

SCENARIO HIGHLIGHTS EFFECTIVE PERSONNEL RECOVERY PROGRAM

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Author’s Note: *The incidents described in this article are somewhat artificial and the time elements were compressed in order to provide the reader a picture of the Personnel Recovery (PR) system.*

The scenario

It was a routine day working in Iraq, until you heard, “Attention on the floor. There’s been a PR incident.”

As the watch officer for your staff section, you join the small group assembling around the Personnel Recovery Coordination Cell (PRCC) director.

“A combat logistics patrol (convoy) was ambushed at 0810 this morning. The ambush was initiated with an IED. The convoy fought through the ambush, and the commander circled the wagons down the road and determined that they were missing one vehicle and the four Soldiers riding in that vehicle. He immediately reported this information to his chain of command and to us.”

He continued, “The village, where the incident occurred is fairly small. The convoy commander recommended, and was approved to, return to the ambush site, establish **hasty checkpoints** around the village and begin searching for the missing Soldiers — a **cordon and search**.”

While the convoy personnel begin the **immediate recovery** operations, their brigade combat team headquarters begins lining up additional units to support this recovery operation. The PR officer (PRO) at brigade immediately notified the PR staff at Multi-National Division (MND) headquarters, and they, in turn, passed it to the Multi-National Corps (MNC) PR staff who alerted the entire PR architecture in theater.

The BCT’s quick reaction force (QRF) was already engaged in an operation in their sector so it was unavailable to assist in this recovery. The BCT asked for

assistance from the MND.

The MND PR staff determined that the ambush site was close to a boundary line and that the neighboring BCT had a unit close by. MND alerted this BCT and the closest company began to load up their Strykers to assist the convoy commander, who was now well into the cordon and search. The Stryker company had rehearsed various recovery operations routinely since their arrival in theater.

As the company began moving toward the village, the PRO began coordinating with the PR staff at division to bring in additional troops to assist with the cordon and search and for an air contingent to watch for all vehicles and personnel leaving the village.

At the joint operations center (JOC), you are learning that a missing Soldier drill is quite a bit like an Amber Alert used to search for kidnapped children, back in the States. Even though all the scheduled missions and those underway continue, a significant effort is devoted to recovering the Soldiers.

The PRCC staff then begins to review the PR battle drill. They keep referring to the military decision making process (MDMP) matrix in FM 3-50.1, *Army Personnel Recovery*, and you make a note to download it so that you can ensure your staff completes all its requirements.

“Personnel: Let’s find out who the missing Soldiers are and let’s make sure everyone who was supposed to be with that convoy was actually with it.” The “4” reported that the convoy had already made two stops during that run. “Let’s make sure that the vehicle and all four Soldiers actually departed with the convoy when it left that last forward operating base (FOB) before the ambush.”

The intelligence NCO said that a request for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) support and archived photos of the area were already submitted. The photos will prove handy for the today’s search and to look for changes in the area if

Personnel Recovery

“The sum of military, diplomatic and civil efforts to effect the recovery and return of U.S. military, DoD civilians, and DoD contractor personnel or other personnel as determined by the Secretary of Defense, who are isolated or missing in an operational environment. Also called **PR**.”

— **Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction (CJCSI) 3270.01A**

Personnel Recovery Tasks

- Report
- Locate
- Support
- Recover
- Reintegrate

There are three **options** that the United States may employ when recovering isolated personnel:

- Military
- Diplomatic
- Civil

The **Military option** has several **categories of recovery**, with one being the **Component**.

The **Component category** includes the methods in which the individual services conduct recovery operations.

The Army uses four **methods** of recovery:

- Unassisted
- Immediate
- Deliberate
- External Supported

References

- FM 3-50.1, *Personnel Recovery*
- HQDA PR website - <https://www.us.army.mil/suite/page/373835>
- Army PR Office - (703) 692-3115/3116/3117

the search becomes extended. You reflect upon the Soldiers who are currently listed on the daily DUSTWUN (duty status whereabouts unknown) and the continuing efforts to locate them.

Meanwhile, the J-4 has begun to assemble another convoy to get the needed classes of supply to that next FOB. The “1” and the “4” are working together, along with the convoy commander, to determine who the missing Soldiers are. The PR cell director has coordinated for air support, psychological operations support, and intelligence support.

