

broken down as shown on the accompanying chart.

Highlights of the course include swimming the BIFV; conducting operator and organizational maintenance; training on all weapon systems, on the simplified test equipment (STE), and on boresighting and range operations; conducting a squad combat qualification exercise; and developing a unit assessment and a unit gunnery training program.

The course is demanding and the standards are high. A student must receive a "GO" in all of the hands-on tasks and must maintain an 80 percent average on all of the written examinations. Each student is allowed one retest for each task or examination on which he has received a "NO-GO." If he fails the retest, his file is forwarded to an academic board, which may recommend his dismissal from the course.

(In the future the Master Gunner's Course at Fort Benning may be revised to include live fire exercises under NBC conditions; reverse cycle training to make the best use of the thermal night sight; and instructions on the Conduct of Fire Trainer (COFT), which is scheduled for fielding early in 1985.)

Once an NCO has completed the course and has become a master gun-

SUBJECT	HOURS
Introduction	3
Hull and turret operations	18
Training management	46
Range operations	50
Strategic deployment/NBC	12
Prefire/preliminary gunnery	42
Target engagement (live fire)	136
Gunner's skill test	16
Student oral presentations	21
Maintenance (vehicle and weapon)	101
Examinations	45
Administration	12
Total	502

ner, he is qualified to serve as the primary advisor to his battalion commander and battalion S-3, or to his company commander for all gunnery training. He will then be knowledgeable in all organizational maintenance aspects of the vehicle and its weapon systems.

It must be pointed out, however, that although he is an accomplished troubleshooter, he is neither a mechanic nor a supervisor of mechanics. His job is to identify maintenance problems in the vehicle and its weapon systems that could adversely affect the mission of the unit.

The master gunner is not a tactician, either. Nowhere in the course is tactics addressed. But he is a gunnery and maintenance subject matter expert who, given tactical guidance by the commander and the S-3, will be able to

develop gunnery techniques that can be integrated into the realistic combat scenarios designed by the operations officers.

The master gunner is also a trainer. He has been taught the rudiments of the battalion training management system (BTMS), and he is fully competent in all aspects of range operations, ammunition management, and target systems. And if, in the performance of his duties, the master gunner encounters a situation that he does not know how to handle, he can write or call the Master Gunner Branch at Fort Benning for up-to-date information concerning the vehicle.

General comments and questions about the master gunner position and the Master Gunner's Course are always welcome. All inquiries should be addressed to Commandant, U.S. Army Infantry School, ATTN: ATSH-W-BFV (MG), Fort Benning, Georgia 31905; or telephone to AUTOVON 784-6201 (Commercial: 404/544-6201).

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Ranger Desert Phase

CAPTAIN WILLIAM D. PHILLIPS

When Ranger School graduates sit around talking, they like to exchange "war stories" about how tough their training was:

"When I went through, we had to walk 50 miles a night on one C-ration a day."

"Oh yeah? When I went through,

we didn't sleep a minute for 60 days."

"That's nothing. When I went through, we each had to swallow a live hand grenade before we could get the tab."

Well, in the future all you old time Ranger graduates will have to be on the lookout for new Ranger graduates

with even better tales to tell — the graduates who have been through the new Desert Phase of the Course, now being conducted near Fort Bliss, Texas.

Previously, the Ranger Course was divided into three phases — the Benning Phase, the Mountain Phase, and



Ranger replaces a 30-round magazine as he crawls forward during desert live fire raid.

the Florida Phase — which exposed the students to three different types of terrain and climate. (See "The Ranger Course," by Captain Ernest W. Cooler, *INFANTRY*, September-October 1980, pages 30-36.)

But Infantry School leaders, with an eye on world events and potential hot spots, realized that Rangers should also be exposed to the terrain and climate of the desert and instituted this fourth phase of training in March 1983. These leaders knew that well-trained light infantry forces in desert regions could prove invaluable in such behind-the-lines operations as reconnaissance patrols, raids, and ambushes. They felt that desert Ranger training would emphasize the great offensive potential of these operations, and that the hardship of the terrain and climate would be a challenge to leadership training.

To add the seven-day Desert Phase to the other three phases, the Ranger Department took five days of patrolling operations from the Mountain Phase and used the administrative breaks to provide for preparatory training and flight time.

The Ranger students' desert training begins before they leave the Mountain Phase at Camp Frank D. Merrill

at Dahlonaga, Georgia. They receive instruction on the desert environment, including its effect on personal health and performance and on equipment, in addition to the first of many hours of instruction on desert tactics, both ours and the Soviets'.

The Ranger students then travel

from Camp Merrill to Fort Benning, where they plan and rehearse the initial tactical operations to be conducted later at Fort Bliss. They receive a jumpmaster briefing and sustained airborne training before their departure at about 0100 hours. (As in the past, there are Ranger students who are not airborne qualified. These students are inserted into the desert training phase by alternate means.)

