

# PERSONNEL RECOVERY

## Program Can Help Soldiers Prevent, Respond to Isolating Events

WAYNE HEARD

*Imagine that you are riding in the trail gun truck along with three other members of your platoon when your vehicle develops engine trouble and coasts to a stop. You try to establish communications with the convoy leader as you watch the convoy move farther away. Then you attempt to check in with a communications relay station. The vehicle commander suggests trying the "Sheriff's net," but no one responds to your calls.*

*The gunner alerts you that there are armed men assembling and heading your way. They begin engaging your gun truck with small arms fire. The team begins to return fire and you begin working the radio frantically trying to raise a close air support (CAS) aircraft or any friendly unit. Nothing. You are becoming decisively engaged, so your leader uses the Blue Force Tracker to alert the Personnel Recovery Cell that you are in trouble. Unfortunately, you still can't raise anyone on the radio.*

*Soon, you are running low on ammunition, and the enemy strength is increasing. Two of your team members have become wounded.*

*Your leader evaluates the situation and decides that your best chance for survival is to evade and use the approaching darkness to break contact with the enemy.*

*The team scours the vehicle for supplies that might prove useful. You disable the heavy weapons and destroy the vehicle communications equipment. You begin moving out per the evasion plan of action (EPA). You*

*pray that someone has received the Blue Force Tracker alert.*

*After you've successfully broken contact, you go into evasion mode. You are now isolated in enemy territory, outnumbered, low on ammunition, food and water; with two of your fellow Soldiers wounded ...with no one answering your radio calls for help.*

*Moving quickly, you put as much distance as possible between you, the vehicle, and the insurgents. The leader reassures everyone that the convoy leader will realize that something has gone wrong at*



the next scheduled commo check. "He's sure to turn around and look for us." You try to eliminate the thought, "Yeah, but what if he's too late."

Your leader decides to halt for a map check. Everyone is listening for sounds of the enemy on your trail. You would like to believe that the enemy will be satisfied by capturing a vehicle, but somehow you don't think that is likely. It's time to move. The leader has decided on a hide site that is close by and provides cover and concealment.

As you settle into the hide site, you begin to take stock of your situation. You try to recall your pre-deployment SERE (survival, evasion, resistance and escape) instruction. How much ammunition do we have remaining? How much water? How soon will the convoy leader come for us? Has a unit been launched to recover us? How are they supposed to know where we are now that we've left the vehicle? What is our next step? How do we signal to friendlies where we are? What if...?

What if this were to happen to you or a member of your unit? Do you know what to do? What does your SOP say about preventing and responding to isolating events? Is everyone in your unit fully aware of how to survive, evade, resist and escape and ultimately to aid in their own recovery? Does everyone understand how to set out a ground to air signal (GTAS) to alert friendly air assets that you are in the area? Do you know the procedures for calling for close air support? Do you, and every member of your team, know — beyond a shadow of a doubt — how to respond in an isolating event? These, and other questions, can be answered by developing and cultivating a comprehensive Personnel Recovery program in your unit.

### **Personnel Recovery**

Although the title, Personnel Recovery (PR), is relatively new to the conventional Army, the Warrior Tasks and training associated with PR are older than the Army itself. The tasks associated with the Code of Conduct (COC) are all under the "umbrella" of Personnel Recovery. All SERE training is organized and conducted to help members of the military adhere to the tenets of the COC.

### **Real World Personnel Recovery Story**

In Mogadishu, Somalia on October 3-4, 1993, elements of Joint Task Force Ranger were defending recovery forces, at "Super Six One" (Chief Warrant Officer 4 Clifton Wolcott's aircraft). Later, in an interview, one of the M60 machine gunners reported that his gun jammed on three separate occasions that night. But, because of the relentless training that Corporal Jamie Smith had put the gun teams through, he was able to take immediate action and keep the gun in operation. At one point, when he had the feed tray cover up and was engaged in clearing a jam, enemy forces rushed his position. But, CPL Smith had prepared him for that, too. This Ranger employed accurate 9mm pistol fire to break up the assault. He then returned to the task of clearing the jam, put the weapon back in action and continued firing his M60 until it was destroyed by a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG).

With that as a starting point, it's easy to see how Warrior Tasks have direct PR implications. For example, patrolling and even movement-to-contact techniques can be employed for evasion. In fact, the famous Roger's Rangers Rules provide instructions regarding moving with stealth to prevent enemy forces from tracking your unit.

