





MAHABIR RANGERS

BY JANICE BURTON

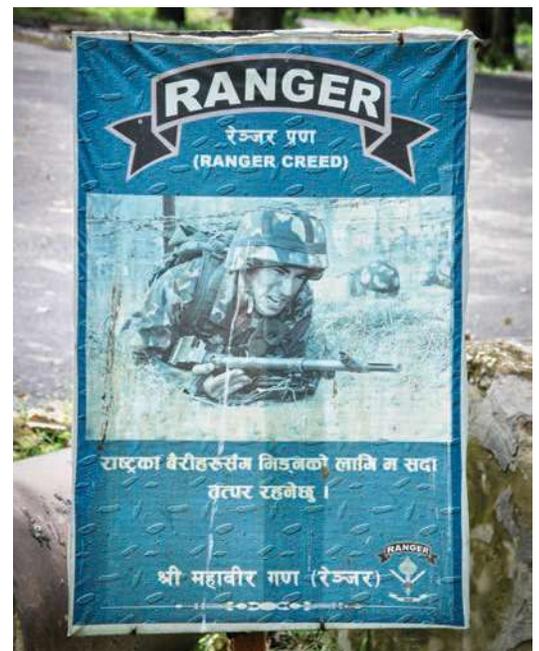
On Oct. 27, 2017, Col. Anup Jung Thapa oversaw the reflagging ceremony of the Mahabir Ranger Battalions into the Mahabir Ranger Regiment. For Thapa, the ceremony had great significance. Thapa was among the first group of Nepalese Rangers trained, and oversaw the training and creation of the remaining companies. As the head of the Mahabir Ranger Regiment, Thapa has much to be proud of, and takes a great deal of joy in discussing the evolution of his force from one company to a regiment. During a recent visit to Nepal, the *Special Warfare* staff had the opportunity to visit the Ranger base in Kathmandu and talk with Col. Thapa about the creation of the unit and its evolution.

“If you saw it this place back then, when it all started, it was all just overgrown elephant grass,” he said. “There was nothing here — no electricity — nothing.”

At that time, the country of Nepal was still immersed in what would be a decade long Civil War, which saw Maoist dissidents fighting against the government. Thapa, who had previously trained at the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, completing the Special Forces Qualification Course and the Civil Affairs Course, was tasked with building soldiers to defend the nation during this turbulent time.

He explained that a number of soldiers who had already been recruited for the Infantry and were about to complete their own training were called on to start training a new breed of soldiers — Rangers.

“This was the beginning of the conflict,” he recalled. “So there was a huge surge in the number of soldiers. Teams were training everywhere — all over Nepal. We took our teams, basically gave them a pep talk, gave them some tests and picked the best and brought them with us here. We started with 512 and graduated 203. At this time, the U.S. was only conceptually involved in our training, as we were just building up. Once this first lot graduated, 43 of us went to our first joint combined exchange training through the U.S. It was the Ranger Instructor Course.”



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A Mahabir Ranger stands guard outside the barracks on the Mahabir Ranger Compound in Kathmandu, Nepal.

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A poster on the compound boasts the Ranger Creed.

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U.S. ARMY PHOTOS BY JENNIFER G. ANGELO



Thapa, along with the first command sergeant major assigned to the Rangers went through the JCET.

“We then created a cadre with your help. By the second series, we all had already had U.S. training,” he continued. “That’s how we started out and what really reflects the close relationship and benefit of this long-term partnership with U.S. Special Forces.”

Much to Thapa’s surprise, the first company of Soldiers from the 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) that came to train he and his fellow Rangers was headed up by a Soldier whom he had made friends with during his attendance at the SFQC in 1994.

“We went through the course together and graduated together, and then he comes here with his B Team to help us set this training up. You can imagine the synergy there, he said. “That talks to the effectiveness of the outreach between the U.S. Special Forces and our Rangers. When we built this training, we did so drawing upon a lot of our U.S. experience and the rest, you could say is history.”



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Following the training, the Rangers raised the first company, and those who led training and those who were being trained all went to war together. A little less than a year later, the second company completed training.

