1 RANGERS are PERSISTENT

BRACE BARBER
RANGER

Persistence does not exist without stress and pressure. You can't persist through a sunny day and an ice cream cone. Your goals will require persistence and patience. How many times do you have to get up after falling? One more time. Persistence isn't dictated by physical beauty or strength. It isn't influenced by a high IQ or perfect eyesight. Persistence is a personal decision made every day or every minute until you have achieved your goal. Persistence is the leveraging of time against the weight of a heavy goal. You'll see that persistence can force actions that are uncomfortable and awkward, and it can compel introspection.

The Decision

Before I attended, no matter how many people I talked to about Ranger School, the same picture remained in my mind. The night is perpetual, and day never arrives to dry the moldy rucksacks on our

backs. Slimy vines from the jungle ceiling hang down to slap our dirty faces as we march forward on another patrol. The forest is a maze of trees, always anchored in marshy soil, which clings to our jungle boots with sucking teeth of mud. We march for days at a time, with no specific mission, just weariness and hunger to keep us company. It is a cold, lonely world, meant only for those who have been challenged.

The Ranger School graduates I asked had the same problem explaining the diversity of misery there as I do to the people who ask me now. How do you convey the feelings of frustration and anger at the paradox of being too tired to march anymore, yet aware that freezing is the alternative if you stop, or how the simple pleasure of a cup of coffee was worth more to a Ranger than the company of his girl back home.

Before attending Ranger School, I read the book *Platoon Leader* by James R. McDonough (Presidio Press, 1996). Early in the book he sums up the experience of Ranger School by saying, "It made me realize that I was not as tough as I pretended, but tougher than I thought." If every Ranger student were as tough as he acted, the school would be little more than a nine-week adventure camp. The only learning done by the students would be patrolling techniques, mountaineering, and swamp operations. Teaching these skills is only a small part of the overall objective of Ranger School. The higher intent is to teach each student about himself during situations of intense duress.

The desire to attend Ranger School did not start as a burning desire; it was more of a small fungus that grew into a tree over a four-year period at West Point. I did not even realize that the thought had taken root until it was almost an acceptable idea my senior year. I waffled on Ranger School so many times it became a habit. When I felt strong, "I am going." When I felt weak, "I'm not going." I finally made the fateful move of verbalizing my goal. I told both of my roommates, Pat Mathes and Brent Layman, that I was going to go to Ranger School. I knew that making a commitment to someone else and laying the goal on the table would force me forward. Despite committing myself when I was feeling strong, I still had to stick with my story through my not-so-strong times.

Mentally, I continued to struggle with the idea of putting myself into voluntary hell, no matter the payoff. To feed my hunger for information on the school, I attended a briefing conducted by Colonel

Tex Turner. Colonel Turner was the head of the department of military instruction at West Point, and had at a previous point in his career run the Ranger School.

At the briefing, I stayed in the back of the auditorium as it filled with my classmates. The murmur of the crowd grew and at times got very loud. The cadets mingled and moved around like dark blue ants between the seats looking for a buddy or finding a place to sit. There was a lot of excitement in the room, as they were about to learn some of the truth about their chosen branch. Colonel Turner walked onto stage and the room got quiet.

He spoke at first about leadership and he related a couple of stories from his days in the field. Then he got to the importance of Ranger School. I stood in the back hoping to pick up any little bit of information I could about the course. I was still trying to figure out if it was right for me. Then he said *it*—"There are two kinds of officers, those who are Ranger qualified, and those with excuses why they are not."

For a second I felt it was just Colonel Turner and myself in the room, and he was looking right at me from two feet away. "Well, cadet, what's it gonna be? Ranger—or *EXCUSE*?"

I stuck around for the remainder of the briefing but did not hear much. I left that auditorium a future Ranger. I would not be denied.

Grasp the simplicity and power of No Excuses, and you have guaranteed success.

"Well, what's it gonna be? Wealthy—or excuse?"

"Well, what's it gonna be? Healthy—or excuse?"

"Well, what's it gonna be? A good parent—or excuse?"

"Well, what's it gonna be? A good friend—or excuse?"

"Well, what's it gonna be? A good employee—or excuse?"

"Well, what's it gonna be? A good leader—or excuse?"

If you set goals in line with your personal priorities, and never accept excuses for failure, you will succeed. The accounts in the remainder of this book are acknowledgments that it is difficult to never give excuses when you are shooting for extraordinary success. The characters show that despite the depth of conviction you have for a worthy goal, the pursuit of that goal will be filled with pressures and opportunities to quit. The journey will be full of chances and desires to make excuses and rationalize the abandonment of your goal. If it were easy to be wealthy, healthy, a good parent, friend, employee, or leader, everyone would be. Choose your goal, not the excuse.

This relates directly to leadership because leaders do not make excuses. I figure if you are responsible for others and you make excuses, you haven't led anyone anywhere and aren't a leader.

Be the Frog

I was on the top bunk, snuggled comfortably in my sleeping bag. All was quiet in the barracks except for the shuffling of the fireguard making his way back and forth through the old wooden building. The darkness outside was stiff, threatening the sun to stay away for a few more hours. My mind popped open, my eyes stayed closed, and my body lay still. Cocooned in my sleeping bag the way I was I could not tell what had awakened me. I listened for the commotion associated with first call, but could not hear any. It could have been midnight, or 0200, or God forbid, 0430. I dared not look at my watch, for fear of the last possibility.

I could still feel the weariness of my muscles pulling me into the mattress. The few hours of sleep could not begin to revive the strength I had expended in the previous four days. I drifted, and sleep quickly dragged me back. In what seemed like only a minute or two, I was awakened again by the yelling of the student platoon sergeant (PSG).

He was a large man with light hair and small dark eyes. He had a heavy face, the kind you could compare with his baby pictures and immediately see the resemblance. He yelled only when necessary, and waking up sleeping Rangers was one of those times.

I sat up slowly, letting my feet hang over the edge of the mattress. Invariably Hines, a private first class (PFC) from the Third Ranger Battalion, would sit up at the same time and bang his head into my feet, or get kicked as I swung them over.

Today, 8 November, was a day that found us dressing, although in silence, with a slightly lightened mood. Day five, the last day of City Week, was here, and so was the last physical training (PT) session, the last run, and the last bayonet drill. Something in the back of my mind said, "It's got to get easier after this."

All of my pretraining had been geared toward City Week, toward the 30 minutes of calisthenics and basic training type hazing. I could do push-ups until the cows came home and "run to Columbus just like this." Despite the training, I was tired after the first four days,

and I prepared to give my last little bit for this final day of City Week. I swore to myself that I would never do this phase of the school again.

Although the weather in Georgia was comfortable, the mornings could be bitterly cold. We stomped out of the barracks as late as possible for formation. BDUs with gloves, running shoes, and black stocking caps were the uniform. We jogged to the PT pit in formation, stopped and downed our gear, moved into the dark brown sawdust, and prepared to start. To our front was our PT instructor, Sergeant Moreno, a short Hispanic noncommissioned officer (NCO) with a muscular body and a very large mouth. However, what waited behind him is what had our attention.