The same can be said for land navigation training, which facilitates our movement toward the enemy or an objective. It could prove to be a crucial skill when employed to evade the enemy and move to a recovery site.

Effective training and use of weapons systems can fall under the aegis of Personnel Recovery. Preventing an isolating event or a hostage-taking attempt may require us to employ one or several weapons systems. Not only is it important to be a good marksman, but Soldiers need to be able to perform immediate action on their weapons, while under stressful conditions, in periods of reduced visibility, during inclement weather, etc.

Pre-deployment environmental training provides a basis for surviving in different regions and climates. Cultural briefings supply us with knowledge necessary to avoid offending host nation personnel and, if held captive, may provide clues in developing the proper resistance posture.

You may be saying to yourself, all of these things are pretty obvious and intuitive, they're the basic Soldier skills, right? The answer is yes, of course, but they definitely deem repeating in this context. Since you know what you need to do to prepare to survive enemy engagement,

it follows that you know how to survive a break in contact and isolation. However, we don't tend to spend a lot of time talking about and training for this particular part of the mission requirement. Deliberate pre-planning, rehearsal, and memorization of these key skills and how they apply to surviving, evading, resisting and escaping can mean the difference between life and death if you become isolated on the battlefield.

PR is the sum of military, diplomatic, and civil efforts to effect the recovery and return of U.S. military, DOD Civilians, DOD contractor personnel or others as determined by the Secretary of Defense who are isolated, missing, detained, or captured (IMDC) in an operational environment.

Until recently, SERE training and other advanced Code of Conduct instruction, were limited to members of the military who were identified as "high risk of capture." Those populations were generally special operations forces and air crews, who historically operated forward of the friendly lines.

Conventional Soldiers, and especially those in support occupations, were traditionally less likely to be captured. Occasionally Soldiers would become separated from their units and fall into enemy hands but not often. Captivity was usually the result of combat action when the front lines were ruptured as in the Battle of Bulge in WWII, or during a major retrograde such as when Chinese forces entered the Korean War.

These concepts have changed radically! The enemy we now face has chosen tactics that demand we change the way we train

and prepare. Now, combat actions are being conducted specifically to take hostages vs. captivity being secondary results of combat action.

Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coastguardsmen and deployed Army Civilians and contractors all face the threat of capture on today's battlefields. Once a primary concern of aircrews, secondary for ground troops, and a rare concern for Army Civilians, kidnapping and hostage-taking have become a powerfully sought means to satisfy insurgent's desires for highly visible actions that they feel give the illusion of domination over powerful coalition forces.

In 2005, the Army introduced the useful doctrinal manual, FM 3-50.1, *Army Personnel Recovery*. Since the implementation of this manual, the Army has made great strides in developing and expanding the Army Personnel Recovery program.

In May 2005, General Peter J. Schoomaker, the Chief of Staff of the Army at the time, directed that the Army ensure "every leader, Soldier, Army Civilian and contractor is trained to survive isolating situations and trained in actions to recover those lost. We must rapidly transform our past combat search and rescue (CSAR) concept into one that uses all of our air, ground, and maritime capabilities to rapidly report, locate, support, recover and return our Soldiers, Civilians and

contractors to friendly control... It is essential TRADOC continue to advance doctrine and rapidly push forward to implement education in our schools."

Even with the command emphasis on this vital training, disconnects and shortfalls continue to occur that need to be redressed. PR training is now mandated in pre-deployment requirements for COCOMs, and although "SERE 100" is the program most closely associated with PR pre-deployment requirements, it is hardly the only PR training required.

In June 2005, the Army G3/5/7, Lieutenant General James Lovelace, reinforced the CSA's instructions with a few of his own. Some of the key points that the G3 included in his message are:

- Every leader is responsible for planning and preparing his unit and personnel for isolating events and support of recovery activities.
- Personnel Recovery will be embedded in all plans and orders as a routine objective.
- We must expedite PR transformation in the Army by producing changes in education and training.
- Incorporate PR events in all mission readiness exercises

*Soldiers with the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division run down a street operations in Baghdad July 1, 2007.*

Staff Sergeant Curt Cashour



**If your convoy came under fire and your vehicles were disabled, do you know what would happen next if your Soldiers were left to fight it out with insurgents intent on taking an American hostage? ... These rhetorical questions are not to fill you with fear and doubt but to provide you with some important considerations that you will want to address before leading that next convoy.**

(MRE/MRX), Combat Training Center (CTC) rotations, and Battle Command Training Program (BCTP).