Back at the village, the convoy commander has secured the damaged vehicle and the sensitive items. Boot prints leading away from the vehicle, along with spent shell casings, make it look as if at least two Soldiers fought their way out of the kill zone. There were also signs that another two had been dragged away.

The convoy commander is in contact with close air support, the Army Air QRF, and the approaching Stryker company. He is coordinating the cordon and search of this village that is growing increasingly robust. The convoy Soldiers are systematically searching each and every building in the village.

The convoy personnel sealed the immediate area around the ambush site. The Stryker company then arrives and creates an outer ring to the cordon. The convoy commander briefs the Stryker company commander on the status of the search and the missing Soldiers.

The two leaders agreed that after a quick “right seat ride,” the Stryker company commander will assume control of the operation freeing the convoy personnel to complete their original mission. The Stryker company commander will be the on-site commander.

As the search continued, the PRCC and JPRC continued to develop support. They also discussed the possible employment of Special Operations forces to conduct the recovery. The distance to this village and an ongoing operation might preclude their use. Intelligence personnel along with Civil Affairs; PSYOP, and transition teams that had worked the area began to build a picture of the villages. More importantly, they were learning who were hostile and who might be friendly.

The “1” and the “4” have identified the missing Soldiers and verified that they were in the convoy when it departed from the last FOB. The “1” also had all units and contracting companies account for 100 percent of their personnel. It was important to ensure that no one was “catching a ride” with the convoy, unknown to the convoy commander. The PR Intel NCO informs the assembled team that she has submitted the request for fingerprints of the four

Soldiers from the FBI.

You remember preparing for your first deployment and how everyone had to be fingerprinted as part of the isolated personnel report (ISOPREP) process. When you began processing for deployment this time, you completed the process from your home computer and no fingerprints were required. The data was transferred from your computer to a secure Web site automatically. Now, the ISOPREP data for every deployed Soldier, DA civilian and contractor is in the secure, national database. You never have to complete another ISOPREP again. The next time you deploy, you’ll only need to review the information to ensure it is current. It really simplifies the job of managing ISOPREPs. Instead of searching through 150,000 files and folders, the staff can access the data by typing in a Soldier’s name.

You are amazed by all the “players” who have become involved in this operation. The public affairs officer had already developed a plan for providing information to the media about the event. The chaplain had planned for support upon the Soldiers’ return. The PR cell accesses the ISOPREP data from the national database and passes the Soldiers’ descriptions and authentication data to the Stryker company commander who relays it to his company leaders.

The intel NCO coordinated for manned and unmanned aircraft flying overhead to look for Ground to Air Signal (GTAS) and other signs of the Soldiers’ presence. Communications personnel, along with SIGINT personnel, had been alerted to listen for radio transmissions on the “sheriff’s net,” command net, convoy net, survival radio net, etc. Intelligence personnel also listened for enemy transmissions that might give us a clue to the Soldiers’ locations or enemy activities regarding these missing Soldiers.

Every piece of available information is being entered into a PR mission management log. You discovered that this record is vital for several reasons: if the search becomes extended, the recovery staffs routinely go back to the original logs to check new information; if the search is unsuccessful those personnel who take on the personnel accounting role will need the best available data to continue the investigation; and when the search and recovery is successful, the documents must accompany the returnee through the Reintegration Phases. The records are then packaged and submitted to the Joint Personnel Recovery Agency (JPRA).

A convoy from the 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment arrives at a city in the Kirkuk province of Iraq March 21, 2007.

TSGT Maria J. Bare, USAF



	Begins	Location/ Responsibility	Activities
Phase I	IMDC comes under U.S. control	Theater / COCOM Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical exam/treatment • SERE debrief (lessons) • Intel debrief (information) • Transport to Phase II (if req'd)
Phase II	Arrives from Phase I	Theater / COCOM Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical exam/treatment • SERE debrief (lessons) • Intel debrief (information) • Transport to Phase III (if req'd)
Phase III	Arrives from Phase II	CONUS / Service (Army) Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical treatment continues • SERE debriefings continue • Intel debriefings continue • Phase III continues based on IMDC situation

Figure 1 — Reintegration

A Civil Affairs LNO identifies a villager who has been helpful in the past. The HUMINT team concurs with the assessment of this villager. The name is transmitted to the Stryker company commander. Several “terps” (interpreters) have been airlifted to the village to assist in the search. The commander assigns his senior platoon leader to accompany a “terp” to the Civil Affairs’ asset. The villager suggests a possible location where the Soldiers might have been taken. The platoon leader leaves a squad to keep “eyes on target” as he returns to the commander to make his report.

