

History of the US Army Rangers



"Rangers Lead the Way

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Pre-Revolution

Today's Army Rangers can trace their history throughout American history back to 1670. Captain Benjamin Church organized a company of troops and designated the Rangers. Church's Rangers fought with distinction during King Philip's War with the frontier Indians from 1670 to the war's end in 1675. During the French and Indian Wars of 1754 to 1763, nine companies of Rangers were organized under the command of Major Robert Rogers to fight for the British. Rogers was a brilliant and persuasive commander and published a set of 28 Standing Orders that emphasized the need for sound tactics and being prepared at all times.

Rogers' standing orders are just as relevant today as they were in 1756.

Revolutionary War, War of 1812, Civil War

In 1775, the Continental Congress authorized 10 companies of expert riflemen to be raised and equipped for the coming Revolution. In 1777, these soldiers were placed under the command of Dan Morgan and identified as "The Corps of Rangers". Also during the American Revolution, a force of 150 hand-picked men were used for reconnaissance and were known as the Connecticut Rangers under the command

of Thomas Knowlton.

After the American Revolution, Ranger units were disbanded. During the War of 1812, Ranger units were raised and deployed along the western frontier. Here they protected pioneer settlements and defended against Indian attacks. These Ranger units later were instrumental in scouring and reconnaissance for the American forces in the War with Mexico. During the Civil War, Meade's Rangers led a raid against the ammunition train of General Longstreet, destroying valuable supplies. Meade's Rangers also engaged and defeated a larger force of Confederate Rangers south of the Potomac River.

After the Civil War, Ranger units continued to work with the frontier Cavalry units protecting settlers.

World War Two

The New Rangers

When America entered the second World War, Maj. Gen. Lucien Truscott, who led the famed 3rd Infantry Division through most of the war, convinced the Army Chief of Staff of the need for an American commando unit. On May 26, 1942 the order was given authorizing the formation of the 1st Ranger Battalion to be commanded by Major William Darby. Word spread throughout the American forces that a special unit was being formed and Major Darby received thousands of volunteers, mainly from the

1st Armored and 34th Infantry divisions. After a careful screening process, the 1st Ranger Battalion was activated on June 19, 1942.

The next challenge was to properly train the new Rangers. For this, the 1st Ranger Battalion was shipped to the British Army's Commando Training Center in Scotland. For several weeks, the American Rangers were tested to their limits by the Commando Center trainers. When it was over, 85% of those who started the course, graduated.

First Blood

On August 19, 1942, 50 American

Rangers were added to a British and Canadian Commando raid on the French port city of Dieppe. 6,100 troops took part in the raid which was the first action that had American forces fighting the Germans in World War Two. During the Dieppe Raid, 3 Rangers were killed and 5 were captured. The American won high praise from their Commando allies.

D-Day June 6, 1944

During the Allied invasion of France, the 2nd Ranger Battalion of the US First Army was given a special mission. The US First Army was assigned to assault the westernmost beaches of the operation designated UTAH and

OMAHA. UTAH was the responsibility of the US VII Corps, comprised of the 4th Infantry Division while the US V Corps, comprised of the reinforced 1st Infantry Division landed at OMAHA. Directly in between was a point of land called Pointe du Hoc with a sheer cliff face rising 150 feet above the beach. On this cliff, the Germans had placed a battery of six 15mm coastal artillery pieces that would be capable of hitting almost any Allied ship of the US First Army. Companies D, E and F were tasked with scaling the cliff and eliminating the artillery pieces.

At the same time, companies A, B and C were to land on the west flank of

OMAHA with A co of the 116th Infantry Regiment, move up a draw to the village of Vierville sur Mer, secure the coastal road leading to Pointe du Hoe and destroy the German positions and radar station along the way. Both Rangers forces were prepared to assist the other should something go wrong. If everything went according to plan, the Ranger forces would link up on the high ground of Pointe du Hoe and support the drive inland with V Corps.

