

# TACTICAL PERSONNEL RECOVERY:

## BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN TTPs AND THE DEDICATED PR STRUCTURE

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Leaders, have you ever heard one of your Soldiers say, “The last bullet is for ... me?” Maybe they have a grenade saved for themselves so they “won’t be captured alive.” Such predetermined behavior is self-defeating and leaves your Soldiers unprepared for the challenges they will encounter should they become isolated personnel (IP) who are “separated from their unit, as an individual or a group” and they “must survive, evade, resist, or escape.”<sup>1</sup> This mindset results from a lack of understanding of personnel recovery (PR) throughout much of the Army, outside of Special Operations or Aviation. While current joint PR training programs have roots in the Air Force, operations post-9/11 have demonstrated the need for and development of similar programs in the Army. Unfortunately, in many units PR consists of checking the box on Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE) training online and completing isolated personnel reports (ISOPREPs) prior to deployment. At the brigade combat team (BCT) level and below, PR is often relegated to the realm of the brigade aviation element, with little awareness among most leaders of the important capabilities available in the Army’s PR program.

### What is Personnel Recovery?

Army PR is “the sum of military, diplomatic, and civil efforts to affect the recovery and return of U.S. military, (Department of Defense) DOD civilians and DOD contractor personnel... who are isolated personnel in an operational environment,” according to Army Regulation (AR) 350-1, *Army Training and Leader Development*. Military efforts begin with education and training such as SERE Level C training, the use of isolated Soldier guidance (ISG) and an evasion plan of action (EPA), as well as the fielding of PR equipment such as the Combat Survivor Evader Locator (CSEL) radio and evasion charts (EVCs). Once isolated, Soldiers return to friendly control through the execution of the five PR tasks — report, locate, support, recover, and reintegrate — which are conducted by IP, units, and personnel recovery coordination cells (PRCC) in accordance with the detailed PR plan within Appendix 2 (Personnel Recovery) to Annex E (Protection).

While you may have never heard of the five PR tasks, developed an EPA, or even seen an EVC, small units in the Army do PR

far better than it initially appears. For example, look at your last land navigation course training. Remember the briefing prior to starting the course where the trainer gave you a panic azimuth and instructions for what to do if you were lost, injured, or ran out of time? That short brief is the application of PR concepts. That trainer just issued ISG! When was the last time you gave a five-point contingency plan? That’s right, isolated Soldier guidance once again! ISG provides Soldiers awareness, accountability, rapid reporting, and actions to take when isolated. Consider some basics of patrolling: headcounts, rally points, route planning and checkpoints, battle tracking in the tactical operations center (TOC), and use of tactical standard operating procedures (TACSOPs). All those things help to plan and prepare for isolation and recovery, thus meeting the definition of personnel recovery. The problem is these small unit tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) are often not tied into the larger PR structure. Simply put, there is no linkage between the five-point contingency plan and the five PR tasks. While small unit actions and TTPs resolve many PR events so quickly that no one ever realizes they existed or recognizes them as PR events, there can be a tremendous gap between those small unit TTPs and the dedicated PR structure. That gap endangers Infantrymen working in small units in austere conditions such as snipers, advisors participating in security force assistance missions, or any unit that could have a break in contact during a patrol. Units can close that gap through the tactical application of PR.

### The PR Process

Personnel recovery is based on the accomplishment of the five PR tasks: report, locate, support, recover, and reintegrate. Central to PR is accountability of all DOD personnel to include military personnel, government civilians, and contractors. Upon realizing that any personnel may be isolated, the first task is to report through normal operational command channels from the battalion TOC to the brigade personnel recovery officer (PRO) to division and corps PRCCs. Anyone who knows of or suspects a person has become isolated should immediately report the incident. Reports do not have to originate from the isolated person’s own unit. Knowledge of the isolating event may come from having witnessed the event,

*Students in SERE Level C training at Fort Rucker, Ala., conduct a water crossing.*

Photos courtesy of U.S. Army SERE School





*Students at the U.S. Army SERE School learn survival techniques during SERE-C training.*

be circumstantial such as no communication with a patrol that missed the expected return time, or from intelligence sources. Once reported, the Army, acting as the land component, will employ a variety of assets to validate the isolating event and collect information.