“That was particularly effective because the leadership of the company had already fought alongside us,” he said. “In 2004, the Rangers were trained so well, were so effective and so much in demand that the army sanctioned the raising of two companies at once,” Thapa recalled. “By this time, we already had a lieutenant colonel who was in charge of the Rangers, and I came out of operations and became the chief instructor to raise Companies C and D together. We were lucky that the events required us to raise everything from rifleman to company commander all together. The commander who took charge of Delta company trained alongside his troops, graduated with them and went to war with them — in fact they didn’t even graduate because one of their soldiers had been abducted while at home on leave and they went and got him back — that was their graduation.”

He noted that at that time, the organization had already claimed its name: Mahabir Rangers. Mahabir means bravest of the brave, but was also the name of the great monkey god in Hindu literature.



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“It was perfect because by that time we already had our colors. We had gone from nothing. Started out as four companies, and the officers from the first four companies started training Echo Company with fresh recruits who came in,” he explained.

In completing its expansion and organization, the Ranger Battalion pulled from its SF heritage and link to build each company with a geographical orientation. Company A was a mobility, Company B was mountain, Company C was jungle and Company D was urban. Urban was the new kid on the block, nobody had units trained for that or even the SOPs. The battalions sent out mobile training teams to more than 100 units.

“They play a huge role in the Nepal Army now. Our training teams are touching all these units and spreading their expertise and making more professional soldiers and it trickles throughout,” he said. “Because our JCETs were pretty spread out, we had to do some things ad hoc. We did not take everything the U.S. Special Forces taught us and put it out, instead, we internalized it and made it Nepali. We did our lesson plans in our language and we modified our TOE and tactics, techniques and procedures through the Army training cells. A lot of what we passed on with our mobile training teams came from you, through us.”



The teams were so successful that when the Army Chief visited the training, he asked for two more companies, which resulted in eight companies in the battalion.

“The intent was always to go into a Regiment concept,” he said. “It makes sound logic. Three or four companies would be out in operations and the others would be in garrison, otherwise we wouldn’t have room for everyone. The idea was to raise the fighting companies first because they were designed for war time. When the peace agreement was reached, part of the deal was that we were restricted to the barracks for quite a while.”

It was during that time that Thapa came back as a battalion commander and “inherited this huge organization that was finding its way.”

In 2009, the Rangers conceptualized the need for a special purpose engagement and reconnaissance squadron that would focus on networks targeting the city and sensitive site exploitation that could feed information to the other companies. Members of the 1st Special Forces Group were instrumental in helping make the SPEAR teams a reality through their mentorship. For Thapa, another link from his past came into play when he encountered a member of his Robin Sage cadre.

“I knew I knew him, and he knew me, so we started comparing notes. It’s sad to say he didn’t remember me for my capabilities but rather my wife. He remembered her from graduation because she was only one wearing a sari. That wasn’t very encouraging to me,” he joked.

Once the peace agreements were in place, Thapa realized the men still needed realistic training. So he turned to the jungles of Nepal and his soldiers started working on anti-poaching efforts. They

stayed in the jungle for two months — he added that the average tick bite count was eight per Ranger. After two years of the partnership with the Rangers, Nepal celebrated 1,000 days of no poaching.

With Mount Everest drawing many visitors to the country, the Nepalese Army did a lot of rescues and conducted relief operations when natural disasters occurred.

“We did not have a fly away team to respond to these crises,” he said. “We began working through this problem set and the U.S. Special Forces brought members of the Air Force to our aid. We were feeling our way and



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Col. Anup Jung Thapa, commander of the Mahabir Ranger Regiment talks about the formation and history of the regiment.

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Col. Anup Jung Thapa and other members of the Mahabir Ranger Regiment talk with the PACOM Augmentation Team in Nepal.

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Mahabir Rangers conduct training on the repel tower at the Ranger base in Kathmandu.



MAHABIR RANGERS

trying to figure out what we needed. We set up our first DART teams in 2015 and by God, it was timely.”

In 2015, Nepal was impacted by the most devastating earthquake in 75 years. There were two U.S. Special Forces teams on the ground that immediately went into action with their Ranger counterparts.

“It’s worth noting that the single biggest numbers of lives saved was by the Rangers at that time,” said Thapa. “We took unbelievable risks to pull people out from underneath collapsed structures. A mountain crashed down into the valley and completely covered a village and an Army post. Only three people survived and that was because they lived in a house tucked behind a huge rock. The DART flew in to confirm it was true.”

