

RECOVERY S.O.P.



STANDARD OPERATING
PROCEDURES:
A VETERAN'S GUIDE TO RECOVERY

VETERAN



**If you are in crisis, help
is available 24/7**

Recovery S.O.P.

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

A Veteran's Guide to Recovery

By

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and

Hollis Ray Robinson

VETERANS' CREED

I am a veteran.

*I have seen and done things many may not
understand.*

I am a warrior.

I will never accept defeat.

I will never quit.

I will never leave a fallen comrade behind.

If they are hurt, I will carry them.

If I can't carry them, I will drag them.

I will help them face their enemies,

including the demons within.

They are my brothers. They are my sisters.

I am a Veteran.

“Pain is okay.

Falling down is okay.

Crawling is okay.

Bleeding is okay.

Quitting is not.”

Recovery S.O.P. – A Veteran's Guide to Recovery

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The information, strategies, metaphors, and analogies used in this book, particularly those inspired by military language, are meant to assist in conceptual understanding and motivation in the context of personal recovery. They are not prescriptive or exhaustive.

Recovery is a deeply personal journey, and each individual's path is unique. While this book may serve as a valuable tool in a broader recovery toolbox, it does not guarantee success or healing. Readers are strongly encouraged to seek support from licensed healthcare professionals, counselors, peer specialists, and other qualified providers.

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If you or someone you know is in immediate crisis, please contact emergency services or reach out to a qualified mental health professional or crisis hotline in your area.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Paul D. Dukes and Hollis Ray Robinson are the co-authors of *Recovery SOP: A Veteran's Guide to Recovery*. Both are proud military Veterans, Certified Peer Support Specialists and Founders of Give Out Smiles 501(c)(3), who have faced challenges in and out of the military, carrying the weight of service and the battles that follow.

Together, they bring not only their stories of resilience but also their commitment as certified peer support specialists. Having walked the difficult road of addiction, trauma, and transition themselves, they now dedicate their lives to walking beside others: fellow veterans, first responders, and anyone still fighting the invisible wars within.

Their mission is clear: recovery is not a solitary assignment. It is a team effort, a call to action, and a way of life. Through honesty, humility, and a promise to “Watch each other's six,” Dukes and Robinson continue to serve by guiding others toward healing, strength, and hope.

DEDICATION

To all the brave men and women of the United States Armed Forces.

From every branch, past and present, who have stood in harm's way to protect our freedoms, our families, and our future.

This book is dedicated to your courage, your sacrifice, and your unwavering commitment to a cause greater than yourselves.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to Denice Rembert, a counselor with the White City VA, for her exceptional teaching style and unwavering support in helping veterans navigate their struggles.

Her guidance, compassion, and dedication to those she serves have made a lasting impact. Without her influence and encouragement, this book would not have been written.

INTRODUCTION

Recovery isn't for the faint of heart. It's not a retreat; it's a redeployment.

If you're holding this book, chances are you've worn a uniform, answered the call, or fought battles that most people will never see. You may have faced gunfire or grief, trauma or addiction, loss or isolation. And now, in the silence after the war, you're facing the most personal mission of all: reclaiming yourself.

This book was born from the language of military service and the path of recovery. Each chapter pairs a familiar term from your professional life with a powerful principle for healing. From 'boots on the ground' to 'PCS,' these pages speak in your language, honor your experience, and offer you a new way forward.

This isn't theory. This is a map. A mission brief. A field guide for coming home not just to a place, but to yourself.

Recovery is not about forgetting what you've been through. It's about integrating it. Honoring the pain. Owning the lessons. And forging a new identity that's not defined by the past but strengthened by it.

You don't have to march this path alone. Others have walked it. Others are walking it now. And together, we can cover each other's six, speak truth in hard moments, and ensure no one gets left behind.

This is your time. This is your mission. And you already have what it takes. Let's get to work.

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Boots on the Ground

Boots on the Ground

Military Definition

In military terms, “boots on the ground” refers to the physical presence of troops in a combat zone or designated area of operation. It marks the moment when planning ends and action begins. Strategy becomes reality. Whether it’s a peacekeeping mission or active combat, once boots hit the soil, the mission is live. It’s the unmistakable symbol of commitment, presence, and readiness.

The Significance in Uniform

Every military operation begins with orders, but it’s not until personnel are deployed that true engagement happens. From a tactical standpoint, boots on the ground give commanders real-time awareness, logistical leverage, and control of the terrain. For the soldier, it means adapting, orienting, and moving with intention in a new environment, no matter how uncertain, foreign, or dangerous.

Translation to Civilian Life and Recovery

In recovery, “boots on the ground” means showing up, fully. It means not just thinking about healing, reading about sobriety, or talking about change, but

physically placing yourself into recovery environments and beginning the process.

Just like a soldier steps into unfamiliar territory, someone in recovery steps into meetings, therapy, group sessions, or sober housing with the same courage. It might feel awkward, threatening, or uncomfortable at first. But presence, raw, honest, physical presence is where the mission of recovery truly begins.

The Power of Presence

You may feel broken. You may feel lost. But when you place your feet on the floor, walk through the door, and take a seat in that recovery meeting or clinical session, you are declaring, I'm here. I'm ready. I'm willing to engage. That willingness, even if fragile, is enough to start a transformation.

A Personal Example

Imagine a veteran waking up after another night of heavy drinking, guilt thick in the air. The thought of going to group is painful. Shame whispers, "Stay home. You don't belong." But instead, they put on clean clothes and walk into the VA recovery room. They don't say a word. They just sit and listen. That's boots on the ground. That's courage. That's recovery.

New Terrain, New Mission

Recovery, like any mission, requires situational awareness. Where am I now? Who are my allies? What are my threats? You begin to understand your environment emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. And just as soldiers set up perimeters, you begin to form boundaries. You gather intel: what triggers you, what strengthens you, what keeps you grounded.

Showing Up is Half the Victory

You don't need to have all the answers. You don't need to know the whole map. You just need to step forward, land your boots in the moment, and remain present. That simple act is the beginning of a new story.