Behind him was the worm pit, Ranger School's version of an obstacle course. Included were most of the normal stations—pull-ups, crawling under barbed wire, a horizontal ladder, a low-crawl pit, and a rope climb. But all of this was augmented with a foot and a half of muddy, ice-cold water underneath each one.

We did our exercises, then went on a four-mile run, and returned to the PT pit for stretching. Steam was rising from our bare heads, giving us an angelic aura when mixed with the stadium lights around the field. No one had given us a yes or no when questioned about the worm pit. We had slipped by the first four days without doing it, and the hope that the winter might save us was strong among the 40 Rangers who now began to feel the cold penetrate their clothes and hot skin.

Even as the first platoon began moving to the start point to our front, we hoped beyond hope that we would not have to go. We were still stretching when the first set of 10 Rangers finished their pull-ups, and plunged, screaming, stomach first into the water. "Fuck," was the only thought that entered my mind, as I gave in to the reality of what was to follow.

In four days of Ranger School, I had already been kicked, slapped, and thrown in the hand-to-hand pit, and I had jogged down a dusty road with an 80-pound rucksack, but the first smashing, almost unbelievable reality of pain came when I fell into that ice-cold, dirty water at the beginning of the worm pit.

We stood in line, 10 abreast, waiting our turn at the pull-up bars. Each rank drew a different RI to guide them through the course. Much to our chagrin, we drew Staff Sergeant Yovan.

His six-foot, nonmuscular frame was capped with a crooked smile and a skewed mentality to match. I am sure that as a child he

twisted the legs off of frogs and pulled his sister's hair until she screamed. He would take sincere pleasure in seeing us suffer through the worm pit under his control.

I let go of the pull-up bar and dropped to the ground. A second later, I was facedown in the freezing water, scraping my belly across the sandy bottom of the lane underneath the barbed wire. A shock had gone to my brain, and my breaths were quick and short as I tried to regain my air. Instantly I began to shiver, and my screams of motivation sounded more like a stubborn car engine on a cold morning.

I kicked with almost panic energy, sucking in more water than air, and scooping sand into my pants with my belt. "Push . . . push . . . push," I thought. "The end is getting closer. Push . . . push . . . push." I must have looked like a frog moving through the water—very little style, but a definite goal. Frustrated, I struggled through the first obstacle, kicking at the sandy bottom that gave way at my feet. My slow progress allowed time to think, to savor the misery into which I had just jumped.

None of us had a choice in the matter, and none had it better than the other. The worm pit was the first major indoctrination exercise into the Ranger mentality. Not a single person there wanted to do it, but we each knew that it was compulsory and expected. We simply had to do it, or leave. Performing a difficult and uncomfortable task was expected of a Ranger when the mission dictated it—no questions asked.

I have read that soldiers in combat do not turn and run in the face of the enemy because of their buddies next to them. People are concerned about their buddies' welfare and also the personal embarrassment running away would cause. It was impossible to think of walking away from the worm pit for those exact reasons. Ranger School had provided our enemy, tapped our basic fears, and expected us to drive on. We did drive on, not even knowing that the worm pit was as close to battle as we might ever come.

I kicked and scratched to the end of the wire obstacle, emerging from the muck resembling a swamp creature. "Arrrrgh! Hooahhh!" we all screamed as we rushed to the horizontal ladder. Through that, we dove once again into a muddy strip of water. There was no wire above our heads, just an RI. We were in the water simply to be in the water. The lane started out wide enough to accommodate all 10 of us, but in its 30-foot length it tapered to a

small end like a funnel spout. We all began with the high crawl, hands and knees, moving as far into the funnel as possible. Sergeant Yovan called a stop to that quickly, and had us on our backs doing flutter kicks in the middle of the water. We rolled left, then right, and then we were instructed to continue down the lane doing the snake. He said it was his favorite: hands behind our backs, bellies in the mud, kicking and wiggling to the end of the lane. As the end closed in, bodies began piling up, and those in the lead inadvertently kicked the rest of us who followed.

Winded and tired, we made it through the snake. The end of the obstacle course was looming near, just a quick climbing obstacle, and then the rope climb. We tromped along, dragging our feet and holding our heads up trying to catch our breaths.

Ken stood in a trough of water three feet deep, and stared in distress at the 15-foot rope, which he grasped in his meaty hands. Ken was about six foot three and 230 pounds. He was a large man with a lot of strength, but not for climbing ropes.

"Wrap the rope around your foot, and step up onto that and then move it up as you go," we encouraged him.

He made two attempts at pulling himself straight up, resting his feet on the knot about two feet off of the water. Sergeant Yovan even cheered him on, offering a case of beer if he made it to the top.

It finally became apparent that he was going to have to use the wrap-around-the-foot method, which would have to be taught on the fly. When Ken wrapped the rope around his foot, no one less than Harry Houdini with a buck knife would have been able to free him. His already tired arms tried once to pull up, then again. We were cheering wildly, unexpectedly realizing some of the enjoyment that can come from group endurance.

The final time Ken tried to pull up, his arms gave out, and his hands slipped from the rope. His large, now whale-like body inverted and splashed into the water. His foot was connected to the rope by what seemed to be close to a hangman's noose, suspending him upside down in the water. His arms flailed, slapping the water wildly, as we jumped in to save his life.

He gasped for air as we unwrapped his foot and stood him upright. The RIs commented that they had not seen such a sight since they were at Sea World, and from then on called him Flipper. Ken survived the rope climb with a rope burn on his ankle and a new nickname that he kept throughout the first phase.

The remainder of the worm pit consisted of three-to-five second rushes on packed dirt and gravel. After 10 or so good yells, and knee-banging drops to the prone position, we were done.

Understanding the near-freezing condition we were in, the RIs released us quickly back to the barracks to clean up. Shuffling back to the barracks, I held my arms out from my sides in an effort to keep my cold, wet clothes from touching my body.

Within a minute of reaching the steps, there was not a stitch of clothing on anyone. We used a garden hose to rinse the scummy water off of our uniforms and ourselves. Forty naked butts stood in line, braving the cold morning air and displaying goose pimples and a bright red blush.

I hung my uniform on the clotheslines in front of the barracks and brought my running shoes, which I had forgotten to clean, into the barracks. Bare feet slapped at the floor as guys raced to the showers to clean up before breakfast. Although barely warm, it was an extremely comfortable shower.

Every day we stand at the beginning of our own worm pit, those difficult and distasteful things we have to do to get to where we want to be. None of us want to be there and none of us look forward to the painful parts of the experience. Walking away from the challenge means failure. Discouraging as it might seem, even as ominous and all-consuming as the worm pit was, it was near the beginning of the challenges that lay in our path on our way to Ranger qualification. It may be the same in your circumstances. You may have a series of worm pits that take several months or years to work through before you achieve your goal.

I was a styleless frog bound for a small success, which I did achieve that day. This type of mind-set relates directly to my early efforts at making money. I didn't care what I looked like; I had a goal.