■ All unit leaders will include PR actions into every order under paragraph III execution. This is especially critical for small unit leaders.

■ Personnel Recovery education will be instilled across the entire force. PR fundamentals will be introduced into all accession schools for all ranks and reinforced at all career level schools.

### **Now back to our isolated gun truck team ...**

If your convoy came under fire and your vehicles were disabled, do you know what would happen next if your Soldiers were left to fight it out with insurgents intent on taking an American hostage? What recovery operations would be conducted? Do you feel sure that, beyond a shadow of a doubt, your convoy leaders could get the support they needed when and how and where needed? Have you asked convoy leaders about the effectiveness of established communications plans? Are you sure that CAS will be effectively and efficiently coordinated and executed? These rhetorical questions are not to fill you with fear and doubt but to provide you with some important considerations that you will want to address before leading that next convoy.

*“In a recent firefight near Salman Pak, Iraq, insurgents were in the midst of an assault on an ambushed and fixed convoy...a group of them, equipped with restraints (zip cuffs and ropes), advanced on the damaged vehicles and wounded survivors...clearly intent on taking prisoners. We know this because a U.S. Army Military Police relief force arrived as cavalry would, and ended their insurgent careers allowing us to discover these*

*details postmortem. Bottom line: a complex, well-resourced, and well-executed ambush was set by our enemies with the main purpose of securing living U.S. personnel for exploitation and most probably ‘public’ (internet) execution.”*

— **Brigadier General**

**Anthony A. Cuculo, III**

Joint Center for Operational Analysis  
and Lessons Learned Quarterly  
Bulletin, March 2005

### **Food for thought**

**Are you aware of the actions you can take that can help prevent an isolating event?** If you were to become separated from your unit, alone or with a small team, what is your unit SOP regarding PR? What are you supposed to do? How will your unit respond? If a convoy taking you from Kuwait through Iraq to your initial forward operating base was hit by an enemy ambush seeking U.S. hostages, do you know who would join the fight to help recover your unit?

**Small unit leaders, have you included PR in your troop leading procedures?** Are your Soldiers trained to survive, evade, resist and escape capture? Do they know how to signal aircraft with GTAS — day and night? Have you reviewed the air tasking order special instructions (ATO SPINS) and recovery site protocols with your unit? What is your battle drill for a lost Soldier? If you discover that one of your vehicles (with three Soldiers) is missing after the last “head count,” what is your plan of action?

**Senior leaders,** are you including high-quality operations orders and operational support in your metrics for success, or are you limiting your “signals for success” to “number of trucks,” “on time SPs” and “tonnage hauled”? Have you made it clear to your subordinate leaders that as soon as they suspect someone may be missing they must report this immediately?

Are you routinely talking with junior officers and senior NCOs controlling convoys and other small unit combat operations to ensure that these young warriors are receiving top quality support? Have you asked them if they are in contact with the fast movers overhead and could call for and adjust CAS if needed? Have you ensured that the air tasking order - special instructions (ATO SPINS) are getting down to every echelon? Are you including PR exercises and rehearsals in every MRX?

Do you feel confident that your subordinates know the PR plan for a “missing transition team member,” and if that plan has been exercised and rehearsed? Have they back briefed their understanding of the plan? Are they prepared with equipment and a plan to prevent themselves from being taken captive? Are the Soldiers you consider at high risk receiving required training from certified personnel?

Colonel Arthur Stang, a former brigade commander in the 82nd Airborne Division had a 3x5 card on his desk that summed up his leadership philosophy. “Have you talked to the troops today? What about the wrench turners and the cooks? Remember, the only thing you lead from behind this desk is your pencil.”

Everyone has a role to play in Personnel Recovery training and operations. Have you done your part?

---

**Wayne Heard** began his career with the Army in 1972, serving in the 82nd Airborne Division. He was the Distinguished Leadership Graduate from his Officer Candidate School class and graduated from the Infantry Officers Basic and Advanced Courses, Ranger School, and the Special Forces Officers Course. In addition to the 82nd, he served with 25th Infantry Division, 5th Special Forces Group, Cadet Command and 10th Special Forces Group. He began his association with Personnel Recovery as the S-3 and XO of 1st Battalion, 10th SFG during Operation Desert Storm. Mr. Heard is a co-author of FM 3-50.1, *Army Personnel Recovery*, and has worked in the HQDA PR Office since May 2005 as a contractor with TATE, Incorporated.

---