

Training Rules of Engagement: Beyond the Briefings

Soldiers Need Clear Standards and Good Examples

by Captain Daniel M. Froehlich

Posavina Corridor, Bosnia-Herzegovina: Private First Class Thompson, a 19-year-old M1A1 driver, occupies a checkpoint along a major thoroughfare. Elsewhere in the zone of separation, other members of the heavy task force conduct dismounted patrols along back roads. The unit is tasked with monitoring and enforcing the peace accord. Prior to his¹ deployment, PFC Thompson received several weeks of training in Germany on Stability and Support Operations (SASO). During the training, he was instructed that "if attacked or facing a clearly imminent attack," he was to use "necessary force" to defend himself. In addition, his leaders educated him on the importance of avoiding excessive force in his dealings with the native population, and his liability under the Uniformed Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) if he overstepped the boundary of "excessive force." During his week-long stay in Bosnia, Thompson has received daily Rules of Engagement (ROE) briefings that constantly adjusted the conditions under which he was expected to accomplish his somewhat ambiguous mission. The briefings issued changes on the control and arming status of his weapon and ammunition, added or removed prohibitions on the use of the weapon systems on his M1A1 tank, and dictated various measures to be taken to detain "criminals," among other instructions. The pocket of his flak jacket contained the waterproofed ROE "Blue Card,"² at right.

With his supervisor temporarily absent, PFC Thompson notices a van approaching the checkpoint at about 40 miles per hour. As it comes within 75 meters of the wire barrier at the front of his position, he realizes that the van has not begun to decelerate. Thompson has less than five seconds to choose and execute a course of action, under high-stress conditions. Further muddling his decision process, the ROE have fluctuated daily, and, his platoon leader admits, "have a lot of gray area."³

Despite the best of intentions and Herculean efforts by commanders and their

OPERATION CONSTANT GUARD COMMANDER'S GUIDE ON USE OF FORCE

MISSION

Your mission is to implement the Peace Plan.

SELF DEFENSE

1. You have the right to use force (including authorized weapons as necessary) in self-defense.
2. Use only the minimum force necessary to defend yourself.

GENERAL RULES

1. Use the minimum force necessary to accomplish your mission.
2. Hostile forces/belligerents who want to surrender will not be harmed. Disarm them and turn them over to your superiors.
3. Treat everyone, including civilians and detained hostile forces/belligerents, humanely.
4. Collect and care for the wounded, whether friend or foe.
5. Respect private property. Do not steal. Do not take "war trophies."
6. Prevent and report all suspected violations of the law of armed conflict to superiors.

CHALLENGE AND WARNING SHOTS

1. If the situation permits, issue a challenge:

IN ENGLISH

"SFOR, STOP OR I WILL FIRE!"

OR IN SERBO-CROAT:

"SFOR, STANI ILI PUCAM!"

Pronounced as:

"SFOR, STANI ILI PUT SAM!"

2. If the person fails to halt, you may be authorized by the senior soldier present or by standing orders to fire a warning shot.

OPENING FIRE

1. You may open fire only if you, friendly forces, persons or property under your protection are threatened with deadly force. This means:
 - A. You may open fire against an individual who fires or aims his weapon at you, friendly forces or persons under your protection.
 - B. You may open fire against an individual who plants, throws, or prepares to throw an explosive or incendiary device at you, friendly forces, or persons or property under your protection.
 - C. You may open fire against an individual who deliberately drives a vehicle at you, friendly forces, persons with designated special status, or property designated special status.
2. You may also fire against an individual who attempts to take possession of friendly force weapons, ammunition, or protected property, and there is no other way of avoiding it.
3. You may use minimum force, including opening fire, against an individual who unlawfully commits, or is about to commit, an act which endangers life or is likely to cause serious bodily harm, in circumstances where there is no other way to prevent the act.

MINIMUM FORCE

1. If you have to open fire, you must: fire only aimed shots, and fire no more rounds than necessary, and take all reasonable efforts not to unnecessarily destroy property and stop firing as soon as the situation PERMITS.
2. You may not intentionally attack civilians or property that is exclusively civilian or religious in character, except if the property is being used for military purposes and engagement is authorized by your commander.

NATO UNCLASSIFIED

staffs at all levels, the current approach most U.S. Army armored units⁴ use to translate ROE into applicable knowledge is inadequate. It is critical for armored

force commanders to find an effective method to convey rules of engagement to soldiers. Without clear standards and good examples, two dangers will con-

continue to threaten mission success. The first danger is that soldiers will not respond to a threat aggressively enough, endangering themselves, other soldiers, or critical facilities. The second danger is that soldiers will respond too aggressively, needlessly harming noncombatants, and possibly jeopardizing strategic or political goals.