Land Navigation

One of the many tests of City Week was the Ranger land navigation course. Land navigation is just that, navigating cross-country using a map and compass in order to find different points. At each location there would be a code for us to record on our score sheets to let the RI at the end of the course know we had been there. Each point also contained an azimuth and a distance to our next point, so you never knew

more than one point at a time. It was built up by the RIs as a difficult course, making us believe that we would be going through thick brush, deep swamps, and hordes of dragons with only a compass and picture of a buck knife. If we were to fail, we would have to repeat the course during the famed eight-hour break while our classmates were out on the town eating real food and buying necessities for the rest of the course. If we were to fail again, recycling or separation faced us. Realizing the stakes of the land nav course, everyone was motivated to make a magnificent effort toward passing the course the first time.

I had had very little experience with dismounted land navigation. During a course set up by West Point prior to the end of our sophomore year, I failed miserably. I wandered in at 1800, one of the last finishers, two hours after the deadline. I retested on that course on the following Saturday. I hoped now that that was not an omen of what was to come.

In the forest, at ground level one hill looks like the next, and one creek is hard to tell from another. The point of land navigation is the development of the ability to tell one from the other, and to locate yourself on a map. When on a course where it might take an hour to get from one point to another, there is generous time for you to start doubting yourself, especially if you are not confident in your map-reading skills to begin with.

We arrived at our start point, and dismounted the back of the truck. We stretched as we hit the ground, standing under a blue sky of what was going to be a pleasant day. The absence of my rucksack made me feel like I could run the whole course. I was not in too much of a hurry. I had eight hours to find a minimum of four out of seven points. I was not interested in getting any praise for finding all seven points. I figured the energy it would take to find the last three points would be better spent elsewhere.

From the high ground where I stood, I could see a large part of the forest into which I would soon venture. I plotted my first point on my map, and then stood up to check whether I could see the general area where it was. Unable to do so, I started the journey. It was November, so most of the leaves of the trees had fallen, making visibility in the forest moderate.

I counted the dips and rises on my map in the direction to my point, and started counting the corresponding features as I passed them on the ground. I figured I would not need to look at my map until I got into the general area of my point. It was rather cocky of me

to use this technique considering my past record, but my memory sometimes glossed over my earlier shortcomings.

Soon, I came to a spot near where I thought my point was supposed to be. After a half hour of trying to find the point by checking the area and checking and rechecking my map, I realized I was lost. Fortunately for me, the saviors of all lost Rangers, voices, were heard in the distance. I hurried off in that direction and caught up with several others gathered at a point—my point. "Outstanding," I thought, but it still took me two hours to find.

My strategy for the second point was a little safer. I checked my compass every couple hundred meters as I ran. I still managed to get myself lost, forcing me to move quickly, sometimes without putting my compass back into its small case. It hung freely, swinging from its lanyard and banging into my leg as I ran. I found my second point in about two and a half hours.

I started to feel the pinch of time—only a few hours left, and two more points to find. A quick orientation and off I went running through the woods, compass loose. I ran—I stopped—I looked, and ran again. On a flat piece of ground exactly like the rest of the ground I had seen that day, I stopped to check my progress. I pulled out my map and reached for my compass—"What? Oh fuck! Where's my compass?" I thought. The lanyard hung loose from my load bearing equipment (LBE). I'm sunk, I told myself. I'm stuck in the middle of the forest, I haven't seen anyone for an hour, the sun is going down, I'm not sure exactly where I am, and if I don't complete this course I get to do it again during my eight-hour break. Unthinkable!

I knew I had to pull out all the stops. I oriented my map to the ground and to the setting sun. I had a rough idea where I was. I assumed I was correct and lit off in a straight line toward the sun and my next point. I put on my leather gloves and safety glasses for protection since there was no longer time for skirting around difficult areas.

The beeline I made for the sun took me through some low ground in the training area. These areas were always filled with an overgrowth of wait-a-minute vines and thornbushes, and could be as wide as 30 meters. Each time I came to an obstacle of these multi-armed monsters I moved through them with manic determination like I was in waist-deep water going against the current. At times I

looked like the aftermath of an unsuccessful attempt to climb through the barbed wire of an enemy perimeter—caught up in all sorts of fashions, barely able to move. I was fortunate, however, that I was not in a summer class when the leaves and flowers were in full bloom and these obstacles would have been impossible.

I found my next point before the sun set. My heart and mind did not have time to rest. I oriented again on my fourth point and moved out. Heading north, I kept the sun on my left shoulder and went straight ahead. The terrain was clearer on this leg because it was mostly uphill. My time was dwindling as I moved, and my stress mounted. I finally arrived where I had the last point marked. I just knew I was in the right place. "This has to be it," I thought. But where was it? "The RIs gave me a bogus grid," I steamed. It was always easy to blame someone else in these times.

I had already spent too much time looking. I had to enlarge my search area to see if it was just out of my sight. I ran up and down the road like a mother looking for her lost child. Then I walked ever larger circles around the place where I had originally thought the point was located. I was losing hope when I saw movement in the distance at a place that I was certain was not my point. It was, however, the closest thing around, so I moved to there as the sun was disappearing from the horizon and marked my card with the code at the point. I hopped onto the road and ran. My time was almost out, and I still had two kilometers to go to the finish.

Even thought I was tired and unconfident, my heart still jumped when I came over the rise that exposed our base camp in the distance. I walked between the large rucksacks in the formation site and made it to the finish desk manned by an RI. Most of the Rangers were back from the course, sitting and resting or talking among themselves. To my surprise, though, there were many people who had not yet returned. I thought I would be the last one in. The RI took my card, compared it with his legend, marked it "Go," and told me to get some rest before we moved out.

I truly relaxed for the short break before we mounted up in the back of the deuce-and-halves for the trip back to the barracks.

In order to accomplish our goals, we need a lot fewer resources than common wisdom would suggest. What you can't do without is determination. Win our lose, you must give it your all and never give up.

Ken of the Hill

We started anew at the Darby phase. Each of us had already outlasted many other candidates through the rigorous City Week. The phase was marked by classes and beginner patrols as a squad. My knowledge of patrolling techniques along with my experience in the field was close to zero. Everything seemed new to me, and therefore I took everything the RIs taught in more of an academic light, which I was used to, instead of as general guidance the way it was intended. I wanted to make sure I checked the box on all tasks. I gave the instruction no analytical thought, and simply copied down what they said without seeing the purpose behind each technique or tactic. I really didn't see the big picture at all. I saw only the pieces of the puzzle and tried to shove all of them into my pocket at once, not knowing whether they would make a congruent picture someday. As I pulled the pieces out one by one or a handful at a time, all I made was a mess.

After the planning portion of our first mission, I was terrified to learn that I was leading the patrol during the execution phase. I was only leading a squad, 11 guys, on a simple patrol, but to me I was driving at 80 miles an hour down an icy road on a dark night with fogged-up windows.

"Let's move out," I commanded.

The first part was simple. I understood how to conduct a forward passage of lines. It really was easy; there was an actual checklist to use. I coordinated with the commander of the unit overwatching the obstacle we would pass through, and whose soldiers would be firing into us or over us if the enemy chose to attack while we were walking the path through their defenses.

I read from my handbook: how many people were in the squad, who was going to guide us through the obstacle to our front, who was responsible for covering us and how far out, what we would do if we received fire while in the lane of the obstacle, and so on. Everything was in writing now.

"Bring up the rest of the squad. Let's count them through," I ordered. I took a breath of relief. Everything was moving smoothly. Ken, our 230-pound M60 gunner, was last. He came by, and then I followed.