After the report of an isolating event, the first effort is to locate, confirm the identity of, and continue to track the whereabouts of the IP through recovery. Information can come from the IP, observers to the isolating event, and all sources of intelligence. When activated, the PR structure has tremendous capabilities and assets to locate and then support the isolated personnel. Once located, both the IP and his next of kin require support to increase the possibility of a successful recovery. The IP may be supported through efforts to provide needed equipment, establish communications, provide intelligence, or raise morale. Support to the next of kin goes beyond normal casualty assistance and includes, for example, public affairs support to reduce the chance that comments or information made by the next of kin could be used to harm or to exploit the IP.

The U.S. government uses military, diplomatic, and civil options to recover isolated personnel. Army doctrine identifies four military methods to execute the recovery task: immediate, deliberate, externally supported, and unassisted. Since the IP's unit often has the best situational awareness, that unit may conduct an immediate recovery before the enemy understands the situation. An immediate recovery requires very little, if any, planning and is the preferred method of recovery. When an immediate recovery fails or is not possible, commanders can plan a deliberate recovery using an established operations planning process. As the land component, the Army is required to conduct its own recovery operations and does so 95 percent of the time; however, if required due to lack of capabilities, there is the option of an externally supported recovery, which utilizes joint, coalition, or host nation assets. Finally, there is unassisted recovery, where the IP returns to friendly control without a formal recovery operation by conducting a successful evasion, which "is normally a contingency used if recovery forces cannot gain access to the isolated individual."<sup>2</sup>

The PR process continues after recovery with the post-isolation reintegration process, which occurs in three phases. The goal of this process is to return isolated personnel to duty with physical and emotional fitness while conducting intelligence and SERE debriefs. These debriefs can provide a tremendous amount of tactical

intelligence as well as identify changes that may be required in operational procedures and training programs. The reintegration process is critical to the long-term well-being of the returnee. The overall process is tailored to the experience and condition of the returnee so a short duration isolating event may only require a debriefing at the phase one facility, which is forward located within the theater of operations. On the other hand, someone who encountered a period of captivity or serious injury would need a longer reintegration and go through a phase two facility, such as Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany, before finishing the process at the Army's phase three facility located at Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

### Linking Unit TTPs to Five PR Tasks

The Army Personnel Recovery Program, established in AR 525-28, is "designed to prevent or reduce any strategic advantage our enemies may gain due to a tactical event involving the isolation of Army personnel" through the "seamless integration of PR policies and doctrine" into Army operations. While PR is a very broad heading, unit commanders can directly link their unit TTPs to the accomplishment of the five PR tasks through the inclusion of ISG and EPA into mission planning. ISG and EPAs synchronize actions between commanders, recovery forces, and IP; this facilitates recovery by giving them expectations of the other's actions.

ISG is the endstate of top-down PR guidance and gives Soldiers the information required to provide awareness, accountability, rapid reporting, and guidance for actions following an isolating event.

At the company and platoon levels, leaders develop ISG based upon PR guidance from higher headquarters and tailor it to the unit's operational environment. While there is not a set format, ISG must provide an easy-to-understand plan of what to do once isolated that is known by all members of a unit. Though lacking the details of a complete ISG, the five-point contingency plan is a simple application of the principles of ISG already in common use at the small unit level:

Where the leader is **Going**

**Others** he is taking with him

**Time** he plans to be gone

**What** to do if the leader does not return in time

**Actions** by the unit in the event contact is made while the leader is gone.<sup>3</sup>

ISG creates awareness by establishing isolation criteria that address the conditions in which Soldiers should consider themselves isolated. These conditions are easier to define for some types of units than others. For example, when the helicopter is on the ground and can no longer fly, then a pilot is probably wise to consider himself isolated. But for an Infantry unit whose mission is to close with and destroy the enemy, the line between poor tactical situation and isolating event remains murky. Isolation criteria provide clarity to those situations and aid a Soldier in determining when to take action. In general, when a Soldier or group of Soldiers can no longer complete their intended mission and must instead turn their focus on survival or evading capture,



then they should consider themselves isolated.

