Prisoners of War
&
Abstracted Search and Rescue

Update History

- Feb 9th 2025 (created)
- Feb 24th 2025 (adjusted Prisoner Capacity generation for Conventional Infantry and Battle Armor. Updated event chance to always have a chance of occurring, albeit a small one)
- Mar 9th 2025 (reduced search coverage from 3 days to 2)
- Mar 24 2025 (reduced event dice roll from d100 to d50; changed event target number calculations)
- Apr 8th 2025 (adjusted temporary prisoner capacity recovery)
- Sep 26 2025 (adjusted Prisoner Capacity gains from non-infantry units)

Introduction

War is an unforgiving battleground, and in the chaos of combat, soldiers may find themselves captured by the enemy. Prisoners of war (POWs) are an inevitable reality of any prolonged military campaign, and how they are treated can shape the perception and reputation of the force that holds them. Whether prisoners are given humane treatment, used as bargaining chips, pressed into service, or face more brutal fates is ultimately the player's decision. These choices introduce strategic, logistical, and ethical dilemmas that can have long-lasting narrative consequences.

Managing prisoners extends beyond simply keeping them detained. It involves considerations such as security, morale, ransom negotiations, and the potential for prisoners to defect or escape. The ability to maintain control over captured personnel is determined by the available security forces and holding facilities, while external factors—such as faction relations and battlefield conditions—can influence whether prisoners are recovered, executed, or exchanged. The abstracted **Search and Rescue (SAR)** system also plays a role in determining the fate of missing personnel, adding another layer of complexity to campaign operations.

The **Prisoner of War system** is designed to enhance the strategic depth of campaign management by implementing prisoner-related mechanics inspired by *Campaign Operations*. However, rather than simply reproducing those rules verbatim, this implementation expands upon them, introducing new mechanics such as **Prisoner Capacity Events**, **Temporary Prisoner Capacity**, and an expanded security infrastructure. Players can choose from multiple **capture styles** that determine how prisoner management is handled, allowing them to tailor the experience to their preferred level of complexity and realism.

Understanding the mechanics of POW management and the Search and Rescue system is crucial for players who wish to effectively navigate the challenges of war. Whether prioritizing humanitarian treatment, leveraging prisoners for financial gain, or taking a more ruthless approach, players will need to carefully balance risk, reward, and their unit's long-term survival. The following sections will explore the intricacies of the system, offering a comprehensive breakdown of how prisoners are taken, held, processed, and ultimately resolved.

Rules as Written

Prisoner capacity and the abstracted Search and Rescue system are based on the official rules outlined in *Campaign Operations*. Due to copyright restrictions, this documentation does not include a full reproduction of those rules. Instead, we will only highlight the areas where our implementation deviates from the official mechanics.

Terminology

Whenever *Campaign Operations* is mentioned in italics, it is referring to the *Campaign Operations* manual. If **Campaign Operations** is in bold, it is referring to the capture style discussed in the next section.

Similarly, when *MekHQ* is referenced in italics, it is referring to the *MekHQ* client. While **MekHQ** in bold is referring to the capture style.

Core Systems

Capture Style

As battles unfold, personnel may surrender or be captured—whether they belong to you or your enemy. Three capture styles are available in Campaign Options (**Human Resources** → **Personnel** → **Prisoners & Dependents**):

Disabled

In this mode, prisoners of war are not taken, nor can your personnel be captured. Any player characters who would otherwise be taken prisoner instead receive *MIA* status. The handling of missing-in-action (MIA) characters is discussed later.

Campaign Operations

Prisoner capture is handled using an abstracted version of the *Search and Rescue* (SAR) system from *Campaign Operations*. The fate of prisoners—execution, ransom, or recovery—is left to the player's discretion in GM mode. While *MekHQ* will track prisoner capacity, exceeding that limit has no direct consequences.

For players seeking an experience closer to the official rules, this is the recommended option. However, it assumes that players own *Campaign Operations* and are comfortable self-adjudicating certain mechanics. This option is also the closest to the prisoner mechanics used by *MekHQ* prior to version 50.04.

MekHQ

Prisoner capture functions similarly to the **Campaign Operations** mode, but with additional mechanics. Players may encounter special events such as ransom exchanges or consequences for exceeding prisoner capacity. This mode is ideal for those using *MekHQ* as a Digital Games Master.

Prisoner Capacity

Prisoner capacity represents your security forces' ability to maintain control over captured personnel.

