

BASIC (THESPIAN) TRAINING

Ranger Camp trains actors how to be soldiers, ready to face casting directors and producers

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WESTSIDE WEEKLY

Day 2, 06:00 hours: With the sun rising over the hills, the 17 cadets stand in formation, camouflaged by the California oak trees in a remote corner of 4,107-acre Griffith Park.

This not-quite-lean or mean fighting machine is about to begin another rigorous training session to be physically and mentally prepared for combat.

The target: casting directors and producers.

Designed by West Point graduates and Army officers J. Scott Shonka and Tom McCafferty, the 10-day Ranger Camp workshop teaches physical fitness and military drills and ceremonies, as well as fundamental Army knowledge so aspiring actors will have extra ammunition during an audition for a military role.

"From the time they pull into the parking lot, it is on," said McCafferty, 34, a Hollywood resident who has appeared on the military-themed TV show "JAG."

"Part of auditioning is owning it. After an experience like this, you can confront what it takes. Casting directors and producers may not know the proper military drills, but they will be able to see these actors have the essence of military."

Push-ups, sit-ups and laps around the parking lot are required of actors-in-training on command during 90-minute workouts. If these would-be soldiers so much as crack a smile or wave a bug from their face, the rangers are quick to reprimand.

"Bugs don't matter. If you are in an ambush, you don't have time to expend extraneous effort waving it way," said Shonka. 35, of Santa Monica, shouting at the



Erica Howard, above center, is encouraged on the last leg of a two-mile run by fellow cadets who already finished. At right, David O'Donnell grimaces as he tries to complete two minutes of push-ups.



PHOTOS BY SHLOMIT LEVY BARD / WESTSIDE WEEKLY

Ranger Camp instructor J. Scott Shonka reprimands a recruit for not properly tucking in the straps of his pants. The workshop teaches actors physical fitness and military drills.

FYI

The next Ranger Camp is tentatively scheduled July 16. Information: (310) 712-5766.

stone-faced group.

"Do not compromise your position. If you don't mind, then it don't matter. Now drop and give me 20."

With knowledge booklets in the pockets of their camouflage regimentals, cadets are responsible for memorizing the phonetic alphabet, the Army's rank structure and principles of leadership.

They also must memorize excerpts from former Gen. Douglas MacArthur's 1962 acceptance speech after receiving the U.S. Military Academy's Sylvanus Thayer Award, which is presented to an American who best fulfills West Point's motto, "Duty, Honor, Country."

On the last day of Ranger Camp, cadets are given oral, written and physical fitness tests.

The actors say they are not put off by the harsh manner in which they are trained. If anything, they welcome the realness of it.

"The discipline and the physical challenge is what interested me," said actor Greg Safel, 38, of West Hollywood. "If I can get up and do this at 6 a.m. on three hours of sleep, then I can do anything. For his film 'Saving Private Ryan,' [director Steven] Spielberg sent his actors to boot camp. I think that added to the credibility

of the movie."

Beyond honing skills for a military part, Ranger Camp also is designed to motivate actors in all aspects of their career, Shonka said.

"Part of it is learning the concept of teamwork, working with directors, cinematographers," said Shonka, who has appeared in such films as "Air Force One," "The Contender" and "The

Perfect Storm." "This is a great opportunity to get that lesson."

Shonka said the \$250 course is only for serious actors. Most participants already spend an average of 10 hours a week studying their craft, along with dance and voice lessons.

"To add another two hours to your day first thing in the morning is quite a

feat," he said. "Ultimately, what will happen is that when an actor walks into an audition, they won't be intimidated. They will be on fire. Casting directors will see that and think that's the kind of actor we want to hire, the one that is continually seeking self-improvement."

STRIKE OUT STROKE

Saint John's Health Center and the Stroke Association of Southern California commemorative *National Stroke Awareness Month* with a 2-Part Health Education Event at the Santa Monica Public Library Auditorium, 1343 Sixth Street.

1) STROKE RECOVERY: How To Keep Going After Rehab
For Stroke Survivors, Friends & Family
Wednesday, May 23, 2:00-4:00 p.m.

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