The squad reports that two men have departed the building. As they approached a checkpoint, they are stopped, apprehended, separated and questioned. One admits that two Soldiers are being held in the building and adds that the hostage takers are growing anxious about being caught with them. The hostage takers had expected to drive away with them to a much larger town, but the checkpoints were established too quickly for them to get away.

After considering the new information, the company commander decides that the recovery needs to be conducted immediately. He begins planning for a raid of the building. Based on the size of the building, he decides on one platoon as the assault force; one positioned as perimeter security; and a squad from another platoon for support.

The ISG recommends that the other two squads maintain a watch on the buildings and roads that have already been cleared

— just in case this turns out to be a dry hole. He also reminds the company commander that after securing the two Soldiers, the troops need to protect the site and treat it as a crime scene so that the CID and others can conduct their forensic investigation.

The company commander relays his plan to higher for approval. The launch and execute authorities for a personnel recovery mission have to be requested from higher headquarters. While headquarters reviews his plan, the company commander and ISG supervise the rehearsals.

The PR staff recommends approval of the recovery operation. The MNC commander approves the company commander’s plan with minor modifications. They are given launch and execute authority.

The raid is executed vigorously and the two Soldiers are recovered. The assault platoon also recovers two weapons and two sets of gear. They seal the site to protect the crime scene. There is no visible evidence of the other two Soldiers having been held here. But where are they?

The successful raid creates a high level of excitement among everyone involved, but it is an excitement tempered with the knowledge that there are still two Soldiers out there who are IMDC. The company commander reports the results to the PRO and the report is passed to the PRCC.

By now, the entire PR architecture is energized. The U.S. Air Force sent a survival, evasion, resistance and escape (SERE) specialist and combat rescue officer (CRO)

to the PRCC to assist in reviewing the EPA (or PR contingency plan). They are using the two and three-dimensional images of the terrain to determine the possible evasion routes that an untrained evader might follow, if under enemy pressure.

The PR team is reviewing the ISOPREP data to determine the levels of SERE training each Soldier has completed. The unit ISG and company commander have been contacted for insights into their training and mental toughness. Do their duties put them into contact with information that is sensitive? What types of SERE equipment will they generally carry with them? What are their backgrounds and what do we know about them that can aid in their recovery? Is either one trained in advanced medical skills (combat lifesaver)?

As the mission extends into the night, various air platforms are incorporated into the search. The staff conducts a full blown mission analysis with a formal METT-TC look at the situation. The SERE personnel advise that the proximity of a canal increases the complexity of the planning and the search.

The planning team determines that there are two or three probable situations. One is that these two Soldiers are evading, an **unassisted recovery**. Another possibility is that these two Soldiers were taken by a second group of hostage takers. A third possibility is that one Soldier has been taken hostage and the other is evading. Regardless, the search must continue within the village and the surrounding area.

As the evening progresses, an infantry battalion from the BCT is moved into the area and performs a relief in place with the Stryker company, allowing them to get some much needed rest. The battalion commander assumes the role of on-site mission commander. Throughout the night, aircraft fly overhead playing music that is reported to be significant to the missing Soldiers. This is designed to boost their morale and let them know that their buddies are continuing the search. Doctrinally, this is one of the five Personnel Recovery tasks — support.

Every aircraft crew has been alerted to be on the lookout for emergency signals from the area.

When the mission became more

involved, the PR cell director requested **external support** from intelligence assets, Air Force SERE personnel, and even close air support (CAS), just in case.

You've seen the members of the PR cell begin tracking the recovery and you've witnessed the event evolve into a full court press by almost every desk in the JOC. The PR Cell director involved personnel from every staff and every service and even used personnel in engineer boats to work this recovery.