The landslide carried the force of a small nuclear device. Thapa, flying in one of the first helicopters on the scene was shocked. After crashing to the ground, the debris bounced so high that 2,000 meters above the valley the pine trees were completely debarked. In the surrounding area, the Rangers evacuated more than 800 people from 14,000 feet altitude. Down below, Kathmandu had the largest number of casualties.

Thapa noted that the success of the Rangers was in part due to the support of their partners.

“We are incredibly indebted and grateful to the significant but quiet support that was and is rendered by the PACOM Augmentation Team at the embassy and by the Special Operations Command-Pacific. They did not make a lot of noise, but had quite an impact on us becoming a Regiment. They had an impact on our missions and they helped save lives,” said Thapa. “We applaud your involvement and hope it continues.



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01 Mahabir Rangers conduct training on the repel tower at their base in Kathmandu.

02 Troops stand in formation during the Mahabir Ranger Regiment flagging ceremony on October 27, 2017.

03 Members of the Mahabir Ranger Disaster Assessment and Response Team practice operations for search and rescue — vital skills that are often put to the test in the mountains of Nepal.

04 Mahabir Rangers showcase many of the tools they use for operating in a variety of disaster assistance operations.



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THE SOLDIERS ARE KNOWN FOR THEIR DEPENDABILITY AND RELIABILITY. "WE DEPLOY WITHOUT CAVEATS ... WE DEPLOY IN AREAS WHERE YOU WANT TO GO – BUT CANNOT."



On our side, we are committed to ensure that we fight hard, smart and clean and maintain the ethos and values that have permeated down from our ancestors — the traditional values of Nepalese Army service to the people and nation. As proper warriors, there is no place for human right violations. They are the same values that you pass on to us not only through teaching, but through your actions. When our teams operate side by side, that is where the main teaching is. Our troops see how your officers treat your noncommissioned officers and they see how capable they are and it comes to us through osmosis."

The Rangers and the members of the 1st Special Forces Group see their relationship as a partnership.

"It is not a one way trade, it's a partnership, although we get the lion's share of the benefit," said Thapa. "But we are happy to conduct mountain training with the U.S. troops, as well as jungle training.

They have not only learned the mountains from us, but also the jungles," he said.

The Nepalese pass on the very nuanced training drills they used while training to fight the insurgency. As an example, Thapa pointed out that in many of the jungle villages, the women go out at 3 a.m. in the morning to get water. The U.S. Soldiers could mistake them for enemy combatants. So teaching them what to look for in the jungle is very important. Additionally the U.S. Soldiers have the opportunity to practice their FID skills working with the Nepalese soldiers and through interpreters. SF troops who have trained in the mountains and the jungles commented on how realistic the training is.

"They have very legit jungles and mountains. It's the real deal. No-where else can you go for training and have a wild elephant chase you ... but the Rangers can offer you that," said one U.S. Special Forces Soldier.

As an organization, the Rangers want to pay it forward and have done so through their involvement in UN operations through hands-on training with other armies, and through passing on lessons learned. Tappa noted that he was fortunate to deploy to the Special Task Force in Darfur, and other Rangers deployed to Burundi. There they helped train

the native soldiers and are now in their 12th iteration of training. Nepalese soldiers were also requested to help in Sudan as a regional protection force. The Nepalese Army is the sixth largest contributor to peace keeping in the world. The Soldiers are known for their dependability and reliability.

"We deploy without caveats," said Thapa. "We take orders from the force commander. We are the most usable force for the UN. We help with training centers. We deploy in areas where you want to go — but cannot. In a way it is force multiplication for yourself. We are happy as a military of a relatively small nation to actually carry our weight and use our expertise and professionalism to contribute to the international peace-keeping missions. The latest is in Libya, and is a political mission. The UN feels it is too dangerous to send workers there without protection. We are the only troops guarding the entire UN Mission."

The Special Forces soldier noted that it is an honor to work with the Rangers and to receive mentorship from their senior leaders who have been working with the international community. "We are grateful for this partnership and are very proud of the Mahabir Rangers and the role they are taking on throughout the world." 

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