

# Training Notes



## U.S. ARMY RANGER SCHOOL

# HOW TO PREPARE, AVOID PITFALLS

### 4TH RANGER TRAINING BATTALION

Numerous articles have been printed about the U.S. Army Ranger School over the years, but most have merely provided in-depth descriptions of the three phases of the school. There has never been an article that lays out specific areas where students fail, and more importantly, how to prepare students to avoid these pitfalls. This article is part one of a three-part series that will highlight the challenges students face during each phase of Ranger School and how to physically and mentally prepare for the Army's most demanding course.

Ranger School is the Army's premier leadership and small unit tactics school designed to produce physically tough and mentally agile leaders that are the foundation of our fighting force. Ranger School requires Soldiers to challenge themselves while they function in an ad-hoc squad and platoon with members from different backgrounds, units, and experience levels. In addition, Ranger School graduates learn that they can push themselves further and faster even when their bodies and minds say "stop." Most Soldiers and civilians fail to maximize their "human potential" and limit themselves to an individual comfort range of approximately 40- to 50-percent exertion during normal activities and only for short periods of time. Ranger School helps students understand and break through their self-imposed limitations and reach a higher level of human potential that equates to more than 80-percent exertion during high intensity and long duration periods. Unfortunately, half of all Ranger students cannot mentally or physically break out of their comfort range and realize their true potential.

It is imperative that the unit selection process for determining who should attend Ranger School, at a minimum, be a battalion responsibility. The years when each line company had 10 to 15 Ranger graduates are over. The level of Ranger School experience, which translates into what the Ranger standard looks like, is currently lacking at the company level. The workout programs, pre-PT test, and layout inspections get pushed down to a squad leader or team leader who has not attended the course and does not know the standard, or even worse, they do not hold the student to the same standard that will be expected by the Ranger instructor.

The Ranger Training Brigade (RTB) would also like to dispel the myth that there exists a limited quota to fill during the PT test. Too often we talk to students who have



heard that they better get in the first two lines during the PT test because once RTB hits their quota everyone else will get a "no-go." This is completely false. RTB is required to bring in 286 students per class by the Army Training Requirements and Resources

System (ATTRs), and we routinely accept 40-50 additional walk-ons. If you follow our instructions and perform to standard, you will get into the course.

### Ranger Assessment Phase

The low percentage of Ranger School graduates originates during the three-day Ranger Assessment Phase (RAP). Approximately 60 percent of the total Ranger School failures occur during RAP. RAP is comprised of numerous events including but not limited to: push-ups, sit-ups, five-mile run, pull-ups, water confidence course, land navigation, two-mile buddy run, Malvesti obstacle course, and 12-mile foot march. No single event is too difficult to complete; however, students are tired, hungry, and stressed during each event. It is the accumulative effect of executing all these events back-to-back that breaks the student either physically or mentally.

One of the major contributors to RAP failures is push-ups. The Ranger standard is 49 push-ups in two minutes. Students must break the plane in accordance with FM 3-22.20, *Army Physical Readiness Training*, in order for each repetition to be counted. This relates back to our previous comment about the Soldiers'



Photos courtesy of 4th Ranger Training Battalion  
*A Ranger instructor grades a student during the push-up portion of the Ranger Physical Fitness Test. The Ranger standard is 49 push-ups in two minutes.*

leadership at home station not enforcing the same standard during the student unit's pre-test. In general, Soldiers should begin to train at least 90 days before entering Ranger School. During preparation, Soldiers should conduct push-ups on dumbbells or other equipment that allows them to go down farther than the ground would normally allow. Future Ranger students should also prepare by elevating their feet or adding a weight belt during the push-up training. Ranger students need to show up on Day Zero prepared to complete 80 "chest-to-ground" push-ups in two minutes in order to guarantee success on the first event at Ranger School.

The next event many fail is the five-mile run. If a Soldier can run five miles in 38 minutes on flat terrain, that Soldier will have a difficult time running the event in under 40 minutes on the Ranger five-mile course. Soldiers need to prepare on a course with intermittent hills. Like the Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT), the running event is the third event on the Ranger Physical Fitness Test (RPFT). Ranger students will not be fresh when it's time to tackle their five miles. In order to understand the difficulty of the RPFT, Soldiers should practice the entire RPFT at least five times during the 90-day train-up period. The fourth and final event on the RPFT requires the student to complete six pull-ups. Students should show up able to complete 12 "dead hang" pull-ups at the end of a rigorous workout. Those Soldiers who train prior and execute correctly during the RPFT will be able to progress to the next events without issue.