We mentally prepared to start being Rangers in earnest, walking

stealthily through the forest, seeing the enemy before he sees us, and setting up an ambush or a raid to kill and demoralize him before he knows what hit him. All of us were in the lane now, flanked on each side by barbed wire and dummy land mines. Shots rang out from the hill to our front. I froze for a second, pulled one of the pieces of the puzzle from my pocket hoping it was the right one, then shouted, "Six hundred meters north!"

The squad began to run through the lane of the obstacle and as far as we could, maybe 50 meters, until we came to a 10-foot-high sheer wall of dirt and rocks. We were already tired as we began to claw our way up the rise. We looked like children playing king of the hill, going up a little way and then falling back down, trying again, and falling again. We grabbed anything we could hold onto and pulled ourselves, our 80-pound rucksacks, and our weapons up the wall.

The enemy continued to fire, making our effort even more pathetic; real bullets would have wiped us out in a matter of seconds. I knew I had blown it. We finally made it up the side of the wall and continued on our way. It's nice to be in a situation where by all rights you should be dead, but you get a second chance to live and do things properly. We continued to march over the rolling, pine needle–covered hills.

It was a nice afternoon for a walk until the artillery simulator landed to the side of the patrol. I again reached into my pocket and pulled out a piece of the puzzle. "Six hundred meters north!" I yelled again. Damn, it was the same piece as before. My squad members were definitely going to kill me. The first 600-meter run lasted only about 200 meters, but exhausted us all. Depending on your point of view, the next action by the RI either saved me or killed me. He stopped us before we ran and made Ken—Flipper—a casualty.

The RI said, "He's wounded and can't walk. What are you going to do, Ranger?"

"Oh, man," I thought, "I haven't the slightest clue." Shooting him and continuing on with the mission seemed like the easiest thing to do, but I knew that wouldn't fly. A couple of the other squad members, sensing my bewilderment, made some suggestions.

"We need to medevac him. Call for a medevac. We need to get him to an open area where a chopper can come in."

The RI, clearly unimpressed, asked, "Is anyone going to perform buddy aid on your friend?"

Oh crap! Now we need to know first aid?!

While a squad mate chuckled at the possibility of performing mouth-to-mouth on Ken, I looked at the map to see where the closest open area was. It was at least a kilometer away according to the map, but in reality no one knew. I called in the medevac report over the radio, another checklist I could read from my handbook. Then the dilemma was how to move a 230-pound man who can't walk. I was a very lean 140 pounds, and no one in the squad could even consider a fireman's carry. "Okay. Let's get two guys, one under each arm," I commanded.

Ken was lying on his back as two of the squad members started to pull him up by the arms. They each strained as they put their heads under his arms and tried to go from a squat to a stand. It was futile. They looked like they were trying to carry a heavy box that was too large to get their arms around.

We had already been sitting there for 15 minutes. I felt like I had spent hours in a maze and ended up at another dead end. I didn't know what to do. The RI was kind enough to remove me from the head of the patrol. I relaxed a bit as we got under way, a fully healthy squad again, but I also knew that I had failed to meet the test successfully and it ate at my gut.

Leaders are trained. Some people are naturally adept at leadership, but the good news is that anyone willing to work at the subject and take the risks necessary to learn through practical experience can be a great leader. I mentioned at the beginning of this book that I approach the subject of leadership as a foot soldier, not an academic. Thank goodness I was provided with the opportunity to develop as a leader. If the Army had counted on my intrinsic abilities. . . .

No matter what your skills are right now, you have the capability to be a leader. Take steps to learn about the subject through study, through exposure to leaders you have access to, and through willingness to step to the front and lead.

Swamp Skirters

Warmth to a Ranger going through a winter class is precious. Most of the time we did not have it, and when we did, it didn't last very long.

Sunshine was our God, and water our Satan. Therefore, creeks, by design of the Ranger Department, were almost always in the path of our patrol. We would spend as much time trying to plan a path around the creeks as we would on the rest of the mission. When we came upon a creek, we would send out teams to find a bypass before we would just trudge on through it.

On one particular mission at Camp Darby, we wore ourselves out trying to keep dry. We had been moving for hours in the area of Hollis Creek, a long, tangled creek that runs through much of the training area. The solid ground frequently gave way to marshy patches, which we persistently skirted. We hoped, beyond any rational hope, that we would find the *one* path through Hollis Creek that would allow us to stay dry.

As if keeping the patrol's feet dry was as important as accomplishing the mission, the point man or patrol leader guided us around wet areas. I moved as carefully as the rest of the patrol, walking around puddles and if necessary hopping from tree to tree. I knew that one good step into muddy ground or into a puddle would allow water to gush into the sides of my jungle boots through the airholes. Once your feet got wet, especially at night, you were in for a long, painful walk.

Walking on soggy socks for miles with a heavy load is like having a starched collar on a sunburned neck for hours. Your feet are tenderized with each step and your socks bunch up in all the wrong places. The best thing to do is to pull up your socks and tighten your boots down to allow as little movement as possible. Unfortunately, no solution is permanent and we moved constantly, not allowing much time for adjustment. Staying out of the water to begin with was the best answer.

Our movement for about the first 500 meters into the creek was fairly easy. It was messy, but not wet. "I hope to hell we are on the way out of this shit," I prayed. Then our movement slowed. "Why are we bunching up? What is ahead?" I worried.

I could not see what the problem was, but distant splashes warned of our wet future. I guess as a last resort the leadership had decided to move through Hollis Creek. As the line of Rangers moved one by one into the swamp, I still maintained that I would be able to get through this obstacle dry. No one wanted to face the fact that they were going to get wet. Each of us fought the idea with an intensity that surpassed reason.

It was our first time into Hollis Creek, but we were not ignorant of the actual nature of the terrain; rather, we were naive. We ignored the map, which clearly depicted a marsh paralleling the creek for its entire length. Patrol leaders were heard to say, "See here, where the marsh gets real narrow, that's where we will hit it, and hopefully we can stay away from the deep water."

One of the battles a patrol leader was fighting was a political one. Only hours or minutes before, he had been a member of a squad, simply following the column of Rangers; now he was the leader and he needed the remaining members of the squad to help him succeed. He wanted to stay out of the water for more than simple comfort reasons—he wanted to keep the soldiers as happy as possible. He knew that when people get wet and cold they focus on their basic comfort rather than 100 percent on the mission at hand. Couple wetness and cold with exhaustion, and you may have what is known as a no-go patrol. Those are the cases in which the entire Ranger chain of command gets a no-go on the patrol. The Rangers fail to perform, usually due to exhaustion or severely adverse physical conditions.

"If we are making good progress, we will try to skirt the creek to the north. I wonder if the RI will let us take this bridge if we use the proper techniques."

The RIs had seen the Hollis Creek scenario too many times: walk around for hours attempting to bypass the water, then, behind schedule, decide to move through it, only to find that there isn't enough daylight left to see where you are going under the thick canopy. They walk along quietly, every once in a while checking to see if the patrol leader knows where he is. They don't much care if he is right or not, they just want to see what an eventful night it is going to be.

