

Training Notes



U.S. ARMY RANGER SCHOOL

FLORIDA PHASE

6TH RANGER TRAINING BATTALION

The third and final phase of Ranger School is located in a coastal swamp environment of Florida's panhandle at Eglin Air Force Base. It is intended to function as the "run phase" of Ranger School. Students are given more complex and evolving missions and expected to use their critical thinking skills to develop creative solutions based on the five principles of patrolling.

The Florida Phase is broken down into three mini-phases, each with its own focus: techniques, adaptability, and resiliency training. The techniques portion takes place prior to insertion into the field training exercise (FTX) where instructors focus on nongraded practical exercises. The adaptability phase takes place during the first five days of the FTX and focuses on challenging students' ability to adapt to changing missions and conditions. Finally, the resiliency portion takes place during the final five days of the FTX and challenges students' ability to endure physical and mental hardships. The Florida Phase is designed to give students the opportunity to truly test their mettle as leaders before many of them will take leadership roles in deployable units.

Techniques training (Days 1-5) in Florida begins with an in-country brief that builds on their experiences at Fort Benning and Dahlonga, Ga. The next two days feature short classes that build on the raid, movement-to-contact, and ambush classes received in previous phases. Each class is followed up by three student-led practical exercises (PE) that allow the students to practice leadership positions and receive mentorship and instruction from Ranger instructors (RIs). During these PEs, an additional RI is

surged on each platoon to maximize supervision, training, and mentorship. Successful students take advantage of the opportunity for a penalty-free experience. They volunteer for as many leadership positions as possible during the first two days and solicit advice during and after the PEs to refine their standard operating procedures (SOPs) developed in the Mountain Phase. Instructors will endeavor to give every student a practice leadership position, but enthusiastic and active participation yields huge dividends during the FTX.

Day 4 introduces students to waterborne techniques vital for success in Florida. Students will learn and practice the proper way to conduct a small boat movement, tactically cross a water obstacle, and how to move through swamps. Mastery of these skills is essential for success in the extremely challenging terrain that they experience throughout the FTX. RIs will then lead the platoon through a PE covering patrol base establishment and priorities of work to reinforce training received in the Mountain Phase.

The final day of techniques week (Day 5) allows each platoon to prepare itself for the upcoming FTX. Graded student leadership takes charge and receives the initial operation order (OPORD). They have the rest of the day to conduct troop leading procedures (TLPs), fine-tune SOPs, and prepare for the airborne operation that will insert them into the FTX. The effort students put into techniques training is one of the best indicators of their performance during

Ranger students cross a stream as a part of rope bridge training during the Florida Phase.

