

Rangers Do It With Less Dying

by [James Dunnigan](#)

September 4, 2011

The U.S. Army's 75th Ranger regiment's motto is "Rangers lead the way" and the 3,500 members of the regiment have been in constant action over the last decade doing just that. During a decade of action, the regiment has suffered 412 combat casualties, including 32 dead. This is less than half the casualty rate suffered by non-SOCOM (Special Operations Command) combat units, and is the result of better training and leadership in the ranger battalions. In particular, the rangers developed more aggressive and effective techniques for treating combat casualties, which substantially reduced the death rate. The rest of the army has adopted many of these techniques.

The rangers usually deploy to Iraq and Afghanistan for three months at a time, and serve as special muscle for important operations. The rangers, who belong to SOCOM, often act as backup for Special Forces or navy SEALs, but also carry out a lot of operations on their own. During a typical three month tour, the rangers might average 3-4 missions (patrols, raids, etc) a day, each one resulting in 3-4 enemy killed and 7-8 captured (along with large quantities of weapons and documents). Other deployments might be more, or less, intense. Often the Rangers are brought in to help Special Forces with searches for Islamic terrorists. In these cases the Rangers will spend most of their time patrolling, or on stakeout, noting everything and developing a web of information that will catch the bad guys.

Although a ranger battalion rarely has more than 600 troops, on a typical tour, 15-20 percent receive medals (mostly Bronze Star medals), while up to half will receive either Combat Action Badges (to recognize non-infantry troops who have spent at least a month in combat) and Combat Infantryman's Badges (for infantry who have spent at least a month in combat). For each tour, 30-40 percent of the troops are in combat for the first time. After one of these deployments, a battalion will usually spend 3-6 months at their base in the United States, before heading off for another overseas deployment (usually to Afghanistan, or somewhere else.)

The three battalions of Rangers are commandos in the classic (World War II) sense. They are light infantry who are trained to perform many of the missions the Special Forces normally take care of (raids, pilot and equipment recovery) plus something the Special Forces normally avoids; light infantry operations (using a several dozen or more troops for an operation.)

The Rangers are America's largest emergency response military unit (the smaller one is Delta Force) that is ready to fly off to an overseas trouble spot in less than 24 hours. In peacetime, one of the three Ranger battalions was always assigned to this duty (spending one month being ready go on 18 hours notice) and two months off (doing intensive training.) The 75th Ranger Regiment headquarters is at Fort Benning, Georgia. The 1st Battalion of the 75th Regiment (1/75) is stationed at Hunter Army Airfield, Georgia, the 2nd Battalion (2/75) is at Fort Lewis, Washington and the 3rd Battalion (3/75) is at Fort Benning, Georgia.

But "the Rangers" are more than the 75th Ranger Regiment. There is also the

TRADOC (Training And Doctrine Command) Ranger Training Brigade, which consists of three more ranger battalions (the 4th, 5th and 6th) who train those who wish to join the ranger regiment as well those who are there just to become qualified as a ranger. This is an important distinction that is often misunderstood. There is a difference between those who are "tabbed Rangers" (authorized to wear the Ranger tab on their uniform) and those who are simply members of the 75th Ranger Regiment. Any physically fit infantryman (and troops in other job categories the Rangers need) can apply to join the 75th Ranger Regiment if they have already gone through parachute training ("jump school"). They will have to pass a physical fitness test first, as the standards at the 75th Ranger Regiment are very high and there's no point sending any volunteers if they are not up to the minimum requirements. Officers and NCOs in the Ranger Regiment, however, must have taken and passed ranger training.

The Rangers encourage promising new recruits to volunteer to try for Ranger duty from the beginning. That way, the new recruit goes to the two week jump school right after 14 weeks of basic and advanced infantry training and is ready to try out for the rangers. This involves eight week long RASP (Ranger Assessment and Selection Program). About half of the volunteers fail. Those who pass are now members of the 75th Ranger Regiment, but they are not "rangers." How can this be?

Simple, the Ranger training was always meant to identify and train the elite infantry leaders. The purpose of Ranger School, for its first 20 years (until the 1970s), was to try and provide one Ranger NCO per infantry platoon and one Ranger officer per infantry company. That goal proved impossible to attain. There just weren't enough qualified volunteers for the tough training. But young infantry officers, in particular, were encouraged to attend Ranger school. The Ranger tab helped one's promotion prospects enormously. Until the 1990s, Ranger School was open to anyone in the army who could pass the physical qualification test. In practice, the army wanted its hotshot infantry officers and NCOs to attend and eventually anyone not working in, or directly with, the infantry, was not allowed to try out for the school. Even so, about 20 percent of attendees are from other services (marines, SEALs and air force special operations) and another 20 percent from foreign nations (many of which have their own Ranger schools, some of which are even harder to pass than the U.S. one.)

The Ranger School is a 61 day course designed to identify and train elite infantry leaders. The training goes on for about 19 hours a day, seven days a week. The attrition rate is about 60 percent. The school emphasizes mastery of basic infantry skills and the ability to lead troops under stressful conditions. Students for Ranger School arrive wearing uniforms devoid of rank insignia. Everyone is of equal rank during the 61 days of training, with everyone taking turns leading squad size units of their fellow students in various exercises. The Ranger School program emphasizes resourcefulness, physical toughness and the ability to think clearly while under extreme stress (and lack of sleep.)

Since its formation in 1974, up until September 11, 2001, the ranger regiment actually hadn't seen much action. But that has a lot to do with American political leaders' reluctance to get involved in overseas military emergencies. And if such action is needed, using fewer troops (as in Delta Force, SEALs or

Special Forces) is preferred. The rangers are seen as the ultimate strategic reserve. So when there is something really, really important that can only be taken care of with several hundred very well trained infantry, the rangers were ready to go. Thus in the last decade, the rangers have been heavily involved worldwide, carrying out counter-terror missions that need a bit more skill and daring than the average combat unit could provide.