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Wanna be a female Ranger? Training course preps women to be Rangers

FORT LEONARD WOOD, Mo. – Fort Leonard Wood female Soldiers striving to become one of the first Ranger-qualified females now have a training course structured specifically to help with their quest.

The pre-Ranger course, conducted by the 787th Military Police Battalion, is the brainchild of the battalion's command sergeant major, according to Capt. Christopher Riggs, Company F, 787th MP BN commander.

According to Riggs, it was Command Sgt. Maj. Teresa Duncan's, 787th MP Bn. command sergeant major, vision to ensure the females who wanted to compete for the Ranger tab would have the physical abilities and skill sets needed.

“The pre-Ranger (course) conducted at the 787th MP Bn. will prepare candidates to complete the Ranger Training Assessment Course at Fort Benning, Georgia,” Riggs said. “The RTAC is being conducted now through March. If candidates complete that assessment, they will be given a slot at Ranger School.”

Program development and oversight is done by Ranger-qualified Soldiers to ensure all training is done to standard and safely.

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Currently, Riggs and 1st Lt. Justin Collins, Company A, 787th MP Bn. executive officer, are running the program, while Staff Sgt. Ronald Groves, drill sergeant, oversees the physical fitness program.

“(One of the priorities) of the program is to ensure the candidates are physically fit enough to meet the requirements of Ranger School,” Riggs said. “Candidates must complete a Ranger Physical Fitness Test, which consists of a 5-mile run, chin ups, pushups and sit ups.”

Riggs said they must also complete water-survival training and numerous obstacle courses, to include a 12-mile ruck march with approximately 60 pounds of gear.

“The most demanding portion of Ranger School is patrolling, where candidates will carry up to 120 pounds of gear through mountains or swamps, with little food or sleep,” Riggs said. “The physical fitness portion of our pre-Ranger program concentrates on increasing the stamina and strength of candidates to ensure they are able to accomplish these tasks.”

According to Riggs, the program also stresses developing and briefing operational orders on sand-table kits, knot tying, call for fire and a heavy emphasis on tactics and dismounted patrols tests.

Currently, there are three women in 787th’s program; Sgt. 1st Class Yasmin Castillo, Staff Sgt. Carrie Lee and Staff Sgt. Karla Guillen, all drill sergeants with the 787th MP Bn.

“Initially, we gathered names to determine who was interested in competing,” Riggs said. “A RPFT was administered, which narrowed our list of competitors to three out of the original eight.”

He added that the trio dedicates an enormous amount of time to attend the training.

“It says a lot about them that they are willing to sacrifice the little free time that they have to ensure they are prepared for the challenges of Ranger School,” Riggs said. “The 787th MP Bn. is trying to ensure that the first females to wear the Ranger Tab come from our Corps. They deserve it.”

Lee joined the pre-Ranger course in November. She said she has learned a lot, but realizes there are a lot more skills and knowledge to acquire.

“This program takes the stress off of planning the training itself and just lets me focus on getting to where I need to be,” Lee said.

Lee added that in addition to her battalion allowing her the time to attend the extra classes, being a drill sergeant also works to her benefit.

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“I can motivate Soldiers while pushing myself to the extra mile on all of the training we conduct,” Lee said.

The driving force behind Lee’s motivation to become one of the first female Army Rangers seems to be in her bloodline.

“My motivation to become one of the first women accepted is because my grandmother was one of the first generations of Women’s Army Corps members back in the 1940s-1950s,” Lee said. “I remember looking at her pictures in uniform and thinking about how fearless and awesome she must have been to even try and join. I hope that one day I can be as awesome as she was.”

While there are many women across the Army working hard to be able to prove themselves in Ranger School, Lee said they are not her competition.

“I am not in competition with other women, I am in competition with myself,” Lee said. “I am honored to have made it this far and plan on absolutely giving my all to make it to graduation.”

Riggs said women from other units working towards attending Ranger School can attend the training that 787th is providing.

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For more information, contact the Fort Leonard Wood Public Affairs Office at 573.563.4145.

(Dawn Arden is the Guidon assistant editor.)

Encl. (1) Photo

Cutline: Courtesy photo - Staff Sgt. Ronald Groves, who is Ranger qualified, demonstrates to Staff Sgt. Carrie Lee the proper way to pack a rucksack according to the Ranger packing list, along with how to balance it properly for long-distance ruck marching. Courtesy photo

About Fort Leonard Wood

Fort Leonard Wood is a thriving and prosperous installation that has evolved from a small basic training post 70 years ago to a premier Army Center of Excellence that trains more than 80,000 military and civilians each year.

Home to the Maneuver Support Center of Excellence, Fort Leonard Wood now trains and educates service members and develops doctrine and capabilities for the Training and Doctrine Command’s U.S. Army Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear School, U.S. Army Engineer School, and U.S. Army Military Police School, three gender integrated Initial Military Training brigades, and the Army’s largest Noncommissioned Officers Academy.

Over the past several years, Fort Leonard Wood has received numerous additional responsibilities to include supporting the 4th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, a large Forces Command unit that is responsible for all deployable capabilities at Fort Leonard Wood. A colonel-commanded Marine Corps Detachment and an Air Force Detachment, which are both the largest on any Army installation, are located on Fort Leonard Wood; a large Navy Seabee Detachment and elements of the Coast Guard train here as well.