Photo by John D. Helms

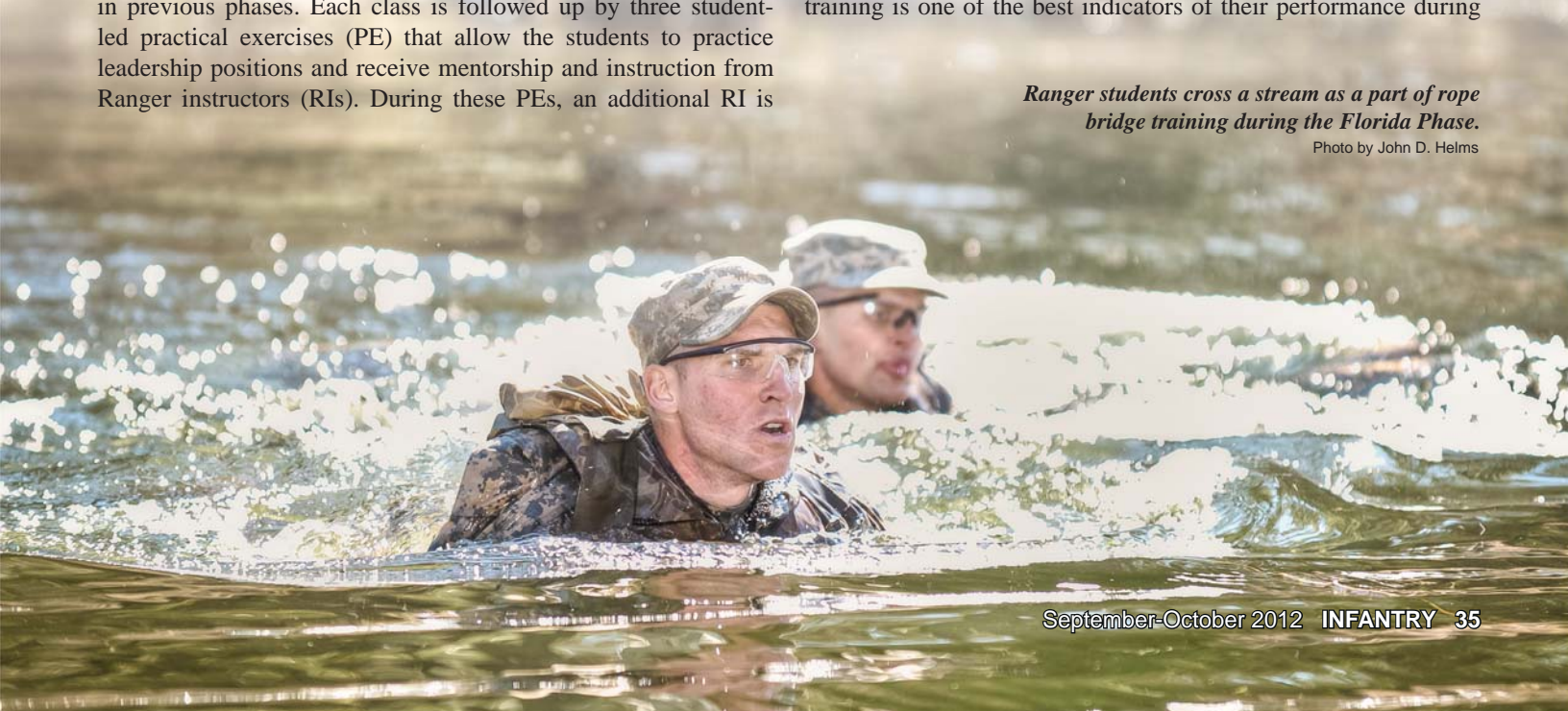




Photo by John D. Helms

Ranger students conduct a boat movement during the final phase of Ranger School.

the first few days of the FTX. Students have greater success when they use their time on Day 5 to rehearse, plan, fine-tune SOPs, and conduct proper pre-combat checks/pre-combat inspections. There is ample opportunity and time to prepare for the FTX; students must simply take advantage of this opportunity.

Following an airborne insertion, the FTX's first five days (Days 6-10) aim to train students' adaptability. This mainly consists of dismounted patrols covering five to 12 kilometers, and students receive roughly one to three hours of sleep each night. The goal of these patrols is to test the students' ability to adapt to changing missions and conditions and to think critically to devise creative solutions to unexpected problems. Students will receive changes to their mission from their higher headquarters throughout this portion of the FTX and will be expected to use any intelligence they have gathered to drive follow-on time sensitive missions.

Platoons that do not rehearse or prepare adequately on Day 5 typically struggle for the first days of the FTX. Student leaders will not have the time and space to adapt quickly to a rapidly evolving mission without well thought out and practiced SOPs. For Ranger students in leadership positions, success during this phase requires adaptability and problem solving. Platoons should not expect that every problem can be solved with dogmatic adherence to the Ranger Handbook but expect to make decisions using the guiding framework of the five principles of patrolling. Student leaders must prepare for the unexpected and make timely and sound decisions that use common sense. RIs will ensure that the unexpected takes place during training to familiarize students with a multitude of combat scenarios.

The final five days of the FTX (Days 11-15) will test Ranger students' resiliency. The operations that Ranger students conduct during this time include multiple complex movements such as traveling through the swamp and conducting one-rope bridge stream crossings, air assaults, trucking convoys, and boat movements along the Yellow River and across the Santa Rosa Sound to Santa Rosa Island. These movements are inherently dangerous, but the Ranger cadre employ a robust safety network to mitigate risk and ensure student safety. These challenging movements will tax the already exhausted Ranger students and add further complexity to the operations that the student leadership must plan for and control.

Even though the focus of this portion is to train resiliency, student

leadership is continually challenged to continue to manage change in order to accomplish these new and complex operations while motivating their peers to endure the final days. Resiliency to overcome conditions of hardship is a trait expected of all Rangers. What limits the Ranger student from achieving success during these final Ranger School days is a lack of clear and concise communication. Leaders must provide a clear task and purpose. Once this guidance is issued, Ranger students must spot check to ensure these tasks are conducted to standard and make necessary changes. Ranger students are far enough along in Ranger School that everyone has an understanding of what needs to be executed. The particular challenge is the Ranger student's individual choice between self-discipline and survival. In other words, students choose either to

do what is right or choose complacency and self-comfort. This has a tremendous effect on the Ranger student leader's ability to successfully complete his mission and ultimately pass his patrol. This is what makes Ranger School such a valuable developmental leadership experience; leadership is not just knowing what should be done but taking that knowledge and executing as one cohesive unit.

The Florida Phase functions as the capstone exercise of Ranger School and the final challenge for students before they graduate the course. The complexity and rigors of the phase offer a final learning experience for the students prior to many of them taking on the unfamiliar mantle of leadership. Instruction in Florida is less directive, and the RIs will take more of a mentoring role while allowing students to struggle to find their own solutions to difficult tactical problems. The challenge of leading a group of peers who have reached common levels of mental and physical exhaustion due to sleep and caloric restriction, while at the same time thinking critically to devise creative tactical solutions, is extremely difficult for many students. These challenges are only manageable because of the instruction and experiences gained in the two earlier phases. In the end, these challenges are essential to creating combat-ready leaders.



Photo courtesy of Ranger Training Brigade

A Ranger student briefs fellow students before a mission.