Boots on the ground. Heart in the fight. Mind in the mission. That's where your recovery begins.



Chain of Command

Chain of Command

Military Definition

In the military, the Chain of Command is the formal line of authority that flows from the highest-ranking officer to the most junior enlisted member. It ensures clear communication, structure, and accountability within every unit. Orders move downward, responsibility moves upward, and everyone knows who they report to and who they are responsible for.

Purpose and Power of the Chain

The chain of command isn't just about rank; it's about function. In high-stress, high-risk environments, this structure keeps chaos at bay. It defines roles, responsibilities, and hierarchy. It allows missions to succeed because each person knows their place, their purpose, and their authority.

Translation to Civilian Recovery

In recovery, many of us show up with no internal structure. Addiction, trauma, or mental health issues may have created a battlefield inside us where fear or impulse has been calling the shots. That's why we need to rebuild our own internal chain of

command; where integrity leads, discipline supports, and our higher self takes point.

Reestablishing Inner Leadership

Recovery requires that we become our own commanding officer. That doesn't mean harshness or rigidity; it means clarity and accountability. Your values become your generals: honesty, courage, humility, and consistency. These values must be at the top of the chain. Your old ways, avoidance, denial, and blame are no longer in charge.

Example

You wake up feeling anxious. Your old habit tells you to cancel therapy and isolate. But your new internal leader, the one rooted in growth, says, 'Suit up and show up.' You listen. You go. That's command. That's recovery.

External Guidance Is a Strength

In the military, soldiers don't just lead, they are led. Recovery is no different. A therapist, sponsor, chaplain, or peer can be part of your external chain of command. Asking for guidance isn't weakness. It's wisdom.

Leading Through Action

You may not feel confident as a leader right away. That's okay. Leadership in recovery is built through small, consistent actions: telling the truth, honoring commitments, and showing up on time. Over time, these small wins earn trust from others and from yourself.

From Chaos to Clarity

Recovery doesn't demand perfection, but it does ask for structure. When life gets overwhelming, your internal chain of command will remind you what to do, who to listen to, and what matters most.

You're not lost. You're in charge now. You give the orders. Let your mission be guided by integrity, purpose, and truth. That's the chain of command in recovery.



Mission Brief

Mission Brief

Military Definition

A mission brief is a tactical overview delivered before any military operation. It provides vital information: the objective, known threats, environment, roles, and logistics. Everyone on the team leaves the room with clarity about what they're doing, why they're doing it, and how they'll move forward.

Why Mission Briefs Matter

In combat, a lack of clarity is deadly. The same is true in recovery. Without a mission brief, a clearly defined purpose, your recovery can feel aimless. You might go through the motions, attend meetings, and still feel lost. That's why your recovery needs a mission brief just as much as any battlefield operation.

Translation to Civilian Recovery

Recovery begins to deepen the moment you define your "why." What are you really trying to achieve? Is it sobriety? Rebuilding family trust? Finding peace? Staying alive? There's no wrong answer, but there must be an answer.

Know the Objective

Write it down. Say it aloud. Let it guide your actions. If your mission today is to stay clean, then not using is success. If your mission this week is to reconnect, then making that call is victory.

Anticipate Obstacles

In every mission brief, there's a section on threats. What are the known risks? What's the backup plan? In recovery, this means identifying your triggers. Who or what can derail your mission? Do you have exit strategies in place? Who will you call if things start to spiral?

Define Roles

Even in personal recovery, you are not alone. Who is on your team? Sponsor, therapist, group members, supportive friends—make it clear who plays what role in your recovery network. Let them know your mission and how they can support it.

Measure Success

Success in recovery is not about perfection. It's about staying mission aligned. If you veer off course, the goal isn't to quit. It's to regroup and re-brief. Clarity is your compass.

Example

You're sober for three weeks. The weekend is approaching, and your old party crew invites you out. You pause. Review your mission. You call your sponsor instead. You go to a meeting. You stay home and journal. That's a mission brief in action. You anticipated the threat, clarified your goal, and made a decision based on the mission, not the moment.

A soldier never enters the field without a brief. Don't enter your recovery blind. Define your why. Clarify your path. Prepare your mind. The mission is your life, and it's worth every ounce of preparation.



S.O.P.

S.O.P.

Military Definition

In the military, SOP stands for Standard Operating Procedure. These are written, detailed instructions for how specific tasks are to be carried out. SOPs ensure consistency, safety, and efficiency, especially under pressure. In the middle of chaos, SOPs are what keep everything functioning. You don't have to think about every move. You follow the protocol. It saves lives.

The Role of SOPs in Service

Whether it's disassembling a weapon, executing a medevac, or responding to a threat, SOPs eliminate guesswork. They create rhythm, discipline, and order. Soldiers learn them, drill them, and trust them.

Translation to Civilian Recovery

In recovery, having a personal SOP can make the difference between chaos and clarity. Early recovery is often disorienting. Emotions run high, cravings hit unexpectedly, and the mind can turn against itself. A recovery SOP grounds you in routine. It keeps you moving even when motivation is low or thoughts are overwhelming.

Why Routine Matters

Unstructured time can be dangerous. It invites relapse, regression, and self-doubt. But with a clear recovery SOP, your day has structure, purpose, and flow. The goal isn't rigidity, it's reliability. Like muscle memory for the soul.

Build Your Personal SOP

Your SOP should reflect your values, needs, and goals. It doesn't need to be perfect—just consistent. Here are examples of what might be in it:

- Wake up at the same time daily
- Make your bed (start with a win)
- Attend a meeting or recovery check-in
- Practice hygiene and dress with intention
- Eat nourishing meals
- Journal, pray, or meditate
- Call a sponsor, friend, or peer
- Get physical activity (walk, stretch, train)
- Wind down with a bedtime routine

Example

You wake up feeling off. Instead of drifting, you turn to your SOP. You shower. You journal. You text your peer. You go to a meeting. You follow the routine even when it feels robotic. By the end of the day, your mood has shifted. You didn't need to feel good to do good. You followed the procedure and it worked.