Before exploring the characteristics of the current ROE model, it is necessary to discuss the definition and function of ROE. Rules of Engagement are the "directives issued by a competent military authority which delineate the circumstances and limitations under which U.S. forces will initiate and/or continue combat engagement with other forces encountered."⁵ ROE are created to serve a variety of political, diplomatic, legal, and military purposes. They are based on two core rules: necessity and proportionality. In order for U.S. forces to use force, a hostile act or hostile intent must be present (necessity), and the force must be scaled in magnitude, duration, and intensity to the threat (proportionality). Specific ROE are dictated by commanders using a formula of restrictions, situational guidance, and readiness postures. For example, a unit may have its ROE defined by weapons control status, alert conditions, challenging procedures, or territorial restraints.⁶

What constitutes a "good" set of ROE? In general, successful ROE must be internalized by the soldier, and must:

guide the soldier to wary but restrained actions, both in combat when facing civilians or prisoners, and in operations other than war when facing any individual or force that the command has not declared hostile. Just as important, these "baseline" ROE must guide the soldier to initiate aggressive action, regardless of the environment, against those who either fit the description of a previously identified hostile force or display hostile acts or intentions toward American forces.⁷

The current process most U.S. armored forces use to convey ROE to soldiers relies on a legislative paradigm to influence soldier conduct. In other words, ROE are written as a series of "laws" that authorities issue and that soldiers are required to interpret and obey.⁸ Examples of these legislative expressions can be found in operations orders, annexes, and on laminated note cards throughout U.S. and other land forces. U.S. Army doctrine sanctions the current model.⁹

The legislative model relies on the individual soldier to translate and make rapid decisions based on a dynamic list of rules that he may not have memorized and almost certainly has not internalized. This can unnecessarily jeopardize mission accomplishment and soldier well-being. To begin with, it is virtually impossible for commanders to control concrete situations using abstract rules. For example, the ROE card the soldier in the above scenario carried in his flak jacket is far from clear on exactly what he should do if he spots a man with an RPG in a crowd of civilians. Under the legislative paradigm, developers of ROE have two options: Either attempt to foresee every possible scenario, and address them with specific rules, or rely on the soldier who is on the ground to make a decision based on a more generic list of rules. The former tends to generate a long, complex tangle of rules, requirements, and explanations that may begin to contradict each other and require the soldier to sift through lists to find the appropriate response. Sifting through lists is fine for attorneys and accountants; unfortunately, soldiers rarely have that kind of time in a threat situation. Attempts to address all contingencies are doomed to fail due to the sheer complexity of the real world.

Trusting soldiers to react appropriately using a short rule list as a guide seems preferable, given the U.S. Army's justifiable pride in the individual initiative of its personnel. Unfortunately, the legislative model tends to have a negative effect on soldier initiative. Ground troops, reluctant to use force out of fear they will be punished for responding excessively, have a tendency to respond tentatively to threats. Reports from U.S. operations in Lebanon in 1983, Panama in 1989, Somalia in 1993, and, most recently Bosnia, indicate that soldiers and Marines tend to be very nervous about invoking ROE to defend themselves. This problem partially contributed to the devastating suicide bombing of the Marine Corps barracks in Beirut in 1983.¹⁰ It is simply a matter of time before another U.S. service member fails to react aggressively enough.

The opposite hazard, that of a soldier or unit acting too aggressively, is also increased by the legislative model. Both dangers are due to soldiers' inability (or lack of confidence in their ability) to interpret and apply the ROE. Like any other military skill, the key to successful implementation of ROE lies in effective, result-oriented training; the more the better. Unfortunately, the legislative ap-

STANDING RULES OF FORCE FOR THE INDIVIDUAL SOLDIER

"R-A-M-P"

Return fire with aimed fire. Return force with force. You always have the right to repel hostile acts with necessary force.

Anticipate attack. Use force first if, but only if, you see clear indicators of hostile intent. (**Hand SALUTE**)

Hand: What is in his hands?

Size: How many?

Activity: What are they doing?

Location: Within range?

Uniform: Are they in uniform?

Time: How soon before they are upon you?

Equipment: If armed, with what?