ISG stresses accountability by clearly outlining the processes and procedures for leaders to account for and track the whereabouts of all Soldiers. ISG should not burden units with additional requirements but rather works best when using TTPs routinely used by the unit such as headcounts prior to movements and daily personnel status reports. Soldiers achieve rapid reporting by having an understanding of what an isolating event is and how it should be reported. An isolated Soldier must take action to effect his own recovery by attempting to contact the unit. Soldiers may use a variety of communication or signaling methods, such as those already included as a part of the primary, alternate, contingency, and emergency (PACE) plans in the unit's SOP. Commonly available methods include VHF/UHF/HF/satellite tactical radios, Blue Force Tracker, VS-17 panels, smoke grenades, star clusters, and strobe lights. While somewhat unknown outside the field of PR, units can get training on the use of personal locator beacons (PLBs) and employment of visual signaling methods to create a ground-to-air signal (GTAS). Regardless of the method, ISG must reflect an understanding of capabilities and raise awareness of all assets available, such as the "sheriff's net," the guard frequency and common traffic advisory frequency (CTAF) monitored by all aircraft, or the emergency beacon on the multiband inter/intra team radio (MBITR), to speed up the report and locate tasks.

ISG must provide simple, easy-to-remember directions that will help "Soldiers feel more confident in difficult situations because they already have a plan" of actions to take.<sup>4</sup> Once again, existing TTPs and SOPs are the best methods to use as ISG since Soldiers are familiar with those methods. The use of rally points, defined in the *Ranger Handbook* as "a place designated by the leader where the unit moves to reassemble and reorganize if it becomes dispersed," is an easy way of providing a plan for actions following isolation. In order to properly use rally points, the handbook states that Soldiers "must know which rally point to move to at each phase ... [and]... what actions are required there."

Finally, an isolated Soldier must conduct link-up with friendly forces. The link-up is difficult and dangerous, especially when the recovery element is from a different unit, service, or nation. ISG reduces the danger by establishing protocols such as designated near/far recognition signals known to both the isolated Soldier and the recovery element.

During missions with a greater risk of isolation, Soldiers or units go beyond ISG to develop an EPA. This improves their chances of successful recovery by providing information about their mission and intended actions following an isolating event. Unlike ISG, an EPA is a bottom-up document that is prepared by the Soldier or small unit, then sent up the chain of command to determine the supportability of the plan and for safe-keeping. EPAs are traditionally used by aviators or Special Operations Forces (SOF), but many common Infantry operations have sufficient risk to justify the effort to develop an EPA. Unit size has an inverse relationship to risk of isolation so elements working in a small team such as scouts, snipers, advisor teams, or other fire team to squad-sized missions should be carefully reviewed for risk of isolation. Even larger elements located in a remote patrol base, combat outpost, or joint security station may need to develop an EPA due to their distance from supporting elements.

EPAs should be tailored to each mission and updated when conditions change. The more accurate an EPA is, the better the

chance of a recovery. The EPA format will vary based upon guidance from unit and theater PR SOPs, operation orders (OPORDs), and commander's guidance. An example EPA format from Appendix B, FM 3-50.1, *Army Personnel Recovery*, provides a baseline of information contained in an EPA. Much of the information is already available in concepts of operations (CONOPs)/OPORDs, trip tickets manifests, and unit SOPs (e.g. signaling). An EPA consolidates that information, along with integrated specific PR actions, into one document to speed up information flow to a recovery force during the accomplishment of the locate, support, and recovery tasks.