Consistency Builds Resilience

In the military, SOPs are followed under stress. They train you to act when thinking fails. In recovery, your routine becomes your fallback plan. It's what keeps you grounded when emotions spike or cravings sneak in.

SOPs don't just create order; they build identity. When you follow your recovery routine, you become someone who shows up, who follows through, who stays the course. And that consistency creates the stability you've been searching for.

Recovery doesn't ask for perfection. It asks for presence, persistence, and a plan. Let your SOP be the plan that brings you home, one steady step at a time.



Battle Rhythm

Battle Rhythm

Military Definition

In military operations, a Battle Rhythm is the deliberate daily schedule that keeps a unit functioning efficiently. It includes planning meetings, briefings, shift changes, maintenance, and mission-specific routines. It's a structured cadence that brings order and predictability to environments that are often chaotic.

Why Battle Rhythm Matters

Battle rhythm creates stability. When soldiers know what's coming next, they're not wasting energy on uncertainty. Instead, they stay focused on execution. It aligns all parts of the unit, from command to field, to work cohesively and efficiently.

Translation to Civilian Recovery

In recovery, your battle rhythm is the flow of your daily and weekly routines. It provides the tempo for your healing. Just like in combat, recovery can feel unpredictable at times. But rhythm and routine reduce friction. It turns chaos into clarity.

Your Personal Tempo

Everyone's recovery rhythm looks different, but it should reflect your needs, energy, and priorities. It's not just about staying busy; it's about staying aligned. Your rhythm can include physical, emotional, social, and spiritual checkpoints.

Establishing a Battle Rhythm

Here's a sample structure:

- Morning: Wake up, journal, stretch, set intentions
- Midday: Attend a meeting, therapy, or check-in with support
- Afternoon: Engage in purposeful activity (work, volunteer, create)
- Evening: Reflect, relax, and review your day
- Weekly: Plan out tasks, meals, recovery goals, and self-care

Example

A recovering veteran starts each day with coffee and 10 minutes of journaling. At lunch, they call a recovery buddy or join a Zoom meeting. Evenings are reserved for reflection and light reading. Weekends include one in-person group and grocery

prep for the week. This rhythm becomes second nature, and when life throws a curveball, it's easier to recover alignment.

Consistency Over Intensity

You don't need a strict schedule. You need a sustainable rhythm. Something you can return to, even after disruptions. Rhythm is more forgiving than a rigid checklist. It allows flow without losing direction.

Think of your battle rhythm as the heartbeat of your recovery. It pulses with intention. It moves with purpose. And over time, it becomes the music of your transformation.

Let your rhythm carry you through the chaos. One beat, one day, one mission at a time.



PT

PT

Military Definition

PT (Physical Training) is a foundational part of military life. It's not just about fitness; it's about discipline, preparation, and cohesion. PT strengthens the body for battle and sharpens the mind under stress. It builds confidence, stamina, and camaraderie.

Why PT Matters in Service

Military units train physically not only to stay fit but to stay functional. Strong bodies can carry more, endure more, and recover faster. But PT is also a mental ritual. It proves to the soldier each day that they are capable of effort, of improvement, and of endurance.

Translation to Civilian Recovery

In recovery, physical training becomes a form of medicine. Movement has been proven to improve mental health, reduce cravings, and stabilize mood. It regulates your nervous system, helps with sleep, and brings your awareness back into your body. PT isn't just about getting in shape; it's about reclaiming your strength.

Movement as Medicine

You don't need a gym. You need a commitment to move. Walking, yoga, hiking, stretching, push-ups in your room, it all counts. Regular movement reconnects you with your body, which is often a source of shame or disconnection after trauma or addiction. PT helps you inhabit your body again with purpose.

Designing a Recovery PT Routine

- Start small. Five minutes a day can grow into a habit.
- Be consistent. Routine is more important than intensity.
- Choose what feels good. Walks. Dance. Lifting. Stretching.
- Set goals that aren't about weight, but about resilience.
- Use PT as an emotional reset button.

Example

A recovering Marine with chronic anxiety begins each morning with 10 push-ups and a brisk walk. The movement grounds him. It lowers his stress. It

creates momentum. That daily practice becomes a pillar of his recovery rhythm.

Healing Through Movement

Many veterans carry trauma in the body. Movement helps release it. The tension, the fight-or-flight wiring, the held grief begins to shift when we move. PT can be prayer. It can be meditation. It can be therapy. It all depends on how you show up for it.

In recovery, your body is not the enemy; it is your ally. Treat it with care. Train it with patience. Honor it with effort.

You don't have to be a warrior anymore, but you can still train like one. PT forges not just strength, but also self-respect. And that's a kind of power worth building every day.



Morale

Morale

Military Definition

In the military, morale refers to the confidence, enthusiasm, and psychological well-being of a unit or individual. High morale strengthens teamwork, commitment, and mission success. Low morale, on the other hand, can break cohesion and lead to failure, even in the presence of skill and resources.

The Role of Morale in Service

A well-trained unit with low morale is a fragile one. But a unit with moderate skill and strong morale can overcome incredible odds. Morale is about spirit. It's about inner belief. Leaders know this, which is why they work intentionally to boost morale with rituals, rest, recognition, and support.

Translation to Civilian Recovery

In recovery, morale is your inner sense of hope. It's the quiet fire that keeps you going when things get hard. When morale drops, relapse risk increases. When morale rises, motivation and resilience grow stronger.

Protecting Your Spirit

You may not always feel strong. But you can protect your morale by practicing small acts of encouragement and inspiration. Celebrate little victories. Surround yourself with support. Speak kindly to yourself. Track your progress. These things are not fluff; they're fuel.

Ways to Boost Recovery Morale

- Keep a journal of daily wins, no matter how small.
- Post affirmations or recovery quotes where you'll see them.
- Reflect on how far you've come, not how far you have to go.
- Stay around people who believe in your growth.
- Take breaks. Rest is part of recovery, not weakness.