From a doctrinal perspective the evading Soldiers are involved in an **unassisted recovery**. The mission evolved from an **immediate recovery** operation conducted as a **hasty check point and cordon and search** to a **deliberate recovery** conducted as a **raid**. Because other services are involved in this recovery, doctrinally it is considered an **external supported recovery**.

As daylight approaches, the recovery forces (air, ground and maritime) are really cranking it up to high gear. The SERE specialist suggests searching a wooded area close to the canal. It's a large area and aircraft have over flown it twice already without seeing any signals. But it's going to require a ground force search to really give it a good look.

The now-rested Stryker company is given the mission to conduct the ground search. The Stryker company commander develops a plan for searching the area. The company moves to the wooded area on Strykers, but conducts a **movement to contact**, on foot, to **link up** with the IMDC (isolated, missing, detained or captured) Soldiers. The men are warned that they need to be on the lookout for a recovery activation signal (RAS) that will alert them that the IMDC Soldiers are nearby. They also need to be alert to the danger of insurgents. This mission will require strict discipline, mature response, and tight control to avoid a friendly fire incident.

The PR cell is now monitoring several ongoing operations: the debriefing of the original convoy leadership; the battalion cordon and search operation of the village; the canal search by Engineer boat crews; the aviation search and outer perimeter cordon; the coordination for military working dogs to track the IMDC Soldiers; intelligence platforms searching the area; and the intelligence and SERE debriefing of the recovered Soldiers, along with their medical treatment plan. These Soldiers have begun undergoing their reintegration actions.

The PR director has even coordinated with the Ministry of the Interior to lower the water levels in the canal to aid in the search and for USN divers to conduct an underwater search if the Soldiers aren't found by the end of the day.

Meanwhile, back in the States, the regional casualty assistance teams have notified the primary next of kin of both Soldiers of their status and the details surrounding the incident. The casualty assistance teams inform the next of kin of the support activities that are available to them.

Back on the "floor" the intelligence NCO comes out of the Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility (SCIF) with a new report. A GTAS has been spotted in a clearing in the wooded area near the canal. The location is transmitted to the company commander. He reviews the recovery protocols, from the Air Tasking Order Special Instructions (ATO SPINS) with his platoon leaders; they enter the GTAS data into their GPS, adjust their azimuths and

move out to make the link up.

Within an hour, the lead element of the company spots the Recovery Activation Signal (RAS). The unit moves forward cautiously. The lead fire team leader displays the far recognition signal. A Soldier steps out from behind a tree and responds correctly. The unit moves closer and establishes an overwatch position. The lead fire team moves forward and challenges the Soldier with the near recognition signal. The response is correct and both Soldiers come out of hiding. The link up is complete.

After 24 hours, the Soldiers have been recovered. Their **unassisted recovery** evolved from an **immediate recovery** attempt, to a **deliberate recovery operation** and ultimately an **externally supported recovery**.

The Stryker company establishes a pick-up zone and the Soldiers are extracted to the Phase I reintegration site for a medical checkup, SERE debrief and an intelligence debriefing.

The operation's success was dependent on employing the Personnel Recovery fundamentals. The Soldiers, who had become isolated, were prepared to survive and evade. The commanders and staffs understood the PR system and had conducted staff rehearsals and exercises for recovery missions. The PR staff ensured that every unit understood the recovery protocols. The forces involved in conducting the recovery operations had routinely rehearsed their actions.

As you returned to your desk on the floor, you think back to your training at Fort Benning and your time as a platoon leader and you understand how the Army's Personnel Recovery program really puts teeth into the Warrior Ethos:

I will always place the mission first.

I will never accept defeat.

I will never quit.

I will never leave a fallen comrade.

For additional information on the Army Personnel Recovery program,

* Contact your BCT PRO;

* Consult FM 3-50.1, *Army Personnel Recovery*;

* Review the Personnel Recovery Program Chain Teaching Program.

* Access the HQDA PR Web site — <https://www.us.army.mil/suite/page/373835>; or

* Contact the Army PR office at (703) 692-3115/3116/3117/3045/3143 (DSN 222).

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