As the VII and V Corps were approaching their beaches, 3 companies of the 2nd Ranger Battalion hit the small beach at Pointe du Hoe and began the long process of scaling the cliff with

rope ladders. The Rangers were under almost constant rifle and machine gun fire from both sides, but the men continued their ascent. The first Rangers reached to top of the cliff just as the first waves hit UTAH and OMAHA. Much to the surprise of the Rangers, only a small platoon of Germans were atop Pointe du Hoe and were quickly eliminated. The German artillery had been pulled out.

MEanwhile, the Ranger force at OMAHA was in trouble. A co of the 116th was wiped out on the beach and the Rangers were forced to fight their way in. With A co out of the fight, the closest Allied troops were 2 kilometers away. The Rangers hit the beach and

made it to the base of the cliff just west of the draw. Only 31 men of C co made it so far. With the Ranger force pinned down, 4 soldiers, Lt William Moody, Lt Sidney Saloman, Sgt Julius Belcher and Sgt Richard Garrett began to pick their way up a small crevice using their bayonets for leverage until they finally reached the top of the cliff. They quickly dropped ropes and the Rangers began to climb. By 0730, C Co was on top of the ridge and facing a fortified house.

The Rangers assaulted the house and Lt Moody kicked in the door, killed the officer in charge and led the search of the trenches dug behind. The Rangers began the systematic destruction of the

pillboxes and positions using grenades, rifles and even their bayonets. Lt Moody was killed clearing one pillbox and command fell to Lt Saloman. Sgt Belcher led a furious charge of German machine gun positions that were pouring a murderous fire down onto OMAHA. Using white phosphorous grenades, the Rangers cooly shot the Germans as they fled the burning positions.

Companies A and B of the 2nd Ranger BN and the entire 5th Ranger BN came ashore at OMAHA shortly before 8:00 and drove inland to link up with C Co. In Addition, the remnants of the 116th Infantry were led up the cliff and joined the Rangers in formed an ad hoc Infantry

Regiment. This force continued to clear the bluffs around Vierville of German positions. The fighting was severe and often hand to hand. The Rangers of the 5th and 2nd Ranger BNs, along with the survivors of the 116th Infantry are credited with saving the Allied invasion at OMAHA Beach. The soldiers of the 1st Infantry Division had been pinned down and were taken horrendous casualties. Once the Rangers got behind the German lines, all hell broke loose and the Big Red One was able to move off the beach and establish their beachhead.

Other Operations

The Dieppe Raid and the D-Day invasion were just two major operations that the Rangers participated in however, the Rangers were present in almost every phase of the Allied effort to destroy Nazi Germany. In all 6 Ranger Battalions were formed. The 1st through 5th served in the European and African theaters while the 6th served in the Pacific. Small detachments of Rangers were sent to act as pathfinders and scout units for the advancing Allied armies. Rangers were sent in ahead of the infantry in dozens of amphibious assaults. In the Pacific, the 6th Ranger BN was the first to hit the beaches of New Guinea, Leyte and broke the back of Fortress Luzon in the Philippines.

During the raids on the Aleutian Islands the 6th Ranger BN ensured that the beaches were clear of all obstacles and led the way when the Islands were cleared.

The Allied march across North Africa, Italy and Europe was led by Rangers. From Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. Across the Mediterranean to Sicily, Naples, Anzio and Rome. The Rangers led the way into Northern and Southern France and were some of the first units to counter the German Ardennes Offensive in December of 1944. In 1945, Ranger units established bridgeheads across the Rhine River into the heart of Germany. Whenever their

was a tough operation that was crucial to the Allied war effort, Rangers were the first to fight.

Other Rangers

There are two other units that must be mentioned when telling the story of the Rangers; the 1st Special Service Force, a joint American and Canadian unit and the 5307th Composite Unit also known as Merrill's Marauders. The 1st Special Service Force was half Canadian, half American and 100% volunteer. They were trained to go behind enemy lines to conduct guerilla operations to disrupt enemy operations. The men were skilled as mountain climbers, lumberjacks,

skiers and game wardens. All had experience in high mountains and extreme cold. The 1st SSF was deployed into the Alps of Southern France and were highly successful in destroying German outposts and garrisons. German troops that were badly needed on the front lines, had to be pulled back to deal with this new threat and they paid a high price in trying to destroy the Allied troops.