Example

A veteran in early recovery feels frustrated after a difficult group session. Instead of spiraling, she opens her journal and reads a note she wrote to herself a week ago: 'I showed up today. I mattered. I tried.' Her morale lifts just enough to stay the course. One page saved one day.

What You Feed Will Grow

If you feed discouragement, it will spread. If you feed your spirit, it will rise. Morale doesn't mean pretending everything's fine. It means remembering that progress is possible and that you are worth the effort.

When your morale is strong, setbacks become lessons. Struggles become fuel. And hope becomes a steady companion on the road ahead.

Keep your morale high. Guard it like your recovery depends on it, because it does.



Firewatch

Firewatch

Military Definition

Firewatch is a rotating guard duty, often done overnight, where service members stay alert to protect their unit, maintain security, and respond to emergencies. It's not always glamorous. It's usually quiet. But its purpose is sacred: stay awake so others can rest.

The Purpose of Firewatch

Firewatch is about vigilance. It's about presence. The one on watch holds space for the safety and well-being of the whole group. It's a powerful act of service, even when it feels boring or lonely.

Translation to Civilian Recovery

In recovery, Firewatch symbolizes conscious awareness. It's the part of you that stays awake and watchful for signs of danger, temptation, or relapse. It's the habit of checking in, staying present, and protecting your progress.

Your Inner Firewatch

You don't need to be paranoid or hypervigilant. Firewatch in recovery is about mindfulness. About

noticing when your mood shifts. When cravings whisper. When you start skipping meetings or isolating. It's about paying attention.

Creating a Recovery Firewatch Practice

- Set a daily or weekly time to reflect: Am I slipping? Am I isolating?
- Keep a mental or written log of your emotional state.
- Have check-in buddies or sponsors you report to regularly.
- Use recovery apps to track patterns or behavior changes.
- Establish 'tripwire' behaviors that alert you when something's off.

Example

A veteran in recovery notices they've skipped two meetings in a row. Their mood has dipped. Their sleep is off. They pause and ask themselves: What's changed? That moment of awareness, of Firewatch, prompts a call to their sponsor and a return to meetings. A potential relapse was caught before it could grow.

We All Take Turns

In military life, Firewatch is a shared responsibility. In recovery, it can be too. Sometimes you're standing watch for others, calling them out with love when they drift. Sometimes they're standing watch for you. Recovery communities thrive when we all stay alert together.

You've come too far to let your guard down now. Keep watch. Stay mindful. Be honest. The quiet work of awareness is what keeps the flame of recovery burning through the night.

Firewatch isn't about fear; it's about love. It says: I care enough to stay awake. I care enough to protect this life I'm building. Even when no one sees, I'm standing guard.



COMMS

Comms

Military Definition

Comms, short for communications, is the lifeline of military operations. Without effective communication, missions fall apart. Comms includes everything from radio signals and command briefings to hand signals and written orders. Precision, clarity, and timeliness are essential.

Why Comms Matters in Service

In the field, miscommunication can cost lives. That's why communication protocols are drilled over and over again. It's not just about talking; it's about transmitting the right message, through the right channel, at the right time.

Translation to Civilian Recovery

In recovery, communication becomes equally critical. Isolation is dangerous. Misunderstanding can lead to conflict. Bottled-up emotions can become relapse fuel. Learning how to communicate clearly, openly, and honestly is a vital skill for healing and connection.

Clear the Channel

Just like in military ops, static gets in the way of good communication. In recovery, static might be fear, shame, pride, or past trauma. Clearing the channel means learning to express your needs without defensiveness, to listen without reacting, and to share without hiding.

Ways to Strengthen Recovery Comms

- Practice honesty with yourself and others.
- Use 'I' statements to express emotions (e.g., 'I feel overwhelmed').
- Engage in active listening and repeat back what you heard.
- Schedule regular check-ins with your support network.
- Write it down, journaling is a form of self-communication.

Example

A veteran in early recovery finds it hard to express vulnerability. In a meeting, he says, 'I'm fine' when asked how he's doing. But afterward, he pulls his sponsor aside and says, 'I lied. I'm not fine. I'm scared I'll relapse.' That moment of truth becomes a

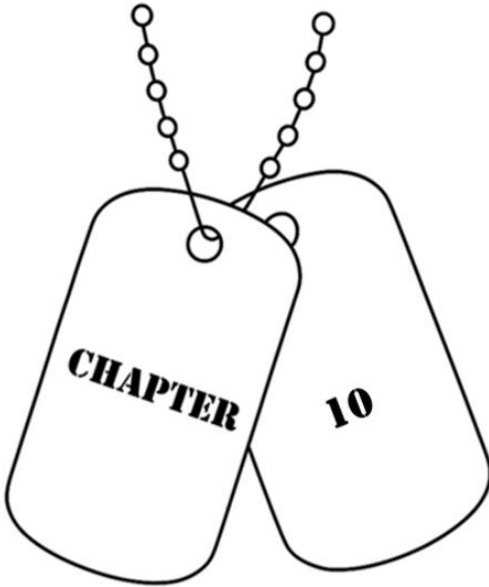
turning point. The comms are clear, and help can now arrive.

Communication Is Connection

Strong comms build strong relationships. Recovery isn't a solo mission. It's a team effort. The more you communicate, the more support you allow in. And the more support you receive, the stronger your recovery foundation becomes.

Don't let silence become your enemy. Don't let miscommunication steal your peace. Use your voice. Use your words. Even when they shake, even when they're messy, speak them.

Comms in recovery means being heard, being seen, and being understood. And sometimes, it simply means letting someone know: 'I'm here. I'm still in the fight.'



Mission Planning

Mission Planning

Military Definition

Mission Planning is the detailed process of preparing for a military operation. It includes identifying the objective, assessing risks, gathering intelligence, allocating resources, and assigning roles. A successful mission is rarely improvised; it is thoroughly planned.

Why Mission Planning Matters in Service

The battlefield is chaotic. Planning provides structure. It helps units prepare for uncertainty and adapt in real time. Every mission begins with a plan but more importantly, with clarity of purpose.