Campaign Operations

Under **Campaign Operations**, prisoner capacity is a static value determined by the number of eligible personnel assigned to security forces. We have extrapolated from the rules in *Campaign Operations* and determined that for each conventional infantry trooper, the player gains a capacity of 15. For each battle armored trooper, the player gains a capacity of 20. No other unit types contribute to prisoner capacity under the **Campaign Operations** capture style.

MekHQ

In the **MekHQ** capture style, prisoner capacity is dynamic. It accounts for factors such as the condition of holding facilities, guard morale, and prisoner compliance. Exceeding capacity may trigger failure cascades unless addressed promptly.

The prisoner capacity generated by each type of infantry has been reduced from 15 and 20 to 5 and 7 respectively. This was changed as we want players to need to invest more into their security forces when attempting to resolve the 'prisoner problem'. It also reflects the need for your security forces to not just manage security, but also the day-to-day running of your holding area.

In addition to the capacities listed above, most other unit types will contribute to prisoner capacity by increasing it by 5% per unit (to a total maximum of +25%). Aerospace units, including fighters, DropShips, and larger, do not contribute to capacity.

While non-infantry units are not intended to serve as guards, this allowance ensures that players have some benefit when including roleplay units in their security forces.

Temporary Prisoner Capacity

Temporary prisoner capacity includes modifiers from events and other unexpected situations, such as mass executions. Temporary capacity is a hidden percentage used to modify overall capacity. A temporary capacity of 50% would reduce total capacity by half, while a temporary capacity of 150% would increase capacity by 50%. Temporary capacity degrades by 10% each month until it returns to 100%.

Temporary capacity is only used while the **MekHQ** capture style is enabled.

Injured Prisoners and Capacity Consumption

Each prisoner generally consumes 1 capacity. However, injured prisoners who have not been assigned a doctor consume 2 capacity. This represents their desperation to escape and the strain they place on security forces.

Treating prisoner injuries promptly is essential to avoid capacity-related events. However, the system does not track the skill level of assigned doctors. The decision of whether to assign a skilled doctor or an inexperienced one is left to the player, without any mechanical judgment implied.

Security Forces

Security forces are a special classification assigned to units in your TO&E. To designate a unit as a security force, right-click the force and select 'Change Force Type' followed by 'Make Security Force.' This designation also applies to all descendant forces, allowing for quick assignment across larger formations such as companies or battalions.

Only units assigned to a security force contribute to prisoner capacity.

Abstracted Search and Rescue

Prisoner Capture

At the end of a scenario, the controlling side may attempt to recover missing personnel or capture enemy combatants. This process is based on the *Search and Rescue* rules from *Campaign Operations*, with specific modifications.

The target number for SAR attempts is determined using the base value from *Campaign Operations*, with modifications based on battlefield control, going to ground, and technological factors.

If the scenario occurred in space both the 'not in planet orbit' and 'SAR includes DropShip' modifiers are applied.

Otherwise, the 'going to ground', 'SAR includes VTOL', and the following modifiers are included:

- If the quality of the searching faction is equal to (or exceeds) the availability rating of Improved Sensors in the current game year, the 'SAR has Improved Sensors' modifier is applied.
- If the quality of the searching faction is equal to (or exceeds) the availability rating of Active Probes in the current game year, the 'SAR has Active Probe' modifier is applied.

Be aware that some modifiers do not stack, as per *Campaign Operations*.

Once the target number is set, 2d6 are rolled twice per potential prisoner. If any result meets or exceeds the target number, the prisoner is captured. This abstracts two days of searching, resolved instantly. If the player conducts the search, it is assumed that Allied Command is responsible for the SAR operation.

If a character was physically picked up during a scenario, they are automatically captured at its conclusion.

Prisoner Processing

Once captured, prisoners undergo faction- and mode-dependent processing. Clan factions may take captives as Bondsmen, following the honor-rating of the prisoner's origin faction as per *Campaign Operations*. The transition to a full Bondsman takes d6 weeks, during which the character is assigned the 'Becoming Bondsman' status.

If a 1 is rolled during the Bondsman determination, the prisoner instead undergoes Bondsref (if they are of Clan origin). Bondsref is only available as a result when using the **MekHQ** capture style. Otherwise, they are treated as if they failed to become a Bondsman, as per *Campaign Operations*.

Captured player characters skip the 'Becoming Bondsman' stage and are immediately assigned the 'Enemy Bondsman' status, effectively removing them from the player's campaign. Clan player characters may also perform Bondsref if using the **MekHQ** capture style.

