



*During the Mountain Phase, Ranger students begin learning lower mountaineering skills including rappelling (30' tower and 60' rock face) and various knot tying.*

Photo by John D. Helms

# Training Notes



## U.S. ARMY RANGER SCHOOL

# MOUNTAIN PHASE

### 5TH RANGER TRAINING BATTALION

The Mountain Phase of Ranger School, overseen by the 5th Ranger Training Battalion in Dahlonaga, Ga., is often regarded as the most difficult phase of Ranger School. Students in the Mountain Phase build upon the squad-level skills developed at Camp Darby and learn the skills required to succeed at the platoon level. These skills are then evaluated in a simulated combat environment designed to apply physical duress to the already mentally taxing course. The cumulative effects of terrain, exhaustion, and increased responsibility at the platoon level make the Mountain Phase a dynamic and demanding environment. Leadership is truly tested as Ranger students execute platoon operations for the first time in the harsh surroundings of the Chattahoochee National Forest.

Upon the completion of military mountaineering training, patrolling instruction, and practical exercises, the students' leadership is evaluated during two graded five-day field training exercises (FTXs) separated by a re-fit and after actions review (AAR) day. Graded positions within each patrol include the platoon leader (PL), platoon sergeant (PSG), three squad leaders (SL), and a weapons squad leader (WSL). A typical patrol will consist of three phases; each phase will have a corresponding platoon leader and platoon sergeant (i.e. PL1, PSG1), while the squad leaders remain for the duration of the 24-hour patrol. The first phase of the patrol is the "Planning and Movement Phase," and the chain of command typically changes out prior to reaching the objective rally point. The second phase is the "Actions on the Objective Phase" where the chain of command (i.e. PL2, PSG2) controls the raid, ambush, or movement to contact but then changes out before stepping off to the nighttime patrol base. The third and final phase of the patrol is "Movement and Patrol Base Operations Phase," where the chain of command (i.e. PL3, PSG3) remains in charge of the patrol throughout the night until they are relieved the next morning. Based on individual performance, Ranger students receive a maximum of three graded leadership positions throughout the 10-day FTX. Historical trends show that approximately 80 percent of Mountain Phase students from any given class will continue to Camp Rudder for the Florida



Photo by John D. Helms

*After completing a knot test, Ranger students move on to rope bridge training.*

Phase of Ranger School. Of the 20 percent who do not move forward on their first try, more than 90 percent will eventually earn their Ranger tab.

The most common student trends, as cited in senior walker assessments, are the inability to implement the techniques and standard operating procedures (SOPs) learned in training as well as failure to effectively work as a team (leadership failure). Although leadership is the overarching principle evaluated in every Ranger, each position offers its own set of challenges. These challenges are further exacerbated by the fact that while a typical Ranger class is diverse in background and experience, on average, most students have less than five years experience in the Army. This relatively young base of the Ranger student population, combined with the requirements of a dynamic patrol environment, largely explains the difficulties in application of technical skills and leadership in the high-stress simulated combat environment in which the students are evaluated.

Though each similar position (PL1 vs. PL3 or WSL vs. assault SL) has the same number of graded tasks, these tasks vary in



U.S. Army photos

Above, a Ranger student briefs an operation order at a patrol base. At right, students climb Mount Greasy during the field training exercise.

the amount of control and technical knowledge required. For example, an assault squad leader must exercise great control maneuvering his men while a WSL must master machine gun theory (see FM 3-22.68, *Crew-Served Machine Guns*) and direct fire control measures (FM 3-21.8, *The Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad*). Both positions represent an equal leadership challenge, but they require different levels of control versus technical knowledge. Combine this with the experience of the average student, who has mostly “classroom” experience (i.e. Infantry Basic Officer Leadership Course, Advanced Individual Training, etc.), and the 57 percent go rate for WSL (five percent higher than the three other SL positions) gains context. The same principle applies to the 17 percent difference in the “GO” rate of the PSG1 position versus the PSG2 position, or the six percent difference between PL1 and PL3 success rates. There is a gap between the understanding of the techniques and SOPs of a Ranger platoon and the implementation of those techniques and SOPs in a tough field environment. This gap between knowledge and application, however, is closed through effective peer leadership, teamwork, and practical experience prior to arriving at Ranger School.

Success is a team effort, as proven by the Mountain Phase success trend analysis. PLs and PSGs typically share a grade, regardless of branch or experience. In fact, nearly 75 percent of PL and PSG teams receive the same grade; those who work as a team will usually combine their strengths and mitigate their weaknesses. For instructors, a platoon’s ability to work as a team makes a discernable difference in that platoon’s success rate. Leaders must be able to work with Soldiers throughout the Army and put aside their own experience and SOPs from their home station units. Under the stressful conditions in the Mountain Phase of Ranger School, any personal conflicts with another student will be greatly exaggerated and result in straining relationships within the platoon and hindering success.

The trends and statistics seem daunting at first, but becoming part of the one percent of Ranger-qualified Soldiers in the Army is entirely possible. Preparation is key to success, and with the proper attitude and preparation, the tab is not out of reach for those



with the will to succeed. To prepare for Ranger School, and specifically the Mountain Phase, students must go beyond basic Skill Level 1 tasks. Simply put, students are expected to demonstrate exceptional physical fitness and competence in basic Infantry skills upon arrival. For a list of these basic skills, visit the Ranger Training Brigade Web site at: <http://www.benning.army.mil/infantry/rtb/> and review the student information link. Future students should assess their current status and develop a plan of action. Keep in mind that Ranger School is a leadership school. Mental and emotional toughness are as essential as physical toughness and will be pushed to the limit in the Mountain Phase. Focus on weaknesses. If students lack experience controlling Infantry elements, they should familiarize themselves with the principles of patrolling and the basics of rifle platoon and squad tactics (specifically react to contact, platoon attack, and ambush). If they lack doctrinal experience, they should practice writing operation orders or fragmentary orders. Leadership is a dynamic skill requiring the utmost in dedication; the resources on the RTB Web site are designed to assist in preparation regardless of past experience. The “Developing Mental Toughness for Ranger School” page can also be found in the student information section of the RTB Web site at <http://www.benning.army.mil/infantry/rtb/StudentInformation.html>. This document can help identify strengths and weaknesses and apply proven developmental techniques to building a Ranger foundation.

Ranger School will challenge all who make the decision to earn their tab. The Mountain Phase will present a unique set of challenges to test the leadership abilities of each potential Ranger. Through effective preparation, prospective students can avoid common pitfalls and join the ranks of Rangers throughout the Army.

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The following Soldiers from the 5th Ranger Training Battalion contributed to this article: **CPT Jason Bradley, SFC Roger Winchester, CPT Jonathan Batt, SFC George Cruse, SFC Jacey Callahan, SFC David Hunt, and SFC Jeffrey Nail.**

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