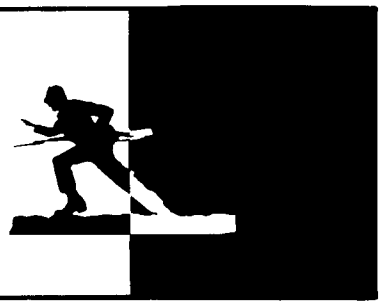
TRAINING NOTES



Unit Level Training

In Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape

CAPTAIN RODIE CHUNN

If you're a highly motivated soldier, whether in a leadership position or not, you can organize and successfully run a survival, evasion, resistance, and escape (SERE) course for your company or battalion. As a young staff officer, I quickly learned that most commanders are willing to provide you with the personnel you need to conduct this training if you also offer the training to their personnel.

You don't need formal Army-approved SERE training to conduct this training, but you should seek out SERE-qualified personnel to teach the escape and evasion (E&E) portion of the course. You can find out who is SERE-qualified by calling the first sergeants in the battalion.

The course described here was conducted by my aviation company in Korea, but it can be conducted by any type of unit and tailored to meet specific needs. The four phases—planning, train-up, execution, and recovery—can be modified as needed.

Planning Phase

During the planning phase of the SERE training event, you will do many of the same things you would do in planning for a field training exercise. One of the first requirements is to get approval from the commanding officer. In seeking that approval, be prepared to brief a general concept of the way you'll conduct the training.

Next, visit the battalion S-3 and select three days on the battalion master calendar that will not conflict with other planned training events. Although SERE training can be conducted in one day, it is better to plan for three consecutive days. If you decide later that one day will meet the needs of the unit, you can do it in one day. But if you decide you need the extended period, you will have that option as well. Allow at least three months for planning the first course so you'll have plenty of time to request training aids, a training site, helicopter support, and pyrotechnics.

Then start the process of selecting instructors. Either hand-pick them, or place a sign-up sheet in the orderly room listing the subjects to be taught, and ask volunteers to fill in their names. Choose two instructors for each station to make sure at least one of them will be there to cover the subject. If the course includes five stations—traps and snares, fire building, shelter building, water procurement and outdoor cooking, and escape and evasion, for example—you should have ten primary instructors. The stations in this example are the minimum number of subjects for an effective SERE course. If possible, however, recruit six more instructors and add rope bridge, rappelling, and combat lifesaving stations. The instructors will become subject-matter experts on their stations, setting them up and then briefing the officer or NCO in charge on how to build and use them during the train-up phase.

Opposing force (OPFOR) personnel are necessary to challenge the students while they conduct the E&E portion of the course. Recruiting the OPFOR may be the easiest part of the planning phase. If the unit has a soldier who is special forces or Ranger qualified, recruit him as the OPFOR officer in charge (OIC). Have him recruit about 12 volunteers from the battalion and break them into OPFOR teams. The OPFOR OIC obtains the vehicles, radios, and other equipment the teams need, then reports back to the course OIC on the OPFOR plan.

If an enemy prisoner of war camp is used, recruit an OIC for it, and ensure that standards of conduct are followed so that no one is hurt or physically abused. Safety must be paramount throughout the conduct of the course.

The most important part of the planning phase is to find the right piece of ground and get the training area request through S-3 channels for approval. Begin with a map recon-naissance and choose about three potential areas, then conduct a ground reconnaissance at each site. Look for areas that seem to be good for traps and snares, for example. This area should have small trails and lots of saplings, and the shelter-building site should have plenty of small trees and concealment. Next, conduct an aerial reconnaissance along the proposed E&E routes at each site. The station training site should be relatively flat, and the E&E route should be rugged and offer concealment.

Once you've found the best site, request that site and also the next best site, which will be an alternate if problems arise in acquiring the primary site. Walk the terrain to find out how long it takes to negotiate, remembering that the students will probably be doing it at night, the ideal time to move. (Our station training area was about a 300-meter square connected to an E&E corridor nine kilometers long and three kilometers wide. Although it doesn't take long to cover nine kilometers over flat terrain, this was nine kilometers of 2,000-foot mountains, which took 12 hours to negotiate.)

Pyrotechnics are helpful in adding realism, but use them carefully in dry weather. In another country as we were, you don't want to have to tell your hosts that you burned their land because you didn't check the status of its dryness. At a post in the continental United States, the local range control will provide this information. Get the pyrotechnics request to the S-3 early; most units require ammunition requests three months in advance.

You'll find many things that you need readily available—vehicles, helicopters, communications equip-ment, MREs (meals, ready to eat), and medical support—but they will require formal requests (by memorandum) through S-3 channels.

When coordinating vehicle support, ask for enough to get the instructors to and from the training area. Students attending the training should be transported by their own units; this procedure makes it easier to focus on other problems that may arise. Also make sure backup vehicles and drivers are available.

Being in an aviation unit, we had no problem with helicopter support, but even if you're not in an aviation unit, a simple request through S-3 channels will get it for you. Submit the request as soon as the support requirements have been defined. Although most aviation units will provide aviation support from a field environment, it is more difficult because they will be involved in planned field training of their own.