In addition to being naive, we also conveniently forgot the stories of old Rangers who were lost in the swamp for a full night, or spent an hour moving 100 meters in water up to their waists.

We disregarded all evidence that predicted the worst. We were new and did not completely know what to expect from the RIs or the terrain. In brief, what we learned over time was that both could be very unforgiving and unmoved by our suffering.

The denial was part of the survival mentality of Ranger School. In order to keep a positive attitude, sometimes the obviously terrible situation had to be ignored.

We were all new to the patrolling aspect of Ranger School, but

from the previous days we knew how the cold could penetrate to the bones even while dry and transform a body into a shivering heap on the ground. A wet uniform was inescapable—a cold that could not be shaken off. To a Ranger student in the dark of the early morning, sitting still in an observation post, it was as permanent as a scar. The only moment you could think of was the current one, and it was a miserable one. You couldn't even imagine the warmth of the noon sun. The cold had a lock on the imagination.

The patrol leader knew that if he took us through the swamp, we would all spend the night as bedmates of the Devil in Dante's Inferno: freezing. It was not only popular but also necessary to the morale of the students that hope remained and that the patrol leader tried to plan around the water.

Patrols, which started with the assurance of the patrol leader that they were going to get wet, automatically concentrated on getting through the water first, and then through the mission.

RIs warned, "Y'all are acting like a bunch of pussies. You're gonna have to ignore the water and consider it a slight unpleasantness if you're gonna accomplish your mission."

We listened and felt less Rangerlike since we weren't that mentally tough yet. They watched with distaste and humor at our vain efforts to plan a dry route. They knew we were going to be soaked by the end of the patrol, and they refused to give advice that was contrary to the true Ranger way of driving on to the Ranger objective despite any obstacle. They knew that at the first sign of water we should march straight through it, and save the energy we were going to use trying to stay dry.

It was now my turn. Three feet to my front was a thin tree, surrounded by water. I could not see a bypass that made any more sense than the path that I faced. I could not see the bottom of the water in the dark, so I assumed the worst. I put my rifle in my right hand, held my left arm out, and leaped to the patch of grass at the base of the tree. "I made it!" I thought, as I grabbed the tree firmly in a headlock. I pulled it tightly to my side. "This isn't so bad. If this is the worst it gets, I'll be able to stay dry!"

It wasn't long before the patrol had lost its bearings completely. To my front I saw five people leaping like fairies out of step, jumping clumsily from one dry patch to another. I was not complaining—I just hoped I could be as successful as they had been, fairy or not.

Soon the darkness concealed the movement all around us. Our column closed in, scared of getting separated as we moved through

the creek. The trees then grew out of leaping range, and the water deepened. Eventually, with a leap, a grab, a fall, and a curse, each of us experienced our own mortality and inability to walk on water. The calm of nature was now broken by frequent exclamations of anger as another of our group stumbled in the dark. Movement to my front seemed very distant, and I traveled as quickly as I could through the thigh-level water to keep up.

The water grew in depth at a deliberate pace. At first it was up to our knees, then up to our thighs, yet we still fought it every bit of the way, tiptoeing if possible, and praying it did not get any worse.

The trees once again condensed as we progressed, but the water maintained its high level. Unfortunately, the trees were too large to hold onto with one hand, and the surface-level roots were too slippery to walk on. The water was dirty with the refuse of the forest ceiling, massive undergrowth, and mud from the bottom. Low branches and heavy vines slapped us in the face, catching onto our rucksacks and increasing the frustration of our slow but determined progress. We struggled for each step as the undergrowth and the depth of the water increased.

We found ourselves in belt-deep water, stepping over crotch-level roots. It was an unbalancing prospect, trying to lift our legs straight out of the thick water and over such an obstacle. The bottom became softer, and laid claim to our feet and legs as if we did not have a choice but to leave them there. There was very little solid support around us to aid our balance. Sometimes we were trapped between two converging roots, like a ladder laid on top of the water, the back of our legs touching one rung, and the front touching the other.

The man to my front was PFC Hines. He was very motivated, and very vocal about his anger when he found himself in a tight spot. Because of his short height, I noticed that he was having some problems getting his legs over the roots. At one point, he struggled until he was stuck. If it had not been for the root lodged securely in his groin, we might have lost him forever. He twisted his body vigorously, and grunted with exertion, "Fuck!"

He had already fallen once, soaking himself to his shoulder on his left side. He was upset at looking like a klutz in front of the squad. He had the pride of a young enlisted man who did not want an officer to see him mess up, and in his opinion he definitely did not need an officer's help.

I saw him fighting to free his leg, and decided to give him a hand. I started lifting his rucksack out of the water from the bottom. This was supposed to relieve him of some weight and allow him to work. Unfortunately, my lifting of the rucksack put more weight on his shoulders. With my help, he ended up with his belly in the water, and his head a cat's lick from being dunked. Fighting siblings do not yell as loudly as he did at me. I, of course, refused to help him the rest of the way through the creek, even if he did not need my assistance.

That night we lived through one of those old Ranger stories that will be ignored by the next group of Rangers, and yes, we did get lost.

After three hours of doing the tree-root hurdle, it became too much for our RI. *"Everybody!* I mean *everybody!* Get your fucking flashlights out and let's get this goddamn patrol moving!" One light appeared in the distance. "Everyone! Come to the white light!" he screamed.

I saw the white light bounce only 20 meters to my front. Until that point, my world had been confined to the dark figures of the man in front of me, the man behind me, and the noises of the patrol moving through the marsh. Suddenly my world expanded, and I could make out the silhouettes of the other members of my squad in a rough line between the light and myself. There were a number of trees between us, but I would soon be there. All of the Rangers at once seemed to assume an admin situation had been granted so they were no longer being evaluated; they started yelling, "Over here! Over here!" or "Hold on! I'll be right there!" It was the reflection of our lifted attitudes as we learned that we would not spend the entire night struggling through that damned creek.

I soon realized that the white light was continuing to move, and very quickly. We all pressed to keep up. The creek ended more abruptly than it had begun, mostly because we did not snake around looking for the dry areas. We marched straight ahead, the water no longer a concern. We emerged from the creek, tired and wet like cats fighting not to drown, and faced the task of concentrating on the long-forgotten mission.

None of us were proud of the way we had made it through the creek, especially of how timidly we had gone into it. We were through it, however, and we hoped we did not have to go through it again to get back.

One of the weaknesses of advice is that it is rarely followed when it is contrary to our personal comfort. Each and every one of us in the

swamp that night would have loved to have given the RI an excuse on why the route was too difficult and to have heard in reply, "Hmmm, you're right. Let me call in the trucks and get us around this mess a lot faster." That, of course, was well beyond our reality.

I look around today and see a lot of people only a few meters into the swamp of their journey, hopping from tree to tree, never getting wet. Some have been there a long time, moving only side to side, never forward. What's their excuse? "I'll get wet." Plain and simple, if you're going to accomplish something worthwhile, you are going to get wet. Get over it and step forward. The sooner you do, the sooner you will realize that it won't kill you and the sooner you will reach your goal.

The sideways movement looking for a shortcut that is not there is dangerous because people either give up their hope of moving forward or make a shortcut that no one else is allowed—something illegal, immoral, or unethical.

