

TRAINING NOTES



ROTC Rangers

EDWARD G. BURLEY

Ranger students can be described as gruff, unshaven, camouflaged men — dirty, tired, and very hungry. ROTC cadets, on the other hand, can be described (generally) as polite, clean-cut, hopeful officer candidates — well-scrubbed, well-rested, and very well-fed. Mutually exclusive categories? Not necessarily.

Each year, though, someone in authority questions the wisdom of sending ROTC students to Ranger School instead of to the usual ROTC advanced camp. But this training is a valuable asset to the ROTC program, and I believe the other 74 cadets who attended the course last summer would agree with me.

By then a Ranger class designed to train only cadets was a thing of the past; the cadets who were enrolled in the Ranger course were integrated with the Active Army officers, non-commissioned officers, and enlisted men in the course. They were just Ranger students, subject to the same trials, confidence tests, and evaluation standards as the others.

To be accepted for the course, each cadet had to meet the usual basic requirements and pass the physical prerequisites. Each had to submit a current physical examination, a state-

ment as to why he wanted to attend, and comments from his Professor of Military Science. It helped, too, if he had collegiate extracurricular activities, prior military service, or Reserve duty on his record, as well as training in land navigation skills and field exercises. Previous military schools, such as airborne, air assault, and northern warfare, in particular,

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also weighed in a cadet's favor, because they indicated that he would be both physically and mentally prepared for the rigors of the Ranger course.

A week before the 1982 class began, the cadets who had been selected reported to Fort Benning for precamp training. This training was designed to give the ROTC cadets some of the instruction they would have received at the ROTC advanced

camp but which is not included in the Ranger course: weapon firing, barracks life, and garrison leadership positions. They also received instruction in land navigation and patrolling from the Rogers Team of the Ranger Department of the Infantry School, and they took part in morning PT sessions.

The Ranger course itself needs no further description, having been covered at length in *INFANTRY* (September-October 1980, page 16). But the training is especially challenging, and a cadet does take several risks in deciding to attend. If he does not complete the first phase of training — the Benning Phase — for whatever reason, he does not get credit for the ROTC advanced camp and, therefore, cannot be commissioned on schedule. Any serious injury he may suffer is not fully medically covered, and he may not be commissioned if he is hurt. In addition, he receives only the basic cadet pay throughout the course — no TDY pay and no jump pay. (But nobody goes through the Ranger course for money — they couldn't pay you enough!)

So why go to Ranger School as a cadet instead of waiting until after commissioning? For one thing, I

believe that the benefits in leadership training and self-knowledge more than outweigh any of the risks.

The Ranger School teaches leadership, *real* leadership, and allows its students to practice that leadership in a simulated combat environment. It is often said that "you can't *manage* a platoon of men to take a hill under fire," but ROTC cadets rarely get a chance to *lead*. In the Ranger course, the principles and traits of leadership that are taught in ROTC classrooms crystallize into day-to-day survival.

Throughout the course, the students (or "studs," as they are called by the instructors) are rotated through such graded leadership positions as patrol leader and assistant patrol leader. As patrol leader, the Ranger student learns what it's like to plan and accomplish a mission while leading tired, dirty, and hungry men who often don't even know their own names. The assistant patrol leader has to push these men to accomplish the patrol leader's mission, constantly accounting for personnel and equipment.

Without food and sleep and under the stress of passing the course, the student leader must pull himself and his unit together in order to succeed. No amount of classroom instruction or practice in drill and ceremonies can teach the importance of quick decisions and sound leadership practices in combat. Only such stressful training as that given in the Ranger course can build competent, confident

leaders. Trust others, obey orders, and stop complaining: the Ranger must do all this to earn his tab.

The Ranger learns to be a good follower as well. Working as a fire team leader, carrying a heavy rucksack, or humping a PRC-77 radio or an M60 machinegun up and down mountains gives the student an understanding of and a respect for the men who normally do these tasks in a unit.

The cadet who attends Ranger training learns these lessons. And when he is commissioned, he will enter on active duty a step ahead of his ROTC classmates who have not been in an Active Army environment before. He will understand how his radio telephone operator feels, for example; he will have greater respect for his troops; and he will know what his men can do if they are given the proper leadership.

The Army's present Ranger policy is primarily designed to integrate Ranger-qualified individuals into regular units. These men, trained in small-unit leadership and tactics, can then instruct and aid their fellow soldiers in these skills.

When each ROTC cadet returns to his college, he, too, brings the benefits of Ranger training back to the other cadets. Thus, the pride, motivation, and leadership skills of one will influence many. He is particularly well-suited to help the other cadets prepare for the tactical exercise lanes, for the military skills test, and for the leadership positions that most

of them will have when they attend their advanced camps.

In addition, the self-knowledge the cadet gains from the course helps him to mature greatly as an individual. He sees himself and others under stress, and it is usually an eye-opening experience. Personal faults and limitations come to the surface, and the cadet must learn to overcome them to earn the coveted Ranger tab.

Balanced against the possibility of suffering an injury or a setback that could result from not getting credit for the advanced ROTC camp, the benefits of leadership training far outweigh the risks. I know that the proudest moment of my life was when the Ranger tab was pinned to the shoulder of my uniform. If "leaders are made and not born," Ranger School is one of the places where they are made. The man who wears the Ranger tab is a true leader, whether on a college campus or in the heat of battle.

Although the school is not for every ROTC cadet, the qualified cadets who do attend and graduate will benefit immeasurably from the training they have received. This, in turn, will make them better officers when they are commissioned, and they will help make a better officer corps.

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Mortar Training Standards

SERGEANT FIRST CLASS STEVE L. OVERHOLSER

A new mortar platoon leader usually has a good basic knowledge of mortar gunnery techniques when he takes over his platoon, particularly

if he has just completed the Infantry Mortar Platoon Course. But he usually lacks the experience to place that knowledge in the proper perspec-

tive. Just by watching his platoon's performance he can usually determine whether a task is being performed right, but the time standards