Merrill's Marauders was another all-volunteer unit but was trained in jungle warfare. The unit was created in October 1943 to keep the Ledo Road of Burma open for supplies. Its commander was Brigadier General Frank Merrill.

The unit was trained for long range, deep penetration raids into enemy held jungles. During its operations the 5307th was known by its code name, GALAHAD. From January until April 1944, GALAHAD was General Joseph Stilwell's most dependable combat unit in the liberation of Burma. GALAHAD was in almost constant combat with the Japanese forces. On March 31, 1944, Gen Merrill was evacuated due to serious illness and injury against his strong desire to remain with his troops. GALAHAD continued to fight in Burma until August 1944 when the unit was reorganized as the 475th Infantry Regiment.

Korean War

After World War Two, most of the Ranger units were disbanded along with much of the war time Army. In 1950, when hostilities broke out in Korea, the Rangers were again ordered into action. Volunteers were called for and soon over 5,000 soldiers, many from the 82nd Airborne Division, had signed up. In October of 1950, the training began for the first 3 Ranger Companies. Also that month, a 4th Ranger company was raised from soldiers of the 505th Airborne Infantry Regiment and the 80th AAA BN. This company was later designated the 2nd Ranger Company and became the

first all-black Ranger unit.

On November 15, 1950 the 1st Ranger Company (Airborne) departed the United States and arrived in Korea on December 17. The 2nd and 4th Ranger Companies (Airborne) Arrived 2 weeks later. In this fight, there would be no large scale Ranger action such as the assault on Pointe du Hoc, instead the Rangers were assigned to various Infantry units. There they scouted ahead of the force, patrolled enemy lines, conducted behind the lines raids and set up ambushes for enemy patrols. The 2nd Ranger Company (Airborne) was assigned to the 7th Infantry Division, the 1st Ranger Company (Airborne) was

assigned to the 2nd Infantry Division and the 4th Ranger Company (Airborne) was assigned to the 1st Cavalry Division. Later, the 3rd Ranger Company (Airborne) would be assigned to the 3rd Infantry Division, the 5th Ranger Co (Airborne) would be assigned to the 25th Infantry Division and the 8th Ranger Co (Airborne) would be assigned to the 24th Infantry Division.

During the Korean War, the Rangers performed superbly. In one night raid, the 1st Ranger Co, marched 9 miles in pitch darkness behind enemy lines and destroyed the headquarters of the 12th North Korean Division, killing its commander and much of his staff. The

attack by just 112 Rangers force 2 North Korean Regiments to retreat in a panic. In the only joint Ranger operation of the war, the 2nd and 4th Ranger Co made a combat jump at Munsan-Ni along the 38th parallel. Once on the ground, the 2nd Ranger co plugged a gap in the lines left after an Allied force had retreated while the 4th Ranger co conducted an over-water raid to secure the Hwachon Dam from the North Koreans. During the Chinese 5th Phase Offensive, the 5th Ranger Co was critical in rallying soldiers of the 25th Division and stopping the Chinese assault. During the battle, Ranger Sergeants were leading Infantry Line units when the chain of command broke down but the Rangers

quickly settled the Infantrymen into the defense and prevented a disaster.

One famous Ranger battle occurred while a platoon of the 8th Ranger Co was on a patrol behind enemy lines. 33 Rangers were on patrol when they were discovered by 2 Chinese Reconnaissance companies. The battle raged for hours while the Rangers fought their way back to friendly territory. When it was over, 70 Chinese soldiers had been killed and many more wounded. Two Rangers had been killed and three wounded but the Rangers brought all 5 back to the Allied lines upholding the tradition that a Ranger never leaves another Ranger behind.

Vietnam

On Okinawa in 1954, the 75th Infantry Regiment was formed. Filling its ranks were the Ranger Companies that had fought in Korea plus the remnants of the 475th Infantry (which was formed from the 5307th Composite Unit, Merrill's Marauders). On February 1, 1969, the 13 Ranger companies of the 75th Infantry began operations in Vietnam. Their mission was similar to that of Korea. Individual companies and detachments were assigned to Division and Corps headquarters to perform patrols, reconnaissance, raids, and scouting missions. In addition, the Rangers

conducted prisoner snatch, bomb damage assessment, and wiretap missions. While the Rangers were all Airborne qualified, most missions were executed following a helicopter insertion.