The business model my partner and I established is unique in the tax industry. In order to establish it, we had to work through many legal, logistical, and support issues that took several years and several hundreds of thousands of dollars to perfect. You could say that we plunged into the water headfirst without a solid plan, besides optimism and faith for coming back up.

In any large business venture you have to expose the details of your business to others, and we did. In at least four cases, we have inadvertently taught our business to less than scrupulous people who have turned around and attempted to compete with us. These are the people who skirt the edge of the swamp and are willing to take what is not theirs. We provided them with what they thought was their shortcut. To them it was not an issue to push us down and walk over us in order to keep dry.

In a couple of these situations, the damage was much more than simply the creation of competition. Our contractors left us without critical services, the loss of which threatened the life of our business. My partner, Darren Oliver, and I have worked extremely hard and on very little sleep over many months to build what we have. In the best circumstances business ownership and creating business growth are difficult. Add to that finding out about these betrayals, setbacks, and the increased amount of work we were going to have to do, and it would have been easy to toss in the towel. We could have made excuses and given solid reasons why we couldn't go on that would have

been accepted by everyone around us. We were faced with a question like those posed at the beginning of this chapter, "Well, what's it gonna be? Success—or excuse?"

The preparation that West Point and Ranger School gave me in developing the habit of doing the right thing at the right time and not allowing excuses had prepared me for these situations also. Neither Darren nor I ever contemplated quitting. Imagine the satisfaction that our quitting would have given to the swamp skirters.

If you are at the beginning of a journey and find yourself moving more laterally than forward, who are you allowing to get ahead of you? Who do you see moving forward and gaining the rewards of decisive action? Should you be the one getting ahead, or do you really deserve it based on your actions? It won't be easy, but plunge in.

Prayer

Strength and health and the battle for their maintenance are among the biggest focuses of Ranger students. I had heard that everyone who goes through Ranger School suffers some type of injury. One man I heard about had dysentery and a broken arm, and still made it. As the course went on, I realized that this was a very true statement. In just the first couple of weeks, I saw a broken rib, a busted nose, and a broken leg. In my own body, I felt my right shoulder and arm lose an enormous amount of strength.

I saw this go on around me, and I felt the effects of what it was doing to me. It became a battle to keep healthy enough to stay out of sick call. My largest regret from Ranger School developed out of this situation. I became so concerned with my strength that I would not volunteer to carry the heavy loads of the M60 machine gun or the PRC-77 radio. The plastic blocks of simulated ammunition were distributed evenly among those not carrying extra equipment. I carried as few of those as possible. Marching, or humping as we called it, became second nature, but strength for the rucksack was always a concern.

The course seemed to collapse on top of me and bend my already weakened knees toward submission. The philosophy of living day to day had paid off until now, but now even tomorrow seemed impossible. There was no end to Ranger School, and looking for a light at the end of the tunnel did not enter my mind. There was no

way I was going to make it. I almost cried at the realization that I was not making it for the first time in my life. I had never quit or been forced to quit anything before this, and now it was time to face my own weakness. I was devastated by the depth to which I had fallen; yet it was still my choice to stay or leave.

Although I had struggled with the radio during the all-night march down the mountain back to a linkup point the night before, I had made it and was still a Ranger in good standing. Unfortunately, I had used up any reserve of energy that I might possibly have had. My legs were weak and moved slowly, even without the cumbersome rucksack. The feeling in my right shoulder and arm had returned only slightly since the end of the patrol. I did not worry that there might be permanent damage. I just knew that for the time being, I could not lift anything with my right arm.

Mentally my wariness tore at my resolve and made me want the easy way out. "I can't even keep my head up. How can I make it through the rest of this school?" I asked myself. Part of me grasped for the next rung of the ladder, knowing that despite my problems I could not quit. I thought of all of the other people who had gone to Ranger School before me, all of the men I had seen who wore the tab, a couple of whom I thought were weaker than I. "If they could make it, so can I," I thought more than once. It was a motivating thought most of the time. Now it moved me little.

Though I was often alone with my thoughts due to the nature of patrolling, this was different. I had had a duty that kept me from eating with the rest of my squad, so I arrived at the mess hall after the crowds had dispersed. Even the walk to the mess hall through the dark night was peaceful. None of the instructors were around, so I was able to leisurely receive my food and find a place to sit. I deliberately picked a seat at an empty table. I placed my LBE on the chair and my weapon against the table, and sat down. The warmth and quiet were in contrast to the rest of the 22 hours I had been up that day.

My meal sat in front of me, a sight I had dreamed about for many cold nights, but before I began to eat, I bowed my head. I was tired, but I didn't close my eyes and bow my head in order to rest; I did it to reflect. As I sat there in silence, I purposely thought of my family and my friends and the support they had given me. Consciously, I knew that I was praying. Oddly enough, when I lifted my head I was revived. In only a minute, I had an energy and a belief that

could not be attributed to anything tangible. It was an amazing feeling that was not only mental, but physical also. I was different when I opened my eyes. I was stronger.

I strongly believe in the power of the mind and that we rarely challenge its limits. What power does passion have when activating our hidden mental reserves? What power comes from faith in action? That night, while teetering on the edge of my willpower and physical capacity, I was fortunate enough to face personal failure and deny it.

Can you gain the habit of successfully dealing with the thought of quitting? Like anything else, you can. What is mental strength besides the ability to overcome intense stress, function capably, and maintain perspective? The habit of not quitting is the Siamese twin of the habit of not making excuses. As you develop one, you get the other.

In My Sleep

Though tired, we all rose to meet the challenges of being a leader. It was a matter of self-preservation, serving the larger team, and attempting to graduate from Ranger School.

"Let me see the following Rangers," the RI said, then read, "Smith, Lopes, Nelson, Mitchell, and Barber."

Despite knowing that I was due another leadership position, my heart still raced a bit. I grabbed my weapon and walked to the RI, who was moving away from the rest of the platoon. He told us to sit down and take notes on the mission. "Okay. Here is the situation," he started, then briefly went through our ambush mission.

We were always concerned about the time of the actual mission. The later the mission, the more likely the Rangers would be droning and only semiaware of their surroundings. Were we taking off in the late afternoon? Did we have to be set up right after dark or somewhere in the early morning? Early morning was always bad. We knew we would still have five to 10 kilometers to walk to get to a patrol base after the completion of the mission, and that was after having been up all night.

The patrol leader was a tall, lanky man with an apathetic attitude even when selected as a leader. He was difficult to get moving when he wasn't being graded and now, surprisingly, seemed no different. There was idle talk of blowing the patrol just to get him a

no-go, but that would screw every other leader also. So, like so many plans of justice, it was left in the patrol base when we marched out that afternoon.

I was the weapons squad leader. I had a big part in the ambush because my machine guns would be on either end of the ambush and would most likely signal the start of the firing. Planning, reconnaissance, security, and control are the four principles of patrolling. I was determined to practice the last one, control, beyond normal for this patrol. I was like an umpire watching over a close play at home plate for the entire patrol.

We started movement in the late afternoon in order to be set in the ambush position at 0200. It was going to be a long night. There was no moon so the movement was slow, and our location, as usual, was questionable. On a couple of occasions the patrol stopped for longer than normal and I ran up to the front, where the leader was, to find out what was going on. He was easily identified because he was covered by a poncho liner with his flashlight on.