Measure the amount of force that you use, if time and circumstances permit. Use only the amount of force necessary to protect lives and accomplish the mission. (**VEWPRIK**)¹⁴

Verbal warning

Exhibit weapon

Warning shot

Pepper spray

Rifle buttstroke

Injure with bayonet

Kill with fire

Protect with deadly force only human life, and property designated by your commander. Stop short of deadly force when protecting other property.

proach makes it extremely difficult to train soldiers before a crisis occurs. Under the current system, after authorities have decided to commit U.S. heavy forces into a theater, the ROE for the current situation is disseminated to the deploying units. The units then begin their initial training on the ROE. There are two problems with this approach. First, it minimizes the amount of time available for ROE training. As the U.S. Army moves to a force projection force, the time gap between the decision to commit heavy forces and their actual deployment is shrinking. While most heavy units now in Bosnia received extensive theater-specific ROE training, that may not always be the case. Second, the training is focused on one particular crisis scenario. The only portion of the legislative model ROE that remains constant is some type of self-defense clause, and even that is interpreted differently throughout the Army. Standardized, thorough training on ROE within the armored force is virtually non-existent.

U.S. heavy forces need a standardized, flexible, training-based model that can impart an ROE foundation in a fashion that allows soldiers to internalize key principles, rather than attempting to memorize unique lists of rules during specific operational deployments. Fortunately, such a model already exists. It has been used successfully for several years by the XVIIIth Airborne Corps, including the then-24th ID (Mech), as the basis for ROE training and execution. The model is based on the acronym R-A-M-P.¹¹ RAMP is to ROE what METT-T¹² is to tactical decision making, or SPORTS¹³ is to correcting a malfunction of an M-16 rifle. It is a mnemonic device that captures standing rules of force for the individual soldier.

The RAMP system has several advantages over the legislative model currently in use by most U.S. heavy forces. First and foremost, it is a system, not just a collection of rules. While RAMP can never replace specific ROE for a given situation, it allows leaders to conduct standardized ROE training far enough in advance to be effective, not just when a deployment into a crisis is approaching. Instead of trying to communicate appropriate responses to an unlimited number of contingencies using daily briefings and laminated cards, RAMP provides leaders with a foundation on which they can base objective training. Training should focus on the individual's ability to apply the RAMP rules in his decision making. This process allows soldiers to develop their analytical skills and mentally organize the

feedback they receive using the RAMP framework. This is preferable to training with a set of ROE that changes from mission to mission. Because soldiers can easily memorize the RAMP principles, they are able to focus on the situation, rather than trying to remember what the laminated card in their pocket says. While conditions affecting their interpretation of the principles may change, the principles themselves do not. By training with RAMP, soldiers can internalize principles through rehearsals and situational training, increasing their ability to make good decisions during an actual event. In the same way that the mnemonic device "METT-T" helps a leader correctly analyze a tactical situation, or that "SPORTS" enables a rifleman to rapidly clear a deformed cartridge from a muddy rifle at night, RAMP assists soldiers by organizing their experiences gained through training. Under stress, a soldier will instinctively refer to familiar principles. These principles, reinforced by the associated experiences gained by the soldier over time, will guide his responses to crisis situations across the entire range of conflict.

As alluded to above, RAMP provides a flexible framework that can be tailored for specific missions. This allows units to conduct general ROE training on a basic model, while allowing for a complex set of contingencies. Each component of RAMP can be supplemented based on the mission criteria. For example, soldiers can be instructed to consider anyone wearing the uniform of the North Korean People's Army to be demonstrating "hostile intent," thereby subject to a preemptive strike under the principle of "Anticipate attack." Another example: when conducting stability operations, a commander could stipulate engagement criteria for a tank main gun by adding specific instructions to the "Measure the amount of force" rule. These adjustments can be pre-planned and standardized by division staffs using ROE annexes and ROE Alert Conditions (ROECONs).¹⁵ This allows commanders to supplement the core RAMP rules with additional controls while providing the basis for training scenarios and unit Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTPs). The result is a model that is training-based and that is applicable in operations from disaster relief to high-intensity conflict.

Armored forces will continue to be called upon to perform an increasingly complex set of missions. These missions carry with them an equally complex set of ROE. The current legislative model of ROE development and dissemination is

not equal to the challenge. An effective system to train the armored force on ROE prior to deployment is badly needed. The new model would need to give the individual soldier a chance to make decisions based on internalized principles, reinforced by experiences collected in training. An additional challenge to leaders is to prepare their soldiers for non-traditional operations efficiently, maintaining as much focus as possible on the business of war. The RAMP model of standing rules of force provides a highly effective, training-based method of imparting a working knowledge of ROE to soldiers. It is a highly flexible system, providing a foundation of understanding that can be readily expanded to support the full spectrum of conflict. As such, training on ROE using RAMP supports the non-traditional roles of an armored force without detracting from its war-fighting focus.