The ranks of the 75th began to swell as Long Range Patrol (LRP) units were added to their Regiment. Soon the Rangers began conducting Long Range Reconnaissance Patrols (LRRPs) using 6 and 12 man teams. Ranger units would often run behind enemy lines for weeks at a time conducting raids and ambushes whenever possible. Other Ranger units were deployed far ahead of American forces to call in naval gunfire and air

strikes on enemy positions. Since they operated so far ahead, the Rangers were able to direct strikes against enemy headquarters compounds and rescue American POWs.

The units of the 75th Infantry were so successful in their operations, the Secretary of the Army dubbed them Neo Marauders. After the Vietnam War ended, the 75th Regiment became the nucleus of the first peacetime Ranger unit in American History when it was redesignated the 75th Infantry (RANGER).

Modern Rangers

With the outbreak of the Middle East War, the Army Chief of Staff, General Creighton Abrams, saw the need for a light mobile force capable of deploying on a moments notice. On January 31, 1974, the 1st Battalion 75th Infantry (RANGER) was officially activated. Volunteers were accepted and the new Ranger unit soon began training. The 1st BN went through extensive training from March until June of 1974 when they parachuted into their new home, Fort Stewart Georgia. On October 1, 1974, the 2nd BN 75th Infantry (RANGER) was formed and made its home at Fort

Lewis Washington. The new Rangers continued to train and often sent small detachments to train units of the Infantry and Airborne Divisions in patrolling and small unit tactics.

Operation EAGLE CLAW

The first test for the Rangers came in 1980, when C co, 1st BN 75th Infantry (RANGER) was ordered to support the mission to rescue the American hostages held in Iran, Operation EAGLE CLAW. The mission was primarily a Special Forces operation and the Rangers were used to provide security for the support elements while the assault forces went in.

The rescue force assembled in Egypt on 21 April 1980. Three days later, a fleet of C-141s carried the 120 man force to Masirah Island, off the coast of Oman, where they transferred to three MC-130s accompanied by three fuel bearing EC-130s. They landed 200 miles southeast of Teheran at 2200 hours and waited for the arrival of eight RH-53D Sea Stallion helicopters from the aircraft carrier Nimitz. A twelve man road watch team, composed primarily of Rangers, was along to secure the site while the helicopters refueled. the team would return to Egypt on one of the MC-130s. The Special Forces units was to be flown to a hide site before dawn on 25 April by the RH-53Ds, which would

remain at their own hide site until the assault on the compound where the hostages were held. The plan was to use the helicopters to ferry the hostages to waiting transport.

The Rangers were to fly into Manazariyeh, Iran to secure the airfield there. The airfield was 35 miles south of Tehran and was to be used for the C-141 transports to fly in and airlift the hostages and rescue forces to safety. Once the transports were airborne, the Rangers were to destroy the airfield and be airlifted out by helicopter. The Rangers never went into action however as Operation EAGLE CLAW was aborted while still in the first phase.

Numerous mechanical problems with the helicopters forced the mission to be aborted. As the rescue forces were pulling out, one of the helicopters collided with a C-130 transport killing 5 Air Force crewmen and 3 Marines. A second rescue mission was never attempted. The Rangers had proven themselves in one respect; they had deployed to the area faster than the Army thought they could and they brought more equipment with them than expected. Once in Egypt, the Rangers had established their command post and were prepared for operations faster than any other unit deployed for the mission.

Operation URGENT FURY

The next mission for the Rangers came in October of 1983 when the Rangers were ordered to participate in Operation URGENT FURY, the American invasion of Grenada. Their mission was to land and secure the airfield at Point Salinas, continue on to the True Blue Medical campus to rescue American students and finally to capture the Cuban army camp at Calivigny.