Being lost or at least unsure of where we were while on patrol was commonplace. Tonight the patrol leader got lucky. As I walked up to find out why we were stopped, I heard the patrol leader telling the RI in an "I'm not so sure I'm sure" tone, "We are here."

The RI, being one of the few who would lend a modest amount of help, asked, "Are you sure *that's* where you are?"

"Well, I think we are. The pace count has us at three kilometers, and we've been going in this direction, so this is where I would *guess* we are," came the hesitant reply.

The RI, continuing to guide, asked, "Do you remember crossing that valley and then going up the high ground?"

"Yeah," the patrol leader squeaked.

I waited outside just to listen and watch until they were done. It was better than going back to my position in line and not knowing when we might move again. I watched the flashlight bounce around under the poncho liner for another couple of minutes. I wasn't bothered at all by the RI's help. It's much better to get to where we were going the first time instead of marching all night trying to figure it out.

"Where do you think that puts you now?" he prompted.

"That might put us in this area, I think," the patrol leader said in a questioning tone.

The RI finished, "I'd agree with you. Now get an azimuth for

where you are going, and let's get this patrol moving. You've got two minutes." The RI crawled out from under their makeshift shelter and moved to the side.

I returned to my position in the patrol.

We continued to walk, each in his silent world instinctively dodging branches and following his buddy to the front. The terrain in Florida, when not in the swamp, was made up of slightly rolling hills of very soft, sandy soil. The trees were thin and widely dispersed, not a real challenge to walk between with our large rucksacks. We felt the first drops of a pending rainfall. The rain wasn't heavy, though it was a little cold. As it got harder, we halted so we could put on our wet weather tops. It wasn't a good idea to get wet at the beginning of a night of sitting in a foxhole. We moved for a couple more kilometers before stopping and beginning the reconnaissance and setup part of the patrol.

Once the marching stopped, the cold became a real issue. Our bodies were no longer generating heat, and the sweat or water that had made it to our clothes began to cool. Part of the agenda prior to conducting the non-energy-intensive parts of the patrol was putting on hot gear—long johns and field jacket liners. After a quick transition of outer gear, the majority of the patrol waited in the rally point while a small reconnaissance team left to check out the ambush site.

I found myself sitting in the dark, rain jacket over my head and legs as much as possible. I was still dry, but with the rain beating on my jacket and rucksack. I dared not move for fear of letting one of those streams of water into my dry domain underneath. I was fighting a battle of last defense. If the water made it in, even a little, I was defeated. It rained harder and harder but my shields held up. I was getting colder, but at least I was not wet. Then I felt it, the littlest breach of my jacket, up around my neck. The water began to pour down my back and into my underwear. The water must have puddled in a depression in my hood and then overflowed. I still didn't want to move because I knew it would make things that much worse. I sat there in agony, like being cut and not being able to scream. The reconnaissance party came back, and it was time to start moving into our ambush positions.

I warmed a little as I moved. The rain slowed down to a drizzle while the outside temperature continued to drop. In the preparation of the ambush position I placed my machine guns at opposite ends of

the line. The patrol leader located himself in the center-rear of the position, under a poncho, as usual. I went to check with him frequently on my trips of supervision between my machine gun positions. He barely moved from his command post, and I never saw him check the ambush emplacement. I continued to update him until I realized he didn't care. The RI moved around looking at the work being done. My positions were digging in and getting the ammo and shelters ready.

Only a few minutes before we had to be ready, I made my last inspection of the two sites. Exhausted, I came back to the machine gun that was responsible for signaling the beginning of the ambush. They were ready. "Okay, I can sit and wait," I thought. I crawled into the hole behind the ammo bearer and pulled the poncho liner over my head. We looked like two people in a horse costume, except there were three of us and we were on our knees. I put my head on the back of the ammo bearer, partially to rest and partially to enjoy some of his body heat.

Ratta-tatta-tatta-tat. . . . "The machine gun is firing!" flashed through my mind. My head fell off of the ammo bearer's back, and I looked up to see the entire team running out of the foxhole. "Get the fuck back here!" I screamed. "Get back here right now, you sons of bitches!" They were screwing up the whole plan and going to get me a no-go. I was incensed.

The ammo bearer, a classmate of mine from West Point, turned and said, "The ambush has started!"

I came out of the foxhole and followed them across the road to set up security. My head was still foggy.

Once set up on the far side of the ambush site, I asked what had happened.

"You hopped into the hole with us, and not more than 20 minutes later the enemy came down the road," he explained. "We opened fire at the perfect time. Both machine guns fired beautifully. Then the whole ambush opened up. We killed the enemy and then assaulted across the objective, exactly the way it was supposed to go. What's the problem?"

"No problem," I answered with a laugh. "I must have crashed the minute I got into the hole with you guys and didn't wake up until you were starting to assault the objective. I slept through all of the firing of the ambush!"

I was happy I had done the setup work prior to sitting down.

The patrol leader did receive a no-go on that patrol, while all of the squad leaders received gos. There was some justice.

Near the end of Ranger School, even while still dealing with the obstacles of fatigue, hunger, cold, and inexperience, I had developed a level of competence as a leader. Over the course of several weeks, I had gone from seeing our mission as confusing puzzle pieces to seeing the big picture. My new abilities as a leader allowed me to set a framework for accomplishment, and my team succeeded despite my untimely nap. Isn't that the goal of every leader—a successful, self-reliant, and functioning team?

Persistence

The many years since my Ranger qualification have been an adventure, and none more than the past two years. When I chose to work as a part-time employee to a small business owner, Darren Oliver, I had no idea that I was crossing the threshold to business ownership and an entrepreneurial free-for-all. From nearly the first day, I felt like I was water-skiing behind a fighter jet. I began to live a professional life without boundaries.

I immediately accepted Darren's goal of creating a national company as my own. Though I worked only 20 hours a week for him, I made the most of that time and began building working relationships with the people who were instrumental in helping us achieve success. Within a month I was working full-time in the office and squeezing any independent consulting into spare day and nighttime minutes. The amount of work and creative energy necessary for our expansion was astounding. I quickly gained a passion for the vision of the company.

Darren drove his Ford F-350 truck down Academy Boulevard like it was a sports car, though its wheels nearly rode on top of the lane-dividing stripes like a railroad car. He rested his elbow on the open window and leaned to the left a little. "Once we are up to speed, the guys in Seattle should be able to bring in about two million dollars a month, meaning a net of three hundred thousand to us."

The team in Seattle was actually a company we were partnering with that was already expert at creating independent consulting teams. They were taking our idea and creating the nationwide sales team for it. We were busy making sure we had contractors that could

perform the detailed tax services that our consultants sold. Our work was minimal considering we already had a great provider and a plan for expansion. Once it was up and running, we would be hands-off while our partners in Seattle did all of the work and gave our company 15 percent of the income. It was a beautiful setup.

After about a month and a half of work, Darren had given me 5 percent ownership of the company, but he always spoke as if I were an equal partner. That was great on one hand, and frustrating on another. "We shouldn't have any other expenses beyond maintaining the materials and ensuring enough contractors to do the work. The rest is ours."