## PR Training

As a part of preparation in order to effectively use ISG and EPAs, Soldiers and leaders should have the appropriate level of training. The baseline for PR training is *Army PR (ARPR) 101: Intro to Personnel Recovery Concepts*, which is an AR 350-1 annual

### Example Evasion Plan of Action

1. Identification information includes:
  - a. Name, rank, social security number or service number, and duty position of unit members.
  - b. Mission number, unit, date, and aircraft, vehicle, or convoy call sign or identifier.
2. Planned route of travel and waypoints information includes:
  - a. Direction of travel, route points, distance, and heading.
  - b. Evasion plans for each part of the journey or activity.
3. Immediate evasion actions to be taken for the first 48 hours if uninjured include:
  - a. Actions for hiding near the aircraft or vehicle.
  - b. Rally points.
  - c. Travel plans including distance, pace, and time.
  - d. Intended actions and length of stay at initial hiding location.
4. Immediate evasion actions to be taken if injured include:
  - a. Hiding intentions.
  - b. Evasion intentions.
  - c. Travel intentions.
  - d. Intended actions at hiding locations.
5. Extended evasion actions to be taken after 48 hours include:
  - a. Destination (such as recovery area, mountain range, coast, border, or friendly forces location).
  - b. Travel routes, plans, and techniques (either written or drawn).
  - c. Actions and intentions at potential contact or recovery locations.
  - d. Recovery contact point signals, signs, and procedures (written or drawn).
  - e. Back-up plans, if any, for the above.
6. Communications and authentication information includes:
  - a. Duress word, number, color, or letter of the day, month, or quarter, or other current authentication codes.
  - b. Available communications and signaling devices: type and quantity of radios, programmed frequencies, encryption code, quantity of batteries, type and quantity of flares, beacons, mirrors, strobe lights, other.
  - c. Primary communication schedule, procedures, and frequencies (initial and extended contact procedures).
  - d. Backup communication schedule, procedures, and frequencies.
7. Other useful information includes:
  - a. Survival, evasion, resistance, and escape training previously completed.
  - b. Weapons and ammunition.
  - c. Personal evasion kit items.
  - d. Listing of issued signaling, survival, and evasion kit items.
  - e. Mission evasion preparation checklist.
  - f. Clothing, shoe size, and resupply items.
  - g. Signature of reviewing official.
8. Supplementary information includes anything contributing to the location and recovery of isolated persons.

training requirement. Those concepts are further explained in *ARPR 202: Commanders and Staff Responsibilities* and in SERE training. The basis for all SERE training is the Code of Conduct. Established in 1955 by Executive Order 10631 as a response to the conditions encountered by prisoners of war (POW) in Korea, the Code of Conduct provides the framework to guide the actions of all service members who find themselves isolated. In six articles, the Code of Conduct provides basic information and guidance for situations that all Soldiers could encounter. A Soldier's level of training will vary and is commensurate with the risk of isolation, capture, or exploitation, which is spelled out in DOD Instruction (DODI) 1300.21.

SERE Level A (SERE-A) is the "minimum level of understanding for all members of the armed forces,"<sup>5</sup> and is often a combatant command (COCOM) theater entry requirement. The Army's SERE-A program consists of two interactive media instruction (IMI) courses: *Army SERE 102: Survival & Evasion Fundamentals Course* and *Army SERE 103: Resistance & Escape Fundamentals Course*. In the short term, Soldiers should complete ARPR 101C in lieu of SERE 103 until the new version of SERE 103 is released. These courses, along with ARPR 101 and ARPR 202, are available on the Army Learning Management System (ALMS), the Army Training Network (ATN), or DVD format from Defense Imagery. Also, the Army Personnel Recovery Proponent Office (PRPO) at the Combined Arms Center offers training support packages (TSP) with PowerPoint slides for unit-level training in place of the ARPR 101, ARPR 202, SERE 102, and SERE 103 IMI courses. In order to conduct SERE-A training, instructors must have completed SERE 102/103 IMI within the past year, completed an Army SERE-C course, and completed either ARPR 202 or the Aviation Mission Survivability Officer (TACOPS) PR course. Contact the PRPO for further information on the TSPs: <https://combinedarmscenter.army.mil/mccoe/CDID/PRPO/Pages/default.aspx>.

