

REPORT



FROM THE FUTURE

Leadership Is Hell



IT'S 2 A.M. ON A COLD, RAINY NIGHT, DEEP IN THE WOODS outside Campbellsville, Kentucky. I'm wearing fatigues, lying on my belly, clutching a paintball gun. Red flares are exploding high over my head; the air is thick and cloudy from a smoke bomb. One thought keeps racing through my mind: *What the hell am I doing here?*

Oh, that's right: *I'm learning to be a better leader.*

These days, the only thing as elusive as great leadership is a reliable way to develop that quality in people. Business is full of programs that teach the meaning of leadership. But Dean Hohl, 29, and Shane Dozier, 28 go further: They teach people how to lead in a world where competition is so intense that business feels like war. Their qualifications? They've experienced the real thing. The two former U.S. Army Rangers run a fast-growing program called Leading Concepts (known to its veterans as LC). The course has attracted more than 500 participants from various organizations, including Blue Cross/Blue Shield, Textron, and Domino's Pizza. The course teaches what Hohl and Dozier believe are the attributes that define great leaders: self-discipline, courage, emotional stamina, and candor, among others. The program isn't fun — it's intense.

"You don't go home at night," says Hohl. "You don't check your voice mail. You don't end your day at the bar. I'd say that most of the people we've trained didn't want to come and don't want to come back. But they're glad they had the experience."

I experienced LC with 13 other aspiring leaders. Our "platoon" consisted of 12 men and 2 women. There were 8 people from DJ Inc., an injection-molding operation; 2 from Elco-Textron, a subsidiary

of the giant manufacturing conglomerate; 2 from Domino's; a consultant — and me. For four days and three nights, we found ourselves huddling in tents, subsisting on decidedly foul MREs ("meals ready to eat"), "hot-cotting" (playing musical beds to deal with an intentional shortage of cots), and sneaking through the woods on long, demanding missions. The goal of these missions was either to elude or to attack a wily enemy known as the MODD (a military acronym for the thing that "makes our day difficult").

"Working as a team is not about liking people," Hohl declares. "You just need to stick together — to respect diversity, to realize that everybody adds value, and to understand the goal. For Rangers, not working together is not an option. In Ranger reality, people die."

In *our* reality, each day was divided into three parts: preparing for a mission, executing the mission, and critiquing the mission. But the defining reality of our experience was change. During the first two days, for example, I was PL, or "patrol leader." Yet time and again, we'd plan a mission in excruciating detail and then discover, just as we were setting out, that Hohl had decided to shift our roles: The medic was now PL, the PL was now Bravo Team leader — and we had five minutes to reorganize and resume the mission.

So what did we learn? Lessons in humility — and in leadership.

Mark Portman, 34, a hardware-support technician at DJ, pushed himself to the limit — literally. He was so determined not to let down our team that he passed out and hyperventilated. "We'd been

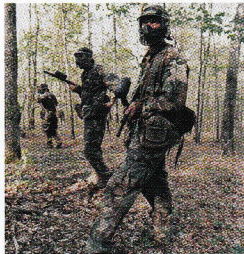
BY CURTIS SITTEFELD
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under attack by the MODD," recalls Portman. "The farther we ran, the harder it got for me to breathe. The last thing I remember is jumping over a ditch."

But there was no rest for the weary. Hours after Portman fainted, Hohl made him Alpha Team leader and charged him with defending the camp for the night. "It made me face my fear of letting down the team," he says. "Three people were depending on me to give them directions."

As one of those three people, I can vouch for his tenacity. We didn't fall asleep. We held the camp.



What did I take away from this grueling, 80-hour experience? To begin with, a starter set of dreadlocks and a mystery rash on my knuckles. But I also took away some insights about commitment and teamwork. I had virtually nothing in common with the rest of my platoon, which was mostly male, mostly Southern, and mostly composed of frontline business-people. Yet at some point during our second mission, I got Hohl's message—that a team can be formed through the most unlikely of personal alliances.

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WAR IS HELL TOO

LEADING CONCEPTS MAKES SERIOUS demands of its students. But those demands are nothing compared with what's expected of real Army Rangers. **Dean Hohl** (above) went through advanced training, airborne school, the Ranger indoctrination program, a post in a Ranger unit—and only then through Ranger school itself.

During the 72 days he spent there, Hohl averaged three hours of sleep a night and lived on one meal a day. But even worse than lack of sleep and constant hunger, he says, was the threat of having to do it all over again. Ranger instructors could "recycle" students at any time—that is, boot them back to day one.

Still, insists Hohl, "Rangers aren't supermen." So what makes them capable of such super feats? "Our operating culture. If the culture is strong, the people feel pride, involvement, and ownership."

That culture played a role in the 1989 invasion of Panama to capture General Manuel Noriega. "When we jumped into Panama, people were landing everywhere, going in all directions," Hohl remembers. "I landed a mile and a half from where I needed to meet up with my group. To get there, I had to cross a main airport runway under fire. I hooked up with a guy who had a radio. We were moving across a field toward the runway, and we picked up three more people from different Ranger units. Immediately we began working together as a tactical fire team and managed to cross the airfield. We knew where to employ our weapons. We knew who was going to be the team leader. We knew the commands.

"There's not always time for consensus and debate. Under fire, you need to shoot, move, and communicate—shoot, move, and communicate."