Flying in either C130 Hercules or C141 Starlifters, the Rangers begin their inflight rigging as they cross the Mississippi River heading west. Two and a half hours from Fort Bliss, the Rangers begin the arduous routine of donning their main and reserve parachutes. Each Ranger has on him all the equipment he will use for the six-day period. Just before sunrise, they arrive over Desperation Drop Zone and execute a mass tactical jump. (The drop zone is a dry lake bed in southern New Mexico, just south of White Sands Missile Range.) After assembling, the Ranger students move out to secure objectives south of the DZ and prepare a hasty defense.

The Ranger students then move into a formal instruction period on desert operation and survival, during which they are taught such survival tech-



Rangers in support positions preparing for desert live fire raid.

niques as how to make a water still and conserve water; how to know which plants are edible and which animals and insects are dangerous; and how to maintain their weapons and camouflage their fighting positions. Much of this early training is aimed at teaching them how to live and manage their personal resources so as to remain combat effective in the harsh desert environment.

Immediately after this first instructional period, the Ranger students take part in a cadre-led combat patrol. This initial exposure allows the Ranger students to see desert combat missions executed correctly before they are graded on their own missions. They also develop movement techniques and tactical considerations, such as judging distance (especially at night) and coping with sand and thorny mesquite bushes. The missions include both a vehicle ambush and a raid, which are the primary offensive operations Rangers can expect to conduct in a desert.

On the second morning, the graded phase of the desert training begins. During the next four days the Ranger students participate in continual combat operations against a conventional motorized enemy force. They alternate serving in leadership positions and are graded on how well they do as a platoon leader and as a platoon sergeant.

CLOSE ATTENTION

Because they never know who will be selected next or where in an operation a change will take place, the Ranger students always have to pay close attention to the original concept of the operation, where the unit is, and how each mission is progressing. (This technique, which is used throughout the Ranger course, keeps the students' interest at a high level, even when they are suffering from extreme stress and fatigue.) These missions continue without respite for four days, with a fresh pair of Ranger instructors for each platoon inserted each morning with the new day's mission and water supply.

During one of the four days of combat operations, the Ranger platoons rotate in conducting a live fire raid on a fortified complex. The raid, as a platoon mission, is conducted on a grand scale. The supporting fires include 60mm squad mortars, 40mm grenades fired from M203 grenade launchers, and M60 machinegun fire, while security teams respond to an "enemy" relief column of BMDs with M72 LAWs.

The Ranger students plan and conduct all of the operations with only minimum supervision from the cadre. Safety procedures are observed, of course, but the training does not suffer from oversupervision or over regulation.

The other three days of combat operations are also conducted by the student platoons. During daylight hours the Ranger students occupy patrol bases in dug-in defensive positions under individual camouflage nets. There, the students practice passive defense measures against "enemy" observation from roads, high ground, and aircraft. While in their patrol bases, the Ranger students plan their night's mission, movement, and needed equipment, conduct personal maintenance, and at the same time maintain tight security. That security is often tested by an OPFOR "stroke" any time the Ranger cadre detect a lowering of the security status.

(Throughout the Ranger Course, in fact, the opposing force (OPFOR) is especially aggressive. Sometimes, when the students do poorly in executing an "action at objective," or when security gets a little lax in a patrol base, the OPFOR is quick, hard, and unforgiving. The Rangers get no cheap victories.)

The Ranger students move out just after dark each night and begin their movement to their objective. The movement legs vary in distance, but because of the size of the desert, they are usually extensive. During most combat operations, each platoon conducts two missions per night using raids, ambushes, and reconnaissance patrols. The cycle begins and ends about daybreak as the platoons oc-

cupy new patrol bases.

On the sixth day, the students assemble and move to Biggs Army Airfield at Fort Bliss to prepare for their airborne assault into Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, and the beginning of their final phase of training. At the airfield, they conduct sustained airborne training, write and issue operations orders, and check and recheck equipment before they board their aircraft around midnight for their flight to Florida.

PRIDE

Each Ranger graduate can review his desert experiences and training with great pride. For by the time he finishes that phase, he has received expert training and extensive practice in such specialized desert tactics as camouflage, maintenance of weapons, radios, and night vision goggles, as well as in personal maintenance and physical deprivation. He has navigated over extended distances and planned combat missions and supporting fires while fatigued and under great stress. He has also experienced an extremely realistic live fire operation. For six days, the desert terrain, the great distances, the high heat, and the danger of live fire have all offered these Rangers the opportunity to exercise leadership at a high pitch.

So, the next time an old Ranger starts to tell a Ranger School yarn, he'd better have a good one if he wants to top the newer graduate — the "Desert Ranger."



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