I sat in the right seat doing the math. Let's see, 5 percent of three hundred thousand is . . .

"I'm going to move to an island," he continued. "I'll do my work from a beach somewhere. Somewhere where no one will find me. A quiet place," he said as he drove through a stale yellow light at Union Boulevard.

Okay. Okay, I thought. Where was I? Five percent of $300,000 is $5—$10—$15,000! I was completely involved in thinking about the reality in which I had somehow found myself. The possibility that my dreams could soon be coming true was nearly overwhelming. I silently looked out of the window.

"The income should start by January," he said.

"Do you really think that is possible?" I pushed back a little.

"Oh, yeah. The guys doing the up-front work are experts and are doing more than that in their current business, which is less appealing than what we are offering. There won't be much ramp-up time. Once this hits the street we'll have to actually limit the number of people we accept as consultants."

"You're kidding me," I said in disbelief.

"No. I'm not kidding. You watch," he said. Darren also had a way of being confident in things I had no clue about.

I hoped he was right. It was July and I was still making two thousand dollars a month and living off of credit cards that were becoming bogged down with weight. I had recently applied for and received another card that allowed me to transfer all of my existing balances onto it and pay no interest for six months. I had gained some valuable time, just enough to get me into January and a desperately needed, hefty paycheck. Please let this business work, I prayed.

We pulled into the parking lot and climbed down out of the

truck. We were still operating as a two-man team headquartered out of the office in the back of Darren's wife's coffee shop. If you turned sideways you could squeeze between the door and bookshelf. The entrepreneurial territory I was treading was completely unfamiliar to me, but I trusted my instincts and training. I knew that there were no rules governing the size of a person's office or the magnificence of the entryway that dictated the size of business he or she ran. I was happy with no title and an incredible prospective income, as was Darren. From that office we were not only doing the tax business, but were also partnering in an international trade business and a professional services business.

The people I met were Rangers of the business world. They were already doing millions of dollars of business a year while creating and innovating new techniques and businesses that would dwarf their current production. All of the revenue projections were mammoth, even when cut in half. All of the expansion ideas were national or international, never just local. I was out of my element, but learning that common sense, imagination, and determination rule the day. Quite often in meetings I sat quietly and took notes, while Darren and the others discussed the possibilities, and frequently covered seemingly contentious topics.

Our relationship with the Seattle group had experienced some turbulence as personalities worked to mesh and details of business implementation and money flow were worked out. As in each partnership, the vested interest in making the venture successful kept each of us finally focused on the work at hand.

I sat down at my desk and began reading e-mails. Darren picked up the phone to check voice mail. A minute later I looked over to see him sit back and slide down in his chair a bit. He had a sober look on his face, and he stared at me with wide eyes as if he had just found out some horrible secret about me. I was immediately anxious and curious. He listened to the phone for 20 more seconds before hanging up. His face was red.

"They can't do it," he softly said.

"Who can't do what?" I asked.

"The guys in Seattle have decided that they are going to focus on their current business and not partner with us," he answered. "They have had all kinds of trouble getting our program put together with their writers and they don't want to put any more money toward it."

I was pissed because these guys had deep pockets, a basic knowledge of our business processes, and an existing sales force. They could do this themselves if they wanted, and that's what I assumed they were going to do. "So. Do you think they are going to set this up themselves?"

"Absolutely," he said without hesitation.

In those 10 seconds, we had been set back to where we had started. My easy income and imminent dream had vanished. The light at the end of the tunnel had gone black. We were again just two guys in the back of a coffee shop with only a good idea. All of the potential options flashed through my mind: quit and find a job, consult full-time and forget the national stuff, focus on the other businesses, or set up this business ourselves. I had already decided what I wanted to do.

"Well?" I prompted.

"Well what?" Darren asked.

"Well, are we going to do this ourselves?" I answered.

He just looked at me. I think he was still thinking of ways to get to Seattle in the next hour and rip down their walls. "No question," he said. "We've got to put this together ourselves, and quickly. I want to crush those bastards."

We both knew that we had a daunting task ahead of us. We had to write and produce marketing materials, advertise, and sell. We had to produce a training manual and establish the system to get the services performed, and we had to do this better than the experts. We stood at the edge of the swamp without a map showing us how wide it was and without Ranger Instructors to whip out flashlights and save us if our situation ever became untenable. We were going to put our full lives and incomes into making our business fly and we weren't sure if it ever would.

I was personally back at a common decision point: Do I move forward or do I roll over and pee on myself?

"This way we'll make even more money," he said.

We have faced decisions of that magnitude four times in the past two years. More importantly, there have been hundreds of less critical but immeasurably tiring situations that have demanded a decision to press on toward our goal. There is a straight line between the success habits that I developed in Ranger School and my daily commitment to my current objective. There has never been a question as to our route. We allowed no other avenue besides straight ahead, and we are

convinced that no one else understands the determination we share. As scouts in the Army we liked to say, "Move out and draw fire." Darren and I did.

Today, we have over 10,000 square feet of office space and nearly 50 employees.

We were scared and uncertain of the future but confident in our ability to persevere.

Ranger Barber's Walk

From wherever you are now you can start to grow in capacity and competency as a leader. Not surprisingly, that journey takes perseverance and will sometimes find you looking like a frog.

Perseverance is a great place to start because it is the car that brings you to the door of all of the other lessons. If at some point you fail to persevere, all of the educational experiences beyond that point will be lost to you. Perseverance is a prerequisite to any level of success, and its presence is a fundamental, underlying component of all the remaining chapters. It has to be there for you to learn the other lessons of leadership and gain the capability to be responsible for other people. Every successful person has persevered through challenges that their competitors did not survive. They started with rudimentary steps that they are proud of, but would probably be unwilling to share with anyone today. Have you considered Rush Limbaugh's first radio appearance, Nolan Ryan's first pitch, Steven Spielberg's first film, Tiger Woods' first swing, or Norman Schwarzkopf's first order? No doubt you've already taken your first step.

As you move from pulling random puzzle pieces out of your pocket to being able to accomplish a mission in your sleep, you will gain perspective and certainty. The people you lead are expecting you to see beyond today to an end state in the future. They want to have confidence that you have a plan and that today's tasks are moving them toward a future success. People may follow you without this kind of vision, but they will never be inspired.

Much of what I learned about leadership came through recognizing what inspired me. I believe that people respond to worthwhile challenges. Had I not responded to the challenge that Colonel Turner laid before me during the infantry branch briefing nearly 18 years ago, I would not be in my current position. Even though the majority

of people respond only superficially to a challenge, it is in human nature to want to overcome and achieve. In today's society, however, where personal choice is paramount and comfort is the pervasive goal, most people will choose not to pursue a worthwhile goal beyond the first hardship. It is part of your leadership terrain to illustrate by example the rewards of perseverance.

You have power to motivate through providing a challenge and a goal, while at the same time you have the task of keeping people focused on that end state throughout the difficulties. It's not just acquiring money that motivates people; there are many more important things you can do, such as listening, appreciating, working hard, and setting the example.

You'll see examples of all of these in Tex Turner's story, as well as hints on how to climb a tree with a motorcycle.