Translation to Civilian Recovery

In recovery, your life becomes the mission. Without a plan, you're at the mercy of old habits, triggers, and emotional ambushes. A recovery plan gives you structure, direction, and a reason to keep moving forward even when it's hard.

Elements of a Recovery Mission Plan

- Objective: What's your goal: sobriety, mental stability, spiritual growth?
- Intelligence: What are your triggers? Who supports you?
- Resources: Meetings, therapy, medication, exercise, support groups.
- Risks: What situations or people threaten your progress?
- Contingencies: What will you do if a relapse temptation hits?

Daily and Long-Term Planning

Mission planning isn't just about the big picture. It's about setting small, achievable goals each day that align with your long-term vision. Recovery lives in the present but it grows from vision.

Example

A veteran in recovery sets a weekly mission plan: attend three meetings, call two sober friends, exercise four times, and complete one therapy session. The structure gives him a sense of purpose and prevents him from drifting into chaos or old patterns.

Plan the Mission, Then Execute

Writing the plan is just the beginning. Following through builds trust in yourself. Each completed task reinforces belief. Each goal reached proves you're capable. The mission becomes real through action.

Don't let your life in recovery be random. Be intentional. Plan like it matters, because it does.

Recovery isn't a sprint. It's a series of missions. Plan each one with care, courage, and commitment. And when the plan fails, as plans sometimes do, adapt, revise, and reengage. The mission is still on.



Field Stripping

Field Stripping

Military Definition

Field stripping is the process of disassembling a weapon into its major components for cleaning, inspection, and maintenance. It's a regular routine that ensures the equipment stays reliable and mission-ready.

Why Field Stripping Matters in Service

Soldiers don't wait until their gear breaks to maintain it. They disassemble, inspect, clean, and reassemble routinely, whether the weapon has been fired or not. This habit creates reliability, familiarity, and discipline.

Translation to Civilian Recovery

In recovery, field stripping becomes a metaphor for self-reflection and self-care. Regularly examine your thoughts, habits, triggers, and emotions. Clean out the mental and emotional buildup before it jams your progress.

Break It Down to Build It Up

Just like with a rifle, taking yourself apart emotionally doesn't mean you're broken. It means

you're being responsible. Check in with yourself. Inspect for wear and tear. Clean out the negative gunk before it corrodes your recovery.

Field Stripping in Recovery Might Include

- Journaling to sort through thoughts.
- Talking with a mentor, therapist, or sponsor.
- Identifying toxic patterns or relationships.
- Practicing meditation or mindfulness to clear mental clutter.
- Taking breaks from overwhelming responsibilities.

Example

A veteran in recovery finds herself snapping at loved ones. Instead of blaming others, she sits down to journal. She realizes she hasn't been sleeping well or attending meetings. She resets her routine and takes a quiet day to recover. That's field stripping in action.

Maintenance Is Survival

Neglect invites breakdown. Regular maintenance prevents collapse. You don't have to wait until

everything falls apart. Catch it early. Clean it often.
Stay ready.

Field stripping reminds us that recovery isn't just
about staying clean, it's about staying well. Taking
care of the inner workings. Honoring your system.
Respecting your tools.

You are your own most vital piece of equipment.
Keep yourself mission-ready, inside and out.



Check Points

Check Points

Military Definition

Checkpoints are designated stopping or monitoring points in a mission or patrol. They're used to verify progress, check for threats, and make sure all units are accounted for. Each checkpoint ensures the mission stays on course.

Why Checkpoints Matter in Service

Without checkpoints, troops can get lost, veer off track, or walk into danger. These markers create order, provide updates, and allow leaders to assess the situation before proceeding.

Translation to Civilian Recovery

In recovery, checkpoints are your moments of reflection and accountability. They give you a chance to pause, assess your progress, recognize warning signs, and adjust your path if needed.

Establishing Recovery Checkpoints

- Daily: Morning meditation, evening journaling, mood check-ins.
- Weekly: Meeting attendance, sponsor calls, step work progress.

- Monthly: Evaluate goals, check sobriety milestones, reflect on growth.
- Crisis: Use checkpoints when stress spikes or routine is broken.

Example

A recovering veteran sets a Sunday night checkpoint. Every week, they ask: 'Did I show up for myself? Did I avoid old behaviors? What needs adjusting?' These moments help them course-correct and stay aligned with their recovery mission.

Checkpoints Prevent Drifting

It's easy to drift when you're not checking in. What starts as a missed meeting can turn into isolation. A small lie can grow into shame. Regular checkpoints catch the drift before it becomes a disaster.

Recovery is not just about moving, it's about moving in the right direction. You need checkpoints to keep your course.

Be Honest at the Gate

A checkpoint is only useful if you tell the truth when you stop. Don't just wave yourself through. Ask the hard questions. Listen to the answers. Let each checkpoint be a chance for growth, not just a ritual.

This journey is long. You won't always feel momentum. But if you keep stopping to check your path, you'll keep moving forward even when it feels slow.

Stay alert. Stay honest. Stop often. The mission is recovery and every checkpoint gets you closer to success.



Situational Awareness

Situational Awareness

Military Definition

Situational awareness (SA) is the ability to perceive your environment, understand what's happening, and anticipate what could happen next. It is the mental picture that keeps soldiers alive and effective in rapidly changing conditions.

Why Situational Awareness Matters in Service

In the field, SA can mean the difference between life and death. Soldiers must constantly scan for threats, track movement, listen for changes, and remain aware of their own position in the mission. It's not just about being alert, it's about being present and informed.

Translation to Civilian Recovery

In recovery, situational awareness means knowing what's going on around you and inside you. It's about being able to sense when something feels off, when a trigger appears, or when you're slipping into old thinking. SA helps you stay ahead of relapse and grounded in your program.

Practicing Recovery SA

- Pay attention to your physical environment—places can trigger emotions.
- Notice how people affect your mood, energy matters.
- Track your internal state, are you hungry, angry, lonely, or tired (HALT)?
- Watch for shifts in your thinking especially justifications or denial.

Example

A recovering vet walks into a bar by accident, he thought it was a coffee shop. Immediately, he feels the tension rise in his body. Instead of staying, he turns around and leaves. That's SA in motion perceive, assess, act.

