

Preparing the Force:

Evasion and Personnel Recovery Training at Home Station

By CPT Jason Nichols

The warfighters of today share the common challenge of thriving in the unknown. Complex threats and adversaries develop worldwide while the defenders of our Nation focus on fighting the “hybrid threat.” As we transition to meet these growing threats on the battlefield, it is essential that we prepare our warfighters to succeed in isolation situations, wherever the unknown takes us.

In 2015, B Troop, 1st Squadron 6th Cavalry Regiment (1-6 CAV), 1st Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB), 1st Infantry Division conducted a rigorous evasion and personnel recovery (PR) training program at Fort Riley, Kansas to prepare for future combat operations. The objective was simple: leverage available resources to provide all unit personnel with effective and realistic evasion and PR training at home station. The gated training plan included critical updates to isolated personnel records - including in-depth academic training which included refresher classes on PR operations, and a

greater than 360 square kilometers of land with which to train, Fort Riley offers a great home station opportunity to maximize training in a field environment. Event planners selected ten days to conduct training. They reserved an individual weapon live fire range, a complex live fire range, and 22 square kilometers of land consisting of main and improved roads, tank trails, streams, urban clusters, and rolling hills with an average elevation change of 60 meters in varying elevation gradients. These provided an optimal environment to train individual reflexive fire, break contact, evasion, and personnel recovery.

vision goggles (NVG). The break contact live fire exercise required additional planning as it is considered a non-standard range operation. Working with range control, the lead planner coordinated the use of a small urban site and the surrounding fields on a larger range to create safety fans, firing



A lane safety and a 1-6 CAV fire team overlook the Break Contact Live Fire range.



A 1-6 CAV Trooper engages targets during the Break Contact live fire exercise as his teammate bounds back to cover.



The Evasion Team Leader contacts the PRCC using a CSEL radio from their hide site.

hands-on “train-up” with advanced marksmanship training. This extensive preparation culminated in a collective evasion and PR training event.

Planning & Resources

With more than 20 live fire ranges and

Research of adversary tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) indicate the likely use of dogs to track isolated personnel; therefore, as an additional level of realism for our exercise, Fort Riley’s 89th Military Police Military Working Dog (MWD) Detachment participated as members of the opposing force (OPFOR).

A reflexive fire drill introduced unit personnel to the practical application of the M4 carbine weapon system in close quarters. Additionally, the Soldiers trained on transitioning to the M9 pistol, as well as firing both weapon systems under night

points, a target array, and firing sequence. Soldiers shot, moved, and communicated throughout the range in teams representing the crew of a downed aircraft.

The CAB’s 2-1 General Support Aviation Battalion and 3-1 Assault Helicopter Battalion provided support for the evasion/PR event. These lift assets provided unit personnel realistic training on the critical pick-up phase of a PR scenario.

Training & Execution

The intent of the “Train-up” phase was to bring a mix of Soldiers together that

included not only aircrews but other personnel representing a variety of military occupational specialties and levels of experience who would likely be on board a downed aircraft. The intent was to establish a baseline of the fundamental skills required for upcoming field training events.

The CAB's Judge Advocate General representative instructed Soldiers on the legal aspect of an isolation event through a "Law of Armed Conflict" brief. The 1-6 CAV S-2 presented a real-world threat brief based on current events and after-action review experiences and also briefed the unit on capabilities and TTP employed by "near-peer," adversaries. Other topics taught included code of conduct, basic evasion, basic survival, Combat Survivor Evader Locator radio operation, introduction to special instructions, individual plan of action, and evasion plan of action.

Unit personnel were required to meet proficiency "gates" during the "walk phase" in order to participate in the "run phase" that consisted of live fire exercises and a two day field problem. Soldiers focused on basics that included day and night land navigation and M4 weapons qualification. These gates mitigated risks and led to an exercise flowing from a break contact live fire to reflexive fire lanes under day and night conditions, and a 24-hour evasion.

The break-contact live-fire range was set at the base of a hill, approximately 300 meters

long, consisting of orange Jersey barriers, de-milled vehicles, wooden buildings, and hand-placed pop-up targets remotely controlled by a range cadre member. This portion of the exercise simulated clearing a downed aircraft and the initial movement to cover. Firers conducted the range in teams of two, simultaneously executing separate lanes while each firer was positively controlled by range control personnel. Once cleared to start, the team quickly deployed their M4s, engaging pop-up targets approximately 50-75 meters away. The team conservatively engaged targets as they synchronized movements using concise communication. Following their final magazine change, the fire team made the decision to make their final bound to the nearby wood line for what would mark the transition from break contact to evasion. The team's efforts continued to focus on rifle and pistol reflexive engagement exercises the following day and culminated with night engagements using NVG.

Once the Soldiers completed advanced weapons training, UH-60s dispersed teams in the training area for the evasion portion of the exercise. The storyline was that the aircraft was forced down by enemy fire and to avoid capture, the crew needed to initiate evasion procedures. Once isolated, immediate priorities were to establish security, assess the situation, and contact 1CAB's Personnel Recovery Coordination Cell (PRCC) to communicate the status of the team and coordinate rescue.

As the storyline progressed, the PRCC could not affect an immediate rescue attempt necessitating that the crews evade a pursuing enemy for the next 24 hours. The OPFOR, resourced with a MWD team, 5.56mm blank rounds, artillery simulators, and smoke grenades, were able to replicate a realistic threat and a true sense for the evasion teams of being hunted by a determined enemy.

After evading the enemy for more than 24 hours, evaders approached their link-up points for extraction. The evasion teams held at a consolidated pick-up zone (PZ) as directed by the PRCC and were successfully recovered by CH-47.

As a result of this training, 1-6 Cav Soldiers obtained quality PR skills and are better prepared to perform in an isolation event wherever they are deployed to meet the next threat. Given the potential risk and probability of isolated personnel events in the current global environment, PR training is essential to mission readiness. Through employment of home station training resources, teamwork of adjacent units, and creative training solutions, leaders from all branches of service have the capability to conduct PR training to build confidence and capacity in isolated personnel events.



1-6 CAV Troopers board the CH-47F "Freedom Bird" after 24 hours of evasion.

CPT Jason Nichols is presently attending the Maneuver Captains Career Course at Fort Benning, GA. CPT Nichols' previous assignments include Commander, B Troop, 1st Squadron, 6th Cavalry Regiment and S-4, assistant S-3, and platoon leader for Task Force Saber. He has deployed for Operation Enduring Freedom XIII. CPT Nichols has seven years' service. He is qualified in the OH-58D.

Acronym Reference

1-6 CAV - 1 st Squadron 6 th Cavalry Regiment	PR - personnel recovery
CAB - combat aviation brigade	PRCC - Personnel Recovery Coordination Cell
MWD - military working dog	PZ - pick-up zone
NVG - night vision goggles	TTP - tactics, techniques, and procedures
OPFOR - opposing force	

