

# Rogers' Rangers and the Mentality of the Modern Firefighter, Part I

*"Soldiers who have not been trained under stressful conditions do not react well when confronted with antagonistic situations." Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences*

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The quote from ARI sounds rather matter of fact doesn't it? It can almost go without saying, that soldiers who have not been shot at, who have not had explosions happen close by, who have not been sleep deprived, gone without food and water, or force marched, will not do well on the real battlefield. What does that say to the 21<sup>st</sup> century firefighter? Obviously today's firefighter has had more to deal with than his predecessor of the 60's and 70's has, but the common theme among the soldier and the firefighter is the fact that the "battle" has not changed. It is true that today's, military tactics, ROEs (rules of engagement), and technology have changed the face of the battlefield, but the battle itself remains the same. Whether the soldier has a flintlock rifle or a M4 assault rifle NOD equipped the basics never change. Put the enemy in your sights, steady breath in, hold, squeeze the trigger, and exhale. Whether the firefighter has a claw tool or a Hydra-Ram, the basics never change. We can wear colored vests, carry radios with 20 channels, have a thermal imaging camera in one hand and a CAFS supplied handline in the other, the basics never change. Put the fire in your sights, crawl in, open the line and kill the fire.

*"Y'know what I think? Don't really matter what I think. Once that first bullet goes past your head, politics and all that shit just goes right out the window."*  
*Delta Operator Walter "Hoot" Evans, Blackhawk Down*

During the French and Indian War, Major Robert Rogers of New Hampshire recruited colonists to fight with British. Capitalizing on recruiting American frontiersman, Rogers handpicked his own men and developed a method of scouting, stalking, and raiding very different from conventional European fighting. His guiding rules, 28 of them were later condensed into standing orders, which are still part of Ranger training today. With a focus on common sense and firefighting mentality, we can put some of these 236-year-old orders, still taught today, into the hands of today's modern firefighter.

***"Have your musket clean as a whistle, hatchet scoured, sixty rounds powder and ball, and be ready to march at a minute's warning."***

When you come in for duty, do your checks. Make sure you have your gloves, hood, and chocks. Put your radio on the fireground channel. Check the tools you will have to use according to your riding assignment.

***“When you’re on the march, act the way you would if you was sneaking up on a deer. See the enemy first.”***

I know it is hard with all of the “routine” runs, all of the bells, the odors, and the b.s. calls, but in your head, on every run, you should be expecting to go to work. Research shows that anxiety floods the frontal lobes of the brain which are responsible for executive functioning (doing things in order, planned out) and disrupts this function and causes us to do things out of order, or that we wouldn’t normally do. The late Andy Fredericks said it best when he said “the garbage man doesn’t get excited when he turns the corner and see trash because he’s expecting it. Likewise, you should be expecting fire on every run.”

***“Tell the truth about what you see and what you do. There is an army depending on us for correct information. You can lie all you please when you tell other folks about the Rangers, but don’t never lie to a Ranger or officer.”***

If you don’t know how it works, or where it is, you have to ask. This doesn’t just apply to the probie, but to the veteran as well. There is always that one piece of equipment, that one address that we are unsure of. You can b.s. civilians, but not the brothers.

***“Don’t never take a chance you don’t have to.”***

Be aggressive, but not stupid. Remember, we only risk our lives for a savable life, and not for property. Don’t rush in with blinders on, but size-up the scene. Ask yourself what are you doing, and why.

***“Every night you’ll be told where to meet if surrounded by a superior force.”***

Accountability begins with the posting of riding assignments and is a key part of the LUNAR report. It is not meant to keep you on a short leash, but to give us an immediate location to start looking for you if things go bad.

***“Don’t stand up when the enemy’s coming against you. Kneel down, lie down, hide behind a tree. “***

With the technology of today, we are encapsulated against the heat of the fire. The “safety police” would frown on us for not using our hoods or our earflaps, and would rather have us have thermometers on our running gear. When we train, we really don’t get down and crawl. We standup because we’ve been in the same burn building year after year, that we can go through it with our eyes closed. Practice the habit of getting down low, duck walking.

***“Let the enemy come till he’s almost close enough to touch, then let him have it and jump out and finish him up with your hatchet.”***

The best engine company advice I ever heard came from a firefighter downtown. He said “when you get into the fire room, the last thing you want to do is to put water on the fire.” Use the

light of the fire to orient yourself with the room. Is there a window on the left? Is there another room in the back? Is that a hole in the floor? Are those legs behind that sofa?

Rogers used these and the other rules to train his men diligently. In the 1700's he was doing live fire training preparing his men solidly, under stressful conditions in order to face antagonistic situations. When he originally published these rules, he considered them to be common sense.

There are quite a few rules, and tactics, in the fire service that we consider common sense just the same. However, do we always train our firefighters under stressful conditions? I'm not talking about the average burn drill, but throwing them the "everything has gone to crap" drill. How adverse are we trying to make training so that the way they think and function on the fireground will be second nature? Does it seem as though it should be common sense? It does for the Rangers, since this is still a part of their training.

In part II we will look at the tragic affects of forgetting, or simply neglecting, common sense rules. We'll compare what took place in Mogadishu, Somalia with some previous line of duty deaths. You'll be very surprised at the similarities.