How might the RAMP model help PFC Thompson resolve his dilemma? With the van rapidly approaching his position, his adrenaline begins to flow. Thompson quickly glances around to see if any of his supervisors are noticing the threatening scenario unfolding. Unsure of the magnitude of the threat, realizing that he is on his own, he takes action.

Anticipating attack, he chambers a round, and moves the selector switch on his M-16A2 rifle off "safe." Measuring the amount of force against a possible but uncertain threat, he fires several rounds at one of the van's front tires, causing it to burst. Soldiers and civilians in the area dive to the ground at the sound of the gunshots. The van swerves, and comes to a skidding halt to the side of the road, thirty meters from the checkpoint's first barrier.

The driver and his passengers, a group of young adolescents, climb out of the vehicle, visibly shaken. After a discussion with the U.S. forces' translator, it becomes apparent that the driver, momentarily distracted by some teenage horseplay in the back of his van, had taken his eyes off the road ahead of him. After gathering his wits, the driver begins to demand reimbursement for the damage done to his van.

Given 20/20 hindsight, the private made an adequate, if imperfect decision. That, however, is irrelevant. In an imperfect world, he must make his choices based on incomplete information and under severe time constraints. What is relevant is that the RAMP training he received gave him an accessible, logical framework on which he based his decision.

RAMP is not a universal remedy. Adoption of a RAMP-based training model, reinforced with mission-specific ROE, will not guarantee the optimal outcome in every situation. Some trigger-pullers will inevitably misread situations, freeze under pressure, or make errors in judgment. It is, however, an excellent means to improve the chance of favorable outcomes for U.S. forces. The sooner U.S. armored forces implement the RAMP model, the better for the soldier at the checkpoint.¹⁶

Notes

¹Unless otherwise specified, masculine pronouns in this article should be read as referring to either gender.

²Sample ROE Card from JA 422 (Operational Law Handbook). Used by NATO ground forces in Operation CONSTANT GUARD.

³Fictional scenario based on information obtained from interview with 1LT Jim Pugh, 27 APR 98, at Fort Knox, Ky. 1LT Pugh served as a tank platoon and mortar platoon leader with 4-67 AR (Later 1-37 AR) in Bosnia from Feb 96 to Sep 96. The scenario does not describe actual actions taken by that unit.

⁴The following argument also applies to USMC armored forces. Throughout this article, "soldier" can also be read "marine."

⁵FM 101-5-1.

⁶Major Mark S. Martins, Rules of Engagement for Land Forces: A Matter of Training, Not Lawyering in *Military Law Review*, Vol. 143, 1994, pp 25-33. Major Martins, a onetime infantry officer, now a JAG officer, played a critical role in the development of the RAMP model, discussed later in this paper. Many of the arguments presented here are presented and further expounded in Maj. Martins' *Military Law Review* article. Further references to this article will be referred to as "Martins, *MLR*."

⁷Martins, *MLR*, p. 82.

⁸Martins, *MLR*, p. 55.

⁹FM 100-23 (*Peace Operations*), Chp 3 and App. D.

¹⁰Martins, *MLR*, p. 5-6.

¹¹Martins, *MLR*, p. 86.

¹²METT-T is an acronym representing five factors that must be considered in the analysis of a tactical situation. These factors are: Mission, Enemy, Terrain, Troops, Time available.

¹³SPORTS is a mnemonic device representing the actions a rifleman immediately performs when his M-16 rifle does not fire. These actions are: Slap up on the magazine; Pull the charging handle to the rear; Observe the round in the chamber; Release the charging handle; Tap the forward assist; Squeeze the trigger. Performing SPORTS is a reflex action to a well-trained infantry soldier.

¹⁴*The Battle for Hunger Hill*, LTC Daniel P. Bolger, p. 99. The Hand SALUTE and VEWPRIK devices were developed by LTC Bolger and MAJ Martins, and were successfully used by soldiers of LTC Bolger's 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment at the Joint Readiness Training Center and on a peacekeeping deployment to Haiti.

¹⁵Martins, *MLR*, pp. 93-102.

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