

Yet Another Guide to Ranger School

CPT ZACHARY C. GUST

Various articles have been written over the years about the U.S. Army Ranger School. There has not been an article written in a while and although the school has not changed much over the years, I thought it would be helpful to go over a few things in depth on how to prepare for the Army's premier leadership school. There will always be different opinions on how to best prepare for Ranger School. These tips and suggestions are my personal thoughts on how to be successful after working in the organization that runs Ranger School, the Airborne and Ranger Training Brigade (ARTB).

There is no point for me to ramble on without letting you know who I am and what my qualifications are to prove they are valid. First, I graduated the course in December 2018 with Class 01-19 after spending 87 days at the school. I initially started with Ranger Class 11-18 and had the pleasure of doing Darby Phase twice, as I recycled for patrols. I completed platoon leader (PL) and executive officer (XO) time with the 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, at Fort Wainwright, AK. I deployed with the battalion to Iraq in 2019-2020 as a mortar PL and then did a short year of work at ARTB.

The article will give advice on how to prepare for Ranger School no matter your rank, gender, or Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). I will cover three areas: fitness (or physical), mental (or knowledge), and miscellaneous, which will include some tips on gear to bring. The point is to discuss ways you can better prepare yourself for Ranger School in a casual manner to make it easier to read and understand.

Bottom line up front (BLUF): Report to Ranger School in the best shape possible. Fitness is no surprise to anyone trying to go to Ranger School. Although it is not a surprise, a chunk of students will fail day one during the Ranger Physical Fitness Test (RPFT). My initial advice revolves around the RPFT: Be able to do 75 push-ups prior to going to



A student in Ranger Class 3-21 completes the push-up event during the Ranger Physical Assessment.
(Photos by SGT Jaerett Engeseth)



At Ranger School, being able to ruck with a heavy pack is crucial.

the course. The Ranger standard is 49 but expect multiple push-ups not to be counted, hence being able to do 75 push-ups will minimize your chance of failure. Practice your push-ups with a metronome so they are methodical and not too fast or slow. Steady push-ups that follow the Army standard are the key.

When training for the five-mile run, run farther than that distance and be able to do the five-mile in 38 minutes or faster. The Ranger standard is five miles in 40 minutes, but if you cannot do the run in 38 minutes or faster, do not expect to be able to run faster than 40 minutes when you are stressed already on day one of Ranger School. Do not go all out during the RPFT and Ranger Assessment Phase (RAP) week. Ranger school is a marathon, and staying healthy is key. The school is a minimum of 61 days, and going all out in the first week can easily lead to injury or burning out.

Ruck, ruck, and ruck some more. After the RPFT, you are on your legs most of the day throughout the course and can have up to a 115-pound rucksack in Mountain Phase (the second phase of Ranger School). Being able to ruck with a heavy pack is crucial. Prepare yourself by rucking twice a week and gradually increase the weight each week to get used to rucking with a heavier pack. Also practice going through an obstacle course. Practice some of the obstacles such as climbing a rope because you will absolutely climb a rope multiple times while at Ranger School. Every military base has an obstacle course somewhere; find a way to use it and practice prior to your report date. Confidence is a major factor, and we will discuss this further later.

Taking care of your body is also part of the fitness/physical side of Ranger School. You will only have access to showers in the beginning of each phase. When patrols start, there will not be a chance to shower and what is in your ruck is what you have. Make sure to switch your socks out each day. Taking care of your feet is crucial and can make or break your Ranger School experience. Wipe yourself down with wet wipes every day and do basic hygiene as much as possible. You will have medic checks every morning; this is a great time to brush your teeth, wipe down, and change socks/shirt.