Scan and Adjust

Situational awareness is not paranoia. It's presence. It's staying engaged with your surroundings and emotions so you don't get blindsided. Just like on patrol, you scan the terrain. In recovery, scan your week, your schedule, your habits.

Ask yourself: What am I walking into today? Am I prepared? What's my exit strategy if things go sideways? Who's in my corner?

Stay Alert, Stay Alive

Recovery is fragile in moments of inattention. One bad situation, one unconscious decision, can unravel a lot of progress. But if you're awake and aware, you give yourself the power to choose your response.

Don't live in fear but do live with eyes open. Your greatest defense is your awareness.

Situational awareness doesn't just keep you safe, it keeps you free.



Battle Buddies

Battle Buddies

Military Definition

A battle buddy is a fellow service member assigned to watch your back, on and off the battlefield. The buddy system ensures no one is ever truly alone, increasing safety, morale, and accountability.

Why Battle Buddies Matter in Service

You rely on your battle buddy in high-pressure situations. They carry your gear if you're down, cover your six in hostile territory, and share your burdens during down time. Battle buddies prevent isolation and reinforce teamwork.

Translation to Civilian Recovery

In recovery, a battle buddy is someone who walks the path with you. They might be a sponsor, mentor, peer, or friend, anyone who offers honest support, checks in on you, and reminds you you're not alone.

Qualities of a Good Battle Buddy

- Trustworthy and honest even when it's uncomfortable.
- Available and consistent not disappearing during tough times.

- Encouraging but not enabling: They call out your blind spots.

- Vulnerable: They're not perfect, and they don't expect you to be.

Example

Two veterans in recovery pair up. They text each morning with goals and check in at night with reflections. When one is tempted to isolate or relapse, the other steps in with a firm, compassionate reminder: You're not alone. Let's get through this together.

How to Be a Good Battle Buddy

It's a two-way street. Don't just receive support, offer it. Listen without judgment. Show up. Keep confidence. Speak truth with love. Celebrate their wins. Sit with them in losses.

Warning

Battle buddies aren't therapists. They can't do your recovery for you. But they can help hold the flashlight when the path gets dark. They can walk beside you when you're too tired to walk alone.

Recovery thrives in connection. Isolation breeds relapse. A single soldier is vulnerable. A team is strong.

Final Thought

Whether you're new to recovery or years into your journey, find a battle buddy or be one. The mission isn't meant to be faced alone. We rise stronger, last longer, and heal deeper when we do it together.



Code of Honor

Code of Honor

Military Definition

A code of honor is an unwritten yet sacred set of values that define conduct, loyalty, and character among those in uniform. It's about doing what's right, even when no one's watching.

Why Honor Matters in Service

In the military, honor builds trust. Soldiers rely on each other to act with integrity because their lives and missions depend on it. It shapes behavior in battle, in barracks, and beyond.

Translation to Civilian Recovery

In recovery, your personal code of honor defines how you live sober, treat others, and carry yourself through the storm. It's your internal compass when the path isn't clear.

Crafting Your Code

No one hands you a recovery handbook. You write it by living it. Start with core values like honesty, humility, and perseverance. Add principles like showing up, being of service, and never turning your back on yourself.

Honor Is Not Perfection

Living with honor doesn't mean never falling. It means owning your mistakes and learning from them. Recovery isn't clean—but your intentions can be clear.

Example

You're tempted to lie about a relapse. But your code of honor demands honesty. You admit it, face the fallout, and rise again—stronger. That's honor.

Who You Are When No One's Looking

Recovery won't always come with applause or support. Your code of honor kicks in during quiet moments, when you choose truth over comfort, courage over silence.

Final Word

You don't need medals to live with honor. You need consistency, clarity, and conviction. In recovery, honor isn't about status; it's about soul. Let your life reflect the values you claim.

Live by a code that heals, uplifts, and transforms. not just yourself, but the world around you.



Rules of Engagement

Rules of Engagement

Military Definition

Rules of Engagement (ROE) define the circumstances, conditions, and limitations under which military forces can initiate or continue combat. These rules balance mission objectives with ethical considerations, helping soldiers make life-or-death decisions in real time.

Why Rules of Engagement Matter in Service

ROE keeps operations disciplined and protects both soldiers and civilians. They're not just limitations—they're safeguards that maintain order in the chaos of conflict. Soldiers are trained to know and act within these rules instinctively.

Translation to Civilian Recovery

In recovery, your personal rules of engagement define how you interact with people, situations, and temptations. They help you know when to engage, when to walk away, and how to protect your peace while staying true to your recovery goals.

Setting Your Recovery ROE

- No substance use, under any circumstance.
- Avoid toxic people and triggering environments.
- Speak truth, even when it's hard.
- Don't engage when HALT (Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired).
- Ask for help before things spiral.

Example

A recovering service member is invited to a party where he knows drinking will be central. His ROE say, 'No exposure to early triggers in the first 90 days.' He politely declines, knowing that even social pressure doesn't override his rules.

Adjusting Engagement for Mental Health

Recovery requires constant boundary assessment. When someone disrespects your peace or gaslights your progress, your ROE help you respond calmly or walk away. You don't fight every battle. You fight the right ones, the right way.

Why ROEs Are Personal

No two recovery journeys are the same. Your ROE must reflect your triggers, experiences, and values. What's safe for someone else might not be safe for you. Define your lines and hold them with integrity.

Final Word

The world won't always respect your recovery. That's why your rules of engagement are sacred. They help you stay focused, ethical, and safe in all environments, especially hostile ones.

You don't owe anyone an explanation. But you do owe yourself consistency. Write your ROE. Live by them. And revise them as you grow stronger.



Misfire

Misfire

Military Definition

In the field, a misfire occurs when a weapon fails to discharge as intended. It's not the end of the mission; it's a pause, a moment to assess, correct, and reengage.

Relapse in Recovery

In recovery, a misfire can look like a slip, a setback, or a return to old habits. But just like in combat, a misfire doesn't mean failure; it means it's time to reset.