Ideally, one OH-58 Kiowa and one UH-1 Huey or UH-60 Black Hawk will be enough for the course. The OH-58 will provide OPFOR support at night in searching for the students conducting the E&E portion of the exercise and may also be used to conduct reconnaissance. The UH-1 or UH-60 will extract the students at the planned pickup point upon completion of the exercise, which may be a night extraction. Both helicopter crews must therefore be current on night vision goggles (NVGs). The flight time needed to complete the E&E course will vary, but five to 10 hours of OH-58 flight time and four to six hours of UH-1 flight time should suffice for the entire course.

Ask the S-3 to task other units in the battalion to provide SINCGARS (single-channel ground and airborne radio system) or other radios during the E&E portion. Each E&E team should have at least one radio, but preferably two—one SINCGARS and one AN/PRC-90 aviation survival radio. Additionally, the tactical operations center should maintain communications with the rear area or garrison, the E&E teams, and the supporting aircraft. Long-range communications normally require an RT-292 antenna. When communications with the E&E teams are lost, the supporting aircraft should maintain communication. In the event of an injury, a quick response may prevent further injury or loss of life and limb.

Planning for food and water is easy. Get the formal request for MREs (meals, ready to eat) to the mess sergeant, and have the NCOIC pick them up on the date requested. Soldiers will sign for MREs when they are issued. Make sure enough water is available on the training site. Also set up a few water points along the E&E route, and declare them "safe zones."

Plan to have a qualified medic or combat lifesaver on site if possible. Although the teams will be scattered throughout the course during the E&E portion, a medic will prove invaluable in case of injury. If someone is injured during the E&E portion, find out where he is and direct the recovery aircraft to him. Since this mission can prove difficult at night, direct the injured soldier to start a fire, turn on his strobe light, or use his flashlight for signaling. Once the aircraft reaches him, have the pilot confirm the grid location and the extent of the injury. Next, decide whether a medevac aircraft is required or if the on-site medic can handle it. If the injury is serious, have the pilot fly the medic to the mishap location to provide interim treatment until the medevac arrives. The helicopter pilot can contact the other aircraft from the air and direct it to the site.

Train-up Phase

During the train-up phase, the instructors for the station training are confirmed, the land request is approved, and the logistical support is coordinated. The instructors are then briefed on preparing their stations. Once they understand the concept of the training, they begin building their stations. This phase of the course may be done in three or four consecutive days or may be spread over two or three weeks. The battalion training calendar may dictate the train-up days that will be available.

The instructors will need some tools and reference materials during this phase—machetes, shovels, knives, parachute cord, copper wire, and any other tools that will help in building the stations. Field Manual 21-76, *Survival, Evasion, and Escape*, is a good reference; the easy-to-carry Ranger Handbook contains useful information on survival topics; and AR 350-30, *Code of Conduct/Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE) Training*, is good for regulations governing SERE training.

The individual stations should appear realistic and professionally prepared. For example, when lashing limbs together to build a shelter, use vines found in the area instead of parachute cord. Build many types of shelters that would be used in the particular climate or tactical situation. The shelter-building station will take the most time to construct. Five or six shelters may take up to 30 or 40 man hours. Other types of stations include the fire-building station, water procurement and outdoor cooking, and traps and snares.

Since one objective of the SERE course is to stimulate imagination, these stations can be built in many different ways. The instructors should read about numerous methods before building the stations and then, during the building process, record the best techniques, the time required, and the best terrain for them. While the instructors are building and rehearsing their stations, the site OIC and the OPFOR OIC should conduct a ground reconnaissance of the E&E route, also selecting water points, trafficable roads, and possible pick-up points.

The final portion of the train-up phase consists of rehearsals. The instructors brief the OIC on each of the stations. They train to a standard of 30 to 40 minutes per station, which allows for a thorough explanation of the subject and hands-on training.

Execution Phase

The execution phase is broken down into two events—station training and the E&E course. Conduct the station training first. When the students arrive at the training site, the OIC briefs them on the training objectives, safety, and administrative requirements. Next, they are broken into groups to conduct the station training. Once this training is complete, the students are divided into two-man teams and are inspected for proper equipment, such as maps, compasses, radios, and food and water. After this inspection, the teams are released in intervals at the start point. The OPFOR is placed in a position to allow the students a fair start. The OPFOR aircraft should begin the search about an hour after the last team has left the start point.

As the E&E teams get closer to the release point, the requested utility aircraft should be on standby to extract them. To keep radio traffic to a minimum, the extraction aircraft should arrive at the pickup point at predetermined times without being called. If the extraction aircraft lands at the point and no one is there for pick-up, it leaves and returns at the next predetermined time.

Recovery Phase

During the recovery phase, personnel and equipment are accounted for, and the after-action review (AAR) is conducted. During the AAR, students are encouraged to comment on both positive and negative aspects of the training. Additionally, certificates of completion and awards are presented to the students at this time.

Clearly, running a SERE course requires some planning and train-up. It is not an easy event to put together, yet it's not too difficult either if you rely on your commander and first sergeant to help you over the hurdles. If you commit yourself to training soldiers to fight, win, and survive in a combat environment, in the process you'll also accomplish training that will help save lives in combat.

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Search and Attack

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The search and attack is one of the techniques used to conduct a conventional movement to contact to find, fix, and finish the enemy. This technique is usually employed in a fluid environment against an enemy operating in dispersed elements with no conventionally fixed lines. In this type of environment, it is especially important for the battalion commander to make a thorough analysis of the intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB).

The IPB process helps the commander visualize the terrain, weather, and enemy in formulating his courses of