Knowledge and mentality boil down to the individual, and the mindset you bring to the course is on you. There are multiple pre-ranger courses out there, and I highly suggest attending one. I am biased towards the Ranger Training Assessment Course (RTAC — <https://www.benning.army.mil/Tenant/WTC/RTAC.html>) because I gradu-

ated from that course prior to starting Ranger School. Go to a pre-ranger course as it will only help hone your skills and prepare you for the grueling course to come. Some key things to know before arrival at Ranger School are the Ranger Creed, knot tying, and Ranger Tactical Tasks (RTTs). It is a simple task to memorize the Ranger Creed prior to the course, but you would be surprised at how many students show up without knowing any of it. Do yourself and your Ranger buddies a favor and memorize it. You will say it every time before you eat, and if you mess up there will be remedial training. Knot tying is another critical skill that you will constantly be doing. You have to pass a knots test in Mountain Phase, so take the time to learn the Ranger knots. At a bare minimum, know how to tie a bowline knot, square knot, and overhand knot. The RTTs are a drop event, which means if you fail you will go home. Practice at your unit with a subject matter expert (SME). The tasks are the same standard as the Expert Infantry Badge (EIB). Most pre-ranger courses will cover RTTs, but you do not want to be the Soldier dropped because you failed RTTs. If you absolutely cannot get your hands on the radios and machine guns, then watch videos that can be found online.

Always be positive. The school will get hard and will challenge you. Being positive will help your mental attitude and rub off on your Ranger buddies as well. This goes along with being a team player. Help your buddies out and do not be the one complaining all the time. Being a “good dude” goes a long way and will always help you in Ranger School. The buddies to your left and right help you earn your Ranger tab. A positive attitude and optimistic outlook each day will make Ranger School a little less miserable. Along with being positive, be confident. Ranger School is about leadership, and part of that is making a plan and making decisions. Be confident with your decisions. You may make the wrong decision and that is okay; failure to make a decision at all is worse than making the wrong one. Do not be so confident that you come across as arrogant, but you do not want to be timid either. Brief loud and clear and own your plan. The confidence you bring to the course will be noticed, and as long as you are not arrogant and pompous, this will help you succeed.

Physical and mental preparation are the two main factors on how to set yourself up for success, but I will add in some miscellaneous tips and gear to bring with you. Get yourself a solid pair of kneepads. You will spend a ton of time on a knee while in short and long halts. Bring multiple head lamps (it is likely you will lose one or two); you do not need a fancy one — ones from one of the large retail stores work just fine. Make sure the headlamps take AAA batteries; it is easier to get your hands on AAA batteries than AA. Bring some socks that you are used to rucking in,



Ranger students plan a mission during the school's swamp phase at Eglin Air Force Base, FL.

and I highly suggest wearing underwear while at school to reduce chafing (compression shorts are not allowed). I watched many of my Ranger buddies chafe badly (which we all know can make rucking miserable), and underwear can prevent this. Get a couple sets of the permanent map markers; you only need the black, red, blue, and green markers. I will not go into the depths on which pair of boots are the best, but bring a pair that are broken in and you like to ruck in (everyone has their favorite brand). A good terrain model will help your squad/platoon out. Simple things to put in your terrain model are golf tees, yarn, notecards, and colored chalk. I had some buddies swear by a foot product that you spray on your feet to toughen them up. It worked for them, but I have no real research on the product so make the call yourself. I previously mentioned that taking care of your body (especially your feet) is important.

Last word of advice is to be a team player. Be the buddy who carries the 240B machine gun. Be the buddy who offers to take the rope or extra weight that day. Do not be the last one to wake up or the one to always fall asleep. Everyone has bad days at Ranger School and everyone will fall asleep, just do not be the guy that it does it consistently.

Whether it takes you 61 days or 237 days, take Ranger School one day at a time. Prepare yourself physically, mentally, and with the right gear/tools. If this article helps one person get their tab, that is all that matters. Everyone has his/her own opinions, but these are some of the things that I believe will set you up for success. Remember to be a “good dude” and things will fall into place. The school is challenging but not impossible. Many before you have earned their tab and many after will as well. Rangers lead the way!

Visit ARTB’s website for the latest Ranger School information — <https://www.benning.army.mil/Infantry/ARTB/Student-Information/>.

CPT Zachary C. Gust is currently serving as the assistant S2 for the 2nd Brigade Combat Team (Strike), 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). He previously served as an assistant operations officer in the Airborne and Ranger Training Brigade at Fort Benning, GA. His other assignments include serving as a Stryker platoon leader, mortar platoon leader, and executive officer with 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, at Fort Wainwright, AK. His military education includes graduating from the Infantry Basic Officer Leader Course, Stryker Leader Course, Advanced Situational Awareness Course, Ranger School, Airborne School, Military Intelligence Captain’s Career Course and Air Assault School. He earned a bachelor’s degree in sociology from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.