Dropping the Shame

Relapse isn't a moral failing. It's a human one. Often, it's a sign that something in your recovery plan needs recalibration, your support system, your stress management, your coping tools.

What to Do After a Misfire

Step one: Don't panic. Step two: Clear the chamber, look at what led to the slip. Was it a trigger, a buildup, or a blind spot? Step three: Reload with knowledge and honesty. Step four: Reengage with your team, your tools, and your mission.

Misfire ≠ Mission Failure

One misfire doesn't cancel your progress. It reminds you to maintain your weapon, your mind, body, and spirit. You've trained for this. Get back in the fight.

Tactical Insight

Even the most seasoned soldiers encounter misfires. What matters is how fast they clear the malfunction, learn from it, and get back on mission. Treat relapse the same way.

Example

You go weeks sober. Then one bad night turns into a drink. Instead of hiding, you call your sponsor. You attend a meeting. You write about what happened. That's recovery real, raw, and still moving forward.

Final Word

A misfire is a moment, not a measure of your worth. You are not broken. You're in training. Keep clearing, reloading, and aiming forward. The mission continues.



Gear Check

Gear Check

Military Definition

In the military, a 'Gear Check' is a deliberate and thorough inspection of one's equipment. It ensures that each piece of gear is present, functioning, and mission-ready. Gear checks are often performed before operations, after field movements, or at regular intervals to maintain combat readiness.

Application in Recovery

In the recovery world, a gear check serves as a metaphor for taking personal inventory. It's the moment we pause, evaluate, and recalibrate. Just as a soldier confirms that their body armor is secure and their weapon is clean, we confirm that our boundaries are intact, our emotional state is regulated, and our recovery tools are accessible.

This chapter follows 'Misfire' intentionally. After a slip, we don't start from scratch, we gear up and step back in. A gear check is not about shame or blame. It's about ensuring we're equipped to move forward. What coping strategies need sharpening? What support systems need reconnecting? What routines need rebuilding?

Civilian Life Analogy

Consider it like checking your backpack before a hike. Would you head out without water, proper shoes, or a map? Likewise, we don't walk back into the world of recovery without checking our essentials: mindfulness, support, routine, and rest.

Summary

Gear checks aren't glamorous, but they save lives. Whether in combat or recovery, readiness is everything. When we take the time to reassess and rearm, we reduce risk and increase resilience. Recovery doesn't demand perfection, only preparedness.



PCS

PCS

Military Definition

PCS stands for Permanent Change of Station. It's a formal relocation order issued to military personnel to move from one duty station to another. A PCS move is often life-changing, involving family, belongings, and a complete shift in surroundings and responsibilities. It demands flexibility, planning, and mental readiness.

Application in Recovery

In recovery, a PCS symbolizes a major transition point, a move from one phase of healing to another. It could be the shift from inpatient care to outpatient, from treatment to independent living, or from early recovery to long-term maintenance. PCS moments require preparation and the courage to embrace change. They are not regressions, they are assignments. New duties, new terrain, same mission.

When you PCS in recovery, you pack up your learned tools, leave behind what no longer serves you, and report for duty to the next chapter of your life. Change is inevitable, how you move with it determines your success.

Civilian Life Analogy

Think of PCS like moving to a new city for a job or school. You carry what matters most, find new support systems, and adjust to a different rhythm. There's fear in the unfamiliar, but also opportunity. A PCS marks growth. It's not about starting over, it's about stepping up.

Final Word

PCS is more than relocation. It's evolution. Every move forward in recovery, no matter how uncertain, is proof of progress. We salute the courage it takes to keep showing up, wherever the mission may lead.



Secure Perimeter

Secure Perimeter

Military Definition

In military terms, securing the perimeter means establishing a safe, controlled boundary around a unit or area. It's about vigilance, early warning, and protection from outside threats. A secure perimeter keeps what's vital inside and keeps danger at bay.

Application in Recovery

In recovery, securing your perimeter is about boundaries. It's about identifying what keeps you safe physically, emotionally, and spiritually. This might mean limiting exposure to people, places, or situations that put your sobriety or mental health at risk. It's about who and what you allow in and what you keep out.

A secure perimeter isn't a wall that isolates you, it's a shield that protects your progress. Maintaining your recovery perimeter means practicing awareness, making smart decisions, and protecting your peace. It's your daily readiness drill.

Civilian Life Analogy

Think of your secure perimeter like home security. You lock your doors, maybe install cameras or alarms, and you're cautious about who enters your space. In life, your emotional and mental boundaries are just as important. You don't leave them open to anyone or anything that threatens your stability. Healthy boundaries are a form of self-respect.

Final Word

Securing your perimeter in recovery is an act of self-preservation. It's a strategy, not a sign of weakness. Stay vigilant. Protect what you've worked for. Because when the perimeter is strong, everything inside has a chance to thrive.



AAR

AAR

Military Definition

AAR stands for After Action Review. It's a structured debrief process used by the military to analyze what happened, why it happened, and how it can be done better. It's not about assigning blame, but about learning. AARs are standard operating procedure after missions, training exercises, or any significant event.

Application in Recovery

Recovery benefits greatly from personal AARs. Whether it's after a stressful day, a triggering event, or a challenging conversation, reflecting on your behavior, your decisions, and your emotional responses helps you grow. The key is honesty without judgment, learning from the experience, not reliving shame.

Ask yourself: What happened? What did I do well? What could I do differently? What support do I need next time? This practice builds emotional intelligence, personal responsibility, and resilience.

Civilian Life Analogy

Think of a job performance review or a team meeting after a big project. People gather to share what worked, what didn't, and how they can improve. This reflection loop is critical in all areas of life, from parenting to relationships to personal goals. Growth happens when we're willing to pause and reflect.

Final Word

Recovery isn't just about moving forward; it's about learning along the way. An AAR helps you carry lessons instead of burdens. Each review is a steppingstone, reminding you that progress is made not just in doing, but in understanding.