The mission called for a Navy SEAL team to land and provide intelligence on the Salinas airfield. That team was unable to get ashore and the Rangers were forced to fly in blind. As they approached the airfield, the Rangers received word that there were

obstructions on the field and they could not land, the Rangers would have to jump in. Quickly the Rangers began re-rigging themselves for the jump. They had been geared up for assaulting the field from the aircraft after it landed and were not ready for a combat jump. As the C-130s circled, the Rangers switched their packs and parachutes and were ready within 15 minutes.

The first Rangers of 1st BN began to drop from 500 feet at 6:30. once on the ground, the Rangers quickly began moving vehicle from the runways while others secured the Airfield buildings of resistance. 30 minutes later, the 2nd BN began their drop onto the airfield. Bad

weather and inexperienced pilots contributed to the delay. By 10:00 the airfield was cleared and the C-130s began landing to offload much-needed equipment and supplies. 2nd Platoon of A co, 1st BN had secured the True Blue campus and the American medical students were evacuated to the airfield.

Later that afternoon, the Cubans launched a hasty counter attack with 3 armored personnel carriers, The Cubans managed to breach the lines of A co but two of the APCs were destroyed after they collided with each other. The 3rd retreated and was destroyed by a Spectre gunship. Most of the attacking soldiers were killed in the attack. Just

east of the True Blue campus, the Rangers came under fire from a hilltop. An air strike was called in and the house was destroyed, but only after several dud bombs landed very close to the Ranger lines.

The next day, 2nd BN, reinforced by C Co 1st BN, launched their assault on the barracks at Calivigny. After an intense air and naval bombardment of the barracks, the Rangers swooped in aboard blackhawk helicopters. The landing became confused and 3 blackhawks crashed killing 3 Rangers. As the Rangers regrouped, they discovered the barracks had been deserted. The Rangers slept in the rubble

of the Barracks and returned to the Airfield the next day for airlifted home.

URGENT FURY has a success but had many serious problems. Army helicopters were at first denied permission to land on Navy ships as they were not qualified. This prevented some of the wounded from receiving necessary care quickly. This decision was quickly overruled. In addition, several of the pilots of the transports were not trained in night parachute operations and several Ranger and Airborne units were dropped in the wrong place. Another problem was communications between the services. Some of the helicopter assaults were

bungled because the Marines and Army helicopters became confused of the order of insertion and not all were on the same radio frequency. Despite all of these problems, the Rangers quickly overcame them and completed all of their missions. Their ability to adapt to the changing tactical situations was critical to their success.

Operation JUST CAUSE

After Grenada, the Army authorized the raising of the 3rd Battalion of Rangers for the 75th Infantry (RANGER) and the headquarters for the Rangers was moved to Fort Benning Georgia. The Rangers now numbered over 2,000 strong and

was the largest Ranger units since World War Two. On December 20, 1989, the entire Regiment was called on for Operation JUST CAUSE, the invasion of Panama to arrest Manuel Noriega on drug charges. The Rangers were tasked with securing the Torrijos-Tocumen International Airport, Rio Hato Military Airfield, and then Noriega's fortified beach house. The Rangers conducted simultaneous low-level parachute insertions on both airfields. Resistance was moderate at both but was quickly suppressed by overhead Spectre gunships. Within two hours of dropping, the Rangers had secured the airfields. Reinforcement, supplies and equipment began flowing in and the

Rangers were sent on a new mission.

The Rangers were ordered to attack and destroy the Panamanian Special Forces unit called the Mountain Troops. The assault began in the early morning hours and the Rangers began moving house to house in the compound. The perimeter defenses were quickly destroyed and many of the Mountain Troops were captured without a fight. The Rangers continued operations around Panama City, eliminating pockets of Panamanian resistance. Several days later, the Rangers entered the capital and secured the Vatican Embassy where Noriega had sought refuge to protect the building from damage. Noriega was eventually

captured and taken to the State for trial.

The Rangers remained in Panama until early January, 1990. During the operation 5 Rangers were killed and 42 wounded. The Rangers had captured over 1,000 POWs and 18,000 enemy weapons. Operation JUST CAUSE was an overwhelming success for the Rangers.