Additionally, individual land navigation skills are critical for success in Ranger School, and the student's abilities will be put to the test on Day 2 of Ranger School. The average distance traveled during the land navigation test is six kilometers. Students are given a compass, protractor, map, score sheet, verification of their pace count, and a quick refresher class on basic land navigation. Lack of confidence is the number one reason for failures during land navigation. This confidence deficit can stem from many sources — unsure pace count, lack of experience in plotting points, inability to read a map with a red lens flashlight, or unfamiliarity in moving throughout a woodland environment,



*Ranger students must be prepared to complete a five-mile run in under 40 minutes on a course with intermittent hills.*

especially at night. The best way to prepare for the Ranger School land navigation test is to PRACTICE. Most Army posts have land navigation courses open for reservation that are perfect locations to refresh land navigation skills. This is why the battalions should take ownership of their Ranger pre-training programs. It will take the battalion to coordinate, man, and resource the running of the navigation course. The land navigation test is a four-hour course and consists of two hours of limited visibility and two hours of daylight. Plotting points are within the four-hour time limit. Students are allowed to plot their points with white light but can only use a red lens flashlight for map checks on the course. Regular practice of basic map reading and point plotting skills as well as understanding how to

use attack points will boost confidence in every Soldier before they arrive at Ranger School. Practicing and memorizing a running and walking pace count will also improve a student's chances of finding points on the Ranger land navigation course. Land navigation is a perishable skill. Soldiers must hone it before they arrive at Camp Rogers.

The final event that causes a significant amount of attrition during the RAP is the foot march. The 12-mile foot march is conducted on paved roads surrounding Camp Rogers and must be completed in three hours. Students will carry their personal weapon, eight quarts of water, and a 45-pound ruck sack. Prospective students should visit the RTB Web site (<https://www.benning.army.mil/Infantry/RTB>) for examples of fitness regimens that will help them prepare for the RAP foot march. Following the foot march is a packing list layout. This and all other layouts during Ranger School are strict and non-waiverable. If a student is missing an item at any equipment layout, that student will be subject to a major minus. Three major minuses lead to a board case and a probable recycle. In order to ensure a Soldier has all items on the packing list, RTB suggests that future Ranger students be pre-inspected at the battalion level from their home unit. An updated version of the packing list can always be found at the RTB Web site along with other keys to success.

**Pre-Ranger/Train-up**

The Ranger Training Brigade has made significant improvements to their Web site with the sole purpose of assisting future

**Figure 1— The RTB Web site (<http://www.benning.army.mil/infantry/RTB/>)**

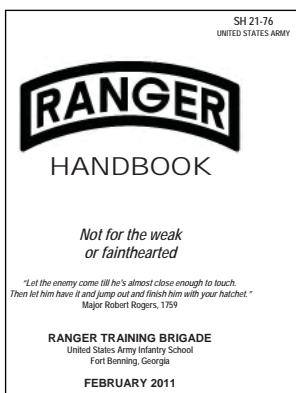


students prepare for the physical and mental rigors of Ranger School. There are 30-, 60-, and 90-day work out programs on the site that ensure the students arrive in shape and not already fatigued. Aside from the normal physical conditioning (cardio and strength training, foot marching, and swimming), prospective students should also study basic small unit tactics from publications such as the Ranger Handbook and FM 3-21.8, *The Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad*, especially if prospective students are non-combat arms. The RTB Web site has another great resource available — Virtual Battlespace 2 videos. These videos explain in detail how to conduct basic and intermediate battle drills used every day in Ranger School. The Web site also provides a section detailing how to prepare mentally for Ranger School and what to expect during the course.

Additionally, prospective students should take advantage of home station pre-Ranger courses or the two-week Ranger Training Assessment Course (RTAC) taught by the Warrior Training Center at Fort Benning. RTAC is not a physical fitness smoke-fest; it gives students a concentrated look at what they can expect from Ranger School in respect to physical conditioning, small unit leadership, and tactics. The RTAC instructors are certified by RTB, and graduation rates show that pre-Ranger/RTAC students are much more prepared for Ranger School than those students that did not attend a pre-Ranger course or RTAC. For example, students who attend RTAC have a 62 percent chance of graduating Ranger School compared to the approximately 50 percent chance for those who don't take a pre-Ranger course. RTAC Students are taught by certified instructors on how to succeed in Ranger School.

Students and unit commanders should know that 75 percent of Ranger students who pass RAP and Benning Phase proceed to the Mountain Phase. About 94 percent of Ranger students starting Mountain Phase progress to the Florida phase. Once in Florida, the Ranger student graduation rate reaches 98 percent. Successful completion of RAP week sets favorable conditions for continued success throughout Ranger School.

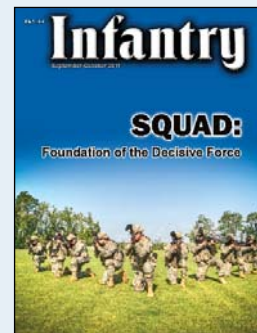
Upon graduation, these young and dynamic leaders are ready to lead the fire teams, squads, and platoons that are the Army's foundation for its decisive force. For more information on Ranger School and how to prepare for the course, visit: [http://www.benning.army.mil/Infantry/RTB/Student Information.html](http://www.benning.army.mil/Infantry/RTB/Student%20Information.html).



**Figure 2 — The Ranger Handbook is available on RTB's Web site**

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