Deploying units often encounter confusion between the Army's SERE-A program, the SERE 100.1 computer-based training (CBT) on Joint Knowledge Online (JKO), and COCOM-specific programs such as the Central Command (CENTCOM) High Risk of Isolation (HRI) Briefing. Prior to a deployment, units should review AR 350-1 and COCOM requirements in order to utilize the appropriate training course.

SERE Level B is for Soldiers with a "moderate risk of capture and exploitation" and expands upon Level A training.<sup>6</sup> The Army has not had a SERE-B capability since the U.S. Army SERE School at Fort Rucker, Ala., became a SERE Level C program in 2007.

Soldiers "whose military jobs, specialties, or assignments entail a significant or high risk of capture and exploitation" require SERE Level C training "at least once in their careers... as soon as they assume duties or responsibilities that make them eligible."<sup>7</sup> AR 350-1 states SERE-C training "should be made available to those individuals whose deployment duties will likely require them to operate outside of secure operating bases with limited security." It further identifies certain Soldiers, as a minimum, who will receive SERE-C training at either the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg, N.C., or at the U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence at Fort Rucker. Army SOF will generally attend at Fort Bragg. Personnel eligible to attend at Fort Rucker include snipers, pathfinders, anyone assigned to a reconnaissance squadron, and anyone assigned to a long-range reconnaissance and surveillance unit. Non-Infantry personnel eligible for SERE-C include aviators and enlisted aircrew members,

counterintelligence or human intelligence personnel engaging in collection outside secure bases, and Criminal Investigation Division (CID) agents or Military Police Soldiers conducting investigations outside secure bases. Additionally, AR 350-1 states that any Soldier based upon "assignment, sensitive knowledge, and/or risk of isolation, capture, or exploitation" determined by a brigade commander or higher is eligible to attend SERE-C. For deploying units, combatant command PR guidance will also designate high-risk personnel that must attend SERE-C as a theater-entry requirement. The SERE school at Fort Rucker provides SERE-C training for 2,000 students per year. Information on attending SERE-C is available in AR 350-1, Army Training Requirements and Resource System (ATRRS) course 2C-F107/600-F17(CT), or the U.S. Army SERE School AKO page.

When conducting planning for PR operations (including ISG and EPA development), a key resource is the PRO, who is typically located within the brigade aviation element and, at division and higher headquarters, in the PRCC. Army publications include AR 525-28; FM 3.50-1; FM 3-05.7, *Survival*; and GTA 80-01-003, *Survival, Evasion, and Recovery*. For Forces Command (FORSCOM) units, the FORSCOM PR office is an important resource: <https://www.us.army.mil/suite/page/650428>. The Joint Personnel Recovery Agency offers country-specific IPG as well as information about PR tools such as blood chits, EVCs, and PLBs on its non-classified and secure websites. While deployed, the PR Special Instructions (SPINS) located in the air tasking order (ATO) provide theater guidance on PR assets, communications, and authentication information. The PR SPINS are available on the secure internet protocol router (SIPR) in the ATO, but it may be easier to get a copy from an Army Aviation unit or your assigned joint terminal attack controller (JTAC).

What we as Infantrymen do as a matter of SOP within our organizations works for our units. But the incompatibility of unit TTPs with the required inputs to the PR system can hinder the activation and utilization of national capabilities in the event one of our Soldiers becomes isolated. By utilizing ISG and developing EPAs, we can link into PR assets and aid in the accomplishment of the five PR tasks. The use of ISG or EPA does not absolve commanders from the responsibility to be prepared to conduct an immediate recovery, which is likely to be the quickest method to return isolated Soldiers to friendly forces. Rather, their usage opens the door to the existing PR architecture, which increases the chances of a successful recovery.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Joint Publication 3-50, *Personnel Recovery*, January 2007, 274.

<sup>2</sup> FM 3-05.231, *Special Forces Personnel Recovery*, June 2001, 1-13.

<sup>3</sup> Student Handbook 21-76, *Ranger Handbook*, February 2011, 7-4.

<sup>4</sup> FM 3-50.1, *Army Personnel Recovery*, November 2011, 1-11.

<sup>5</sup> DODI 1300.21, January 2001

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

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