Final Debrief

Final Debrief

Military Definition

A Final Debrief is the concluding discussion after a mission or deployment. It's where the team gathers one last time to evaluate outcomes, share insights, and formally end the operation. It allows everyone to take a breath, process what they've been through, and prepare for what comes next.

Application in Recovery

The recovery journey, whether through a program, group, or personal path, benefits from a final debrief. It's a chance to take stock of progress, recognize growth, and acknowledge the work done. It doesn't mean the journey is over—it means this phase has reached a point of understanding and closure.

It's also an opportunity to express gratitude—to those who helped, to yourself for showing up, and to life itself for the second chances. A Final Debrief is your moment to look back with clarity and forward with confidence.

Civilian Life Analogy

Much like the end of a school year, a work contract, or even a meaningful conversation, we benefit from reflecting and closing loops. Final debriefs help us finish strong, emotionally and mentally. They are not goodbyes—they are acknowledgments that give new chapters space to begin.

Final Word

Your story isn't ending, it's evolving. The final debrief in recovery marks a moment of triumph and transition. You've made it through the fog, you've learned the terrain, and now you walk with intention. Carry your lessons, leave behind your burdens, and step into your next mission; life, fully lived.

Conclusion

As we conclude this journey through the lens of military discipline and recovery, one truth remains: healing is a mission that never ends. Every chapter you've walked through, from lacing up your boots on Day One to reflecting in your Final Debrief, represents a battle fought and a victory earned.

In the heart of every service member lives a code: 'No Man Left Behind.' This doesn't just mean physically; it means emotionally, spiritually, and mentally. In recovery, this is a call to check in on others, to be a lifeline, and to be willing to speak up when someone is slipping. We don't leave each other in the trenches.

You've also learned what it means to 'Adapt and Overcome.' Whether facing relapse, resistance, or rebuilding, you've seen that every misfire is a lesson in disguise. You are not who you were when you began. You're more focused, more resilient, and more aware of what truly matters.

Let this book not be a final salute, but a launchpad. Stay mission-ready, hold the line for others, and keep moving forward with clarity and courage. The war may be over, but your service to yourself and to those still in the fight continues.

No Man Left Behind. Adapt and Overcome. And never forget your life is worth the mission.

Appendix A

Key Terms and Definitions (Alphabetical)

AAR (After Action Review): Reflecting on what worked and what didn't.

Battle Buddies: Trusted individuals who support you in recovery.

Battle Rhythm: Daily routine that supports recovery stability.

Boots on the Ground: Initial engagement in recovery; being fully present.

Chain of Command: Establishing a personal support hierarchy.

Checkpoints: Milestones or moments to assess progress.

Code of Honor: Your guiding values and ethics in recovery.

Comms: Keeping open and honest communication.

Field Stripping: Breaking down habits or behaviors to examine them.

Final Debrief: End-of-phase evaluation before a new chapter.

Firewatch: Staying vigilant and being accountable.

Gear Check: Taking inventory of your recovery tools and readiness.

Misfire: A relapse or mistake; a chance to reload and recommit.

Mission Brief: Clarifying your recovery goals and daily objectives.

Mission Planning: Setting short- and long-term recovery strategies.

Morale: Maintaining positive emotional and mental outlook.

PCS (Permanent Change of Station): Major life change or transition.

PT (Physical Training): Using physical activity to support mental health.

Rules of Engagement: How to deal with conflict and boundaries.

SOP (Standard Operating Procedure): Personal rules and strategies for staying sober.

Secure Perimeter: Protecting your recovery environment.

Situational Awareness: Being mindful of your surroundings and triggers.

Appendix B

Veteran Support Resources

Resource information was verified at the time of publication. Organizations phone numbers and websites may change over time.

Veterans Crisis Line: Dial 988, then press 1 or text 838255 — Free, confidential support 24/7

VA Mental Health Services:

www.mentalhealth.va.gov — Information on programs, treatments, and access to care.

National Center for PTSD: www.ptsd.va.gov — Educational resources and support for trauma recovery.

Wounded Warrior Project:

www.woundedwarriorproject.org — Peer support, financial assistance, and wellness programs.

Team Rubicon: www.teamrubiconusa.org —

Disaster response and veteran reintegration opportunities.

DAV (Disabled American Veterans):

www.dav.org — Support for benefits claims, transportation, and advocacy.

Vet Centers: www.vetcenter.va.gov —

Community-based counseling for combat veterans and families.

Give an Hour: www.giveanhour.org — Free

mental health care from licensed providers.

AMVETS: www.amvets.org — Advocacy and

support for all U.S. veterans.

National Call Center for Homeless Veterans:
Call 1-877-4AID-VET (1-877-424-3838) — 24/7
access to VA services.

VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars): www.vfw.org
— Veteran benefits assistance, scholarships, and
advocacy.

The American Legion: www.legion.org —
Community programs, benefits navigation, and
support for veterans and families.

Hope for the Warriors:
www.hopeforthewarriors.org — Transition support,
wellness programs, and career services.

**IAVA (Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of
America):** www.iava.org — Policy advocacy and
mental health support.

Code of Support Foundation:

www.codeofsupport.org — Personalized case coordination for veterans and families.

Semper Fi & America's Fund: www.thefund.org

— Financial assistance and support for critically wounded service members.

Operation Homefront:

www.operationhomefront.org — Relief and housing for military families in need.

The Mission Continues:

www.missioncontinues.org — Empowering veterans to serve in under-resourced communities.

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors

(TAPS): www.taps.org — Grief counseling and support for families of the fallen.



Give Out Smiles / RTOmeetings.org

A veteran-owned nonprofit initiative focused on recovery through service, peer support, structure, accountability, and community outreach.

Recovery Through Outreach uses familiar military concepts and terminology to help veterans and individuals navigating recovery reconnect with purpose, stability, personal growth, and community.

Programs and initiatives include:

- RTO peer-support groups
- Veteran outreach and support
- Community service opportunities
- Mission-oriented recovery activities
- Encouragement through accountability and connection
- Community and Veteran outreach initiatives

Mission:

“Spread kindness, change lives. No one left behind.”