Operation DESERT STORM

During the Gulf War, A and B Company of the 1st BN were deployed in support of the Allied mission to rescue Kuwait from the Iraqi invasion. The Rangers

conducted numerous raids against Iraqi forces and served as a quick reaction force responding to Iraqi counter attacks. During the fighting, the Rangers killed and captured dozens of Iraqi soldiers while sustaining no casualties of their own. The Rangers also conducted critical reconnaissance patrols into Kuwait to determine the Iraqi positions and composition. Information provided to the assault forces was vital to the success of DESERT STORM.

Rangers have deployed to Kuwait on numerous occasions to train the Kuwaiti Army equivalent of the Rangers. The Rangers were also one of the first units deployed to Kuwait in December of

1991 in response to renewed aggression by Iraq.

Task Force Ranger, Somalia

On August 26, 1993, B Co, 3rd BN was deployed to Mogadishu Somalia to assist in the United Nation's effort to bring peace to the east African nation. Their primary mission was the capture of Mohammed Aidid, the leader of a guerilla force wreaking havoc in Somalia. The Rangers conducted numerous missions against Aidid's forces and captured many of his top leaders. On October 3, the Rangers conducted a day time raid into the heart of Aidid's compound and succeeded in

capturing more of his leadership cadre. During their extraction, several of the helicopters were shot down. Several dozen Rangers were trapped. Aidid's forces quickly attacked and a furious battle raged. Wave after wave of Somali guerillas attacked the Rangers, but each was defeated. A rescue mission from 2nd BN 14th Infantry was sent to rescue the Rangers but was ambushed and turned away. The Ranger Rapid Reaction force from the Mogadishu airport made several attempts to reach their comrades but could not reach them.

After several hours communications was lost with the trapped Rangers. As night approached, the guerillas settled in for

the night keeping up only a small amount of fire on the Rangers to keep them from sleeping.

Finally the next day, a reinforced task force from 2/14 broke through to the Rangers and drove back a Somalian attack. The rescue forces quickly reached both crash site and began evacuating the Rangers. Shortly afterwards, the Somali forces launched a strong attack with rockets and mortars. While under intense fire, the rescue forces continued to evacuate the Rangers. The battle lasted for 4 hours but every Ranger, including the dead, were brought to safety. The Rangers had fought for 13 hours and lost 16 killed

and 57 wounded. The Somali forces paid a heavy price losing over 300 troops killed in the action. Hundreds more were wounded and captured. The Rangers had fought with courage and tenacity keeping in the high traditions of their code of honor. They never left a fallen comrade to fall into enemy hands, no matter what the risk.

Rangers Lead the Way

The Rangers of the United States Army continue to remain ready to answer their nation's call to respond to aggression anywhere in the world. They continue to train in long range patrolling and surveillance and are prepared to close

with and destroy any enemy upholding the traditions of the Rangers as expressed in the Ranger creed.

The Ranger Creed

Recognizing that I volunteered as a Ranger, fully knowing the hazards of my chosen profession, I will always endeavor to uphold the prestige, honor, and high esprit de corps of my Ranger Regiment.

Acknowledging the fact that a Ranger is a more elite soldier who arrives at the cutting edge of battle by land, sea, or air, I accept the fact that as a Ranger my country expects me to move

farther, faster and fight harder than any other soldier.

Never shall I fail my comrades. I will always keep myself mentally alert, physically strong and morally straight and I will shoulder more than my share of the task whatever it may be. One-hundred-percent and then some.

Gallantly will I show the world that I am a specially selected and well-trained soldier. My courtesy to superior officers, neatness of dress and care of equipment shall set the example for others to follow.

Energetically will I meet the enemies of my country. I shall defeat them on the

field of battle for I am better trained and will fight with all my might. Surrender is not a Ranger word. I will never leave a fallen comrade to fall into the hands of the enemy and under no circumstances will I ever embarrass my country.

Readily will I display the intestinal fortitude required to fight on to the Ranger objective and complete the mission though I be the lone survivor.

RANGERS LEAD THE WAY!

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