



## SERE fire circle: Students put it all together in final phase

by Senior Airman Emerald Ralston  
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*Editor's note: The SERE fire circle is a time-honored tradition of Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape specialists. The fire circle is typically beneath a parachute, an iconic visual of the SERE member in the woods, where they gather to learn and join in the camaraderie of the career after their long days in the field. This is part seven of an eight-part series following the phases of the Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape tech school.*



Staff Sgt. Christopher Moore, SERE student, gives a lesson on signaling. (U.S. Air Force photo/Senior Airman Emerald Ralston)

Situated on a snow encased mountain in the Kaniksu National Forest, a quaint log cabin serves as the base of operations for the Integrated phase of Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape tech school.

In this, the final phase, students are given a chance to put all their training up to this point together and practice what will be one of their primary duties after graduation - teaching aircrew members to survive the elements.

The 31 remaining students are broken down into elements of four or five students. Each day, a different student is appointed instructor and the remaining students assume the role of aircrew members going through survival school - this gives the appointed instructor a feel for what it is like to teach and really convey the survival message out in the wilderness.

"Ultimately, each student has their own day and they're going to be instructing the rest of the students throughout the entire day - [they'll be teaching] routes of travel, triangulation and hitting main objectives they'd need in order to navigate successfully," said Senior Airman Daniel Foret, SERE instructor. "This directly correlates to what they'll be doing in the 22nd Training Squadron after they graduate."

Several elements of SERE students can be found scattered along the logging trail trying to keep warm before their travel day begins. As the sun peeks through the mountain tops, students huddle around their fires awaiting direction from their instructor for the day.

The instructor checks care and use of the students' equipment, ensures they are ready for the travel day and begins navigation by giving coordinates for the students to plot.

Since the remaining students are supposed to portray aircrew members who have never experienced anything like this before, the instructor for the day has to start with the fundamentals and move up to the more complex ideas for the students.

"Hopefully the instructor for the day will take into account everything they've learned - all the remedial training and the things they've done right - and put it all together so they pass this course and move over to the 22nd TRS," said Senior Airman Clifton Cleveland, SERE instructor. "They take into account everything they've learned over the past five and a half months and it's their time to shine."

On the first day of Integrated, Staff Sgt. Christopher Moore, SERE student, was appointed instructor for the day in one element. After having his students plot points on a map, the group set out through the mountains, stopping from time to time to identify plants or animal tracks and ensure they were still headed in the right direction.

Once the element reached a clearing near the final point for the day, Sergeant Moore taught a lesson on the global positioning system, followed by an exercise in signaling. During the instruction, Sergeant Moore related everything to what each aspect of the lesson would be like for an isolated person with a lack of resources.

"It was a little different being the instructor," Sergeant Moore said. "It was a little rough starting off and getting

the jitters out, but throughout the day it got a little easier. You have to manage your time and you have all these objectives to meet - it's a little stressful but definitely something that will get easier the more you do it. It's everything we're trained to be familiar with, but now it's on me to teach it."

As long as the appointed instructor was doing well, the actual instructors didn't step in much. They observed, took notes and intervened occasionally to give advice or when the appointed instructor was struggling.

"We expect to have conversations with the instructor throughout the course of the day," said Airman Foret. "We want to know what they're thinking and offer advice when needed. At the same time, this is for them to show us they can do what they have been taught."

While they may step in on occasion, it takes a lot to get marked down in this phase.

"Crew resource management is going to be the biggest difficulty," said Airman Cleveland. "It takes a while to get that, and getting the flow for the day figured out. In the winter you only have so much time to meet your objectives with only eight or nine hours of sunlight. But we are here to set them up for success - if they have questions, we encourage them to ask. We're here to help - we want to watch them walk across that stage [at graduation.]"

Setting the students up for success after graduation is reinforced during this phase of training as this is the students' last opportunity to ask questions, make corrections and ensure they have the skills to succeed as SERE specialists upon graduation.

"The biggest thing I gained from the experience of being the instructor for the day was, despite the level of difficulty since it was the first time doing this, I definitely gained some confidence," Sergeant Moore said. "I think the cadre does a great job of keeping training the same and fair across the board, ensuring everyone is able to learn everything they need to be successful. The cadre does their job well; it's up to us as students to perform."

*During the Integrated phase of training, at least three students dropped out. The 28 remaining students of the 61 that started will move on to graduation to be covered in the final installation of the SERE series.*