX is a squad exfiltration back to Camp Merrill through friendly forward unit (FFU) lines. The section training and the FTX missions complete the transition from the squad operations conducted at Fort Benning to platoon operations conducted in the second FTX in North Georgia and in Florida.

Students move directly into the mountaineering portion after successfully completing the section FTX. Under the old POI, students arrived at Camp Merrill, in-processed, and started mountaineering training. Fundamentally, instruction has not changed in the mountaineering phase, but two subtle changes were made in the training—a new knot test and improved equipment. The improvements to the training have reduced the number of mountaineering failures as well as the number of injuries.

The knot instruction now centers on the figure-8 family of knots. This keeps the Ranger Course's mountaineering training consistent with that provided at other military courses. Rangers must successfully pass the knot and belay tests to remain in the course and move on to advanced mountaineering training. Ranger students receive more than 15 hours of knot training and have three opportunities to pass their tests. A student who fails is dropped from the course but has the option of returning at a later date.

The second subtle change is that Ranger students now use more modern equipment. They use kernmantle ropes,

which are more pliable than standard issue green-laid rope. Kernmantle ropes also greatly improve the Rangers' ability to tie knots.

One of the most popular pieces of new equipment is the climbing harness. Rangers still learn to tie the "Swiss seat," but now they wear a climbing harness when conducting rappelling and climbing training. This harness moves the center of balance from the waist and to the chest, which allows for more freedom of movement. The introduction of this equipment has reduced injuries and is giving the Army better-trained Rangers.

The first three days of mountaineering still consist of knot instruction and testing, climbing and falling training, basic rappelling, belaying instruction and testing. The students receive classes on the construction of A-frames, rope bridges, and the suspension traverse. This training gives the students the basic skills they need to proceed to more technical training.

Advanced mountaineering, conducted at Mount Yonah, is one of the events with the highest risk. Ranger students foot march to the top, set up a bivouac site, and start training. During the two days of training each student must successfully negotiate a 200-foot night rappel, a direct-aid climb, a two-man party climb, and a balance climb. While the training certainly does not make the students experts, they do gain a tremendous amount of personal confidence (many have never done anything like it before). At the end of the second day, the students foot march back down Mt. Yonah and move to Camp Merrill to begin their platoon technique training.

Following the successful completion of the mountaineering training, the students receive an intelligence update from the battalion S-2. Two days of combat technique instruction at platoon level reinforce the tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) for the raids, ambushes, and patrol bases taught thus far in the course and focuses the Rangers on platoon operations. The students receive an operations order and begin planning. On day 15 of the phase, the students air assault into the Chatta-

hoochee National Forest for a five-day FTX, which concludes the evaluated portion of the Mountain Phase of the Ranger Course.

Rangers who successfully pass half of their patrols, receive a passing mark on peer reports, and have not accumulated a total of five major minus spot reports begin preparing for operations in the Florida Phase. Rangers who do not meet the academic standards go before an academic review board chaired by the battalion commander. Each Ranger is examined individually, and his records are closely examined to determine whether he will be recycled, dropped, or sent on to Florida. The only Ranger students who are recycled are those who have not met academic standards but clearly have the potential to succeed in the next class. All others are released from the course but are eligible to return later. The final appeal authority is the brigade commander.

Rangers who are going on to the Florida phase receive an operations order and begin planning for an airborne insertion into a drop zone at Eglin Air Force Base. Following a short refit period, Rangers receive sustained airborne training, load aircraft, and execute the airborne insertion into the drop zone. Their mission, to secure a drop zone for follow-on forces, completes the Mountain Phase of the Ranger Course and provides a seamless transition of control from the 5th Ranger Training Battalion to the 6th Ranger Training Battalion, while maintaining the tactical flow of the course.

The tactical scenario is integral to maintaining the focus and realism for the Ranger students. What used to be a scripted event controlled by Ranger instructors is now a free-play scenario based on mission-type orders and OPFOR countertasks. OPFOR squads are not given exact platoon locations or student missions. Instead, they must conduct their own reconnaissance missions to make contact with the Rangers. The free-play scenario forces the Ranger patrol leader to think through the intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) process and be prepared for enemy contact at any time. The OPFOR is relentless and often success-

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ful. Feedback from the students is overwhelmingly supportive of the free-play scenario.

The Mountain Phase taxes the students both mentally and physically. Results indicate that Rangers who have participated in a pre-Ranger program have a higher success rate than those who have not. Unit programs should focus on teaching task organization for the patrolling mission instead of relying on the three-squad method of mission preparation. Prospective Ranger students should review TTPs and the IPB process and its application at small unit level.

During the Mountain Phase, a Ranger student conducts air assaults, adjacent unit coordinations, departure and reen-

try of an FFU, and link-up operations, control of aerial resupply missions, and location of caches.

The only route to success is teamwork and individual heart, will, and desire. More than 80 percent of all students who arrive at the beginning of a phase will go on to the next phase. The formula for failure is a soldier who is trained but lacks the self-discipline to follow the standard, plus a leader who fails to enforce that standard.

The 5th Ranger Training Battalion has worked hard to improve the course, introduce new equipment available to units in the field, and provide the most tactically realistic training under conditions approaching those found in combat.

The battalion cordially invites any personnel in a Ranger student's chain of command to observe training and walk a patrol.

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