Captured personnel may also defect, potentially joining the player's campaign. The base defection chance is 1 in 100, modified by faction type. Mercenary characters are more likely to defect. While Clan characters may instead declare themselves as Bondsmen, though the chance of this happening is significantly lower if the campaign's faction is Mercenary or Pirate.

Missing in Action

Only player characters can go MIA. Daily recovery attempts are handled using the abstracted SAR system. If a character is not recovered in a space scenario, they are presumed KIA. During daily SAR attempts, the modifiers for 'going to ground' and 'battlefield control' are not applied. Otherwise, all other modifiers are identical to capture attempts.

Players may abandon MIA characters by leaving the planet, at which point the character permanently exits the campaign.

Prisoner Events

Prisoner events only occur while the **MekHQ** capture style is enabled. While on an active contract, various prisoner-related events may occur, such as ransom offers, riots, or other security incidents.

Ransom Events

Ransom events have a 17% monthly chance of occurring, with a separate 1 in 6 roll determining whether enemy forces offer to ransom back captured player characters.

The ransom of player characters is designed to be costly and infrequent, forcing players to weigh the decision of whether to pay for their personnel's return or endure their absence.

Ransom costs are included below, however note that during ransom events the cost of ransoming back player characters is multiplied by 10. While the payment for ransoming non-player characters is halved. This reflects the diplomatic difficulties encountered during an ongoing conflict.

Experience Level	MekWarrior / AeroSpace Pilot	Other Role
None	2,500 C-Bills	1,250 C-Bills
Ultra-Green	5,000 C-Bills	2,500 C-Bills
Green	10,000 C-Bills	5,000 C-Bills
Regular	25,000 C-Bills	10,000 C-Bills
Veteran	50,000 C-Bills	25,000 C-Bills
Elite+	100,000 C-Bills	50,000 C-Bills

Prisoner Capacity Events

If the number of prisoners ever exceeds the campaign's prisoner capacity, there is a chance of triggering one of 60 special prisoner capacity events. Currently, there are 50 minor events and 10 more impactful major events. Each event has six possible outcomes based on how the player chooses to resolve them.

Prisoner capacity events are checked every other Monday. The probability of an event occurring is determined by how much the current prisoner count exceeds capacity—the **prisoner overflow**. A 50-sided die is rolled; if the result is less than the overflow percent, an event occurs. If the campaign has more than 25 prisoners, a second 50-sided die is rolled. If this second roll is also less than the overflow, a **major event** occurs. Otherwise, the event will be **minor**.

A roll of a 1, on either 50-sided die, will always result in an event so long as at least 25 prisoners are being held. This limitation applies to both minor and major events.

Capacity Warning Event

If the campaign has a prisoner overflow but no event occurs, the player will receive a **warning dialog**. This alerts them to the capacity issue and presents three options for resolution:

- **Do nothing** – The player takes no immediate action, leaving the issue unresolved.
- **Free prisoners** – A sufficient number of prisoners are released to bring the campaign's count 10% below capacity. However, this forfeits any potential ransom for those prisoners.
- **Execute prisoners** – The player executes 10% of their current prisoners, with potential consequences.

Executing Prisoners

If the player chooses to execute prisoners, the game rolls a 6-sided die. On a roll of **1**, the execution backfires, reducing the **temporary prisoner capacity percentage** by twice the number of executions. If the executions do not backfire, the temporary prisoner capacity percentage increases by twice the number of executions.

After this, a 100-sided die is rolled. If the result is less than the number of executions, the execution is **noticed** by the wider galaxy, including potential employers. This updates the campaign's **last crime date** and reduces its **Reputation** by twice the number of executions (capped at 50).

This system is based on *Campaign Operations*, which imposes a fixed **Reputation** penalty for executing prisoners. The approach allows for more nuance—executing a single prisoner is less impactful than purging an entire holding pen, for example.

Notably, this process is identical if the player chooses to execute (or jettison) prisoners from the **Personnel** tab.

Minor and Major Events

The core mechanics of minor and major events are the same, differing only in severity.

- **Minor events** include issues like guards getting too close to prisoners, hunger strikes, and internal disputes.

- **Major events** include more severe incidents like riots, fires, poisonings, and murders.

Whenever an event occurs, the player is presented with a dialog describing the situation and three choices. The player **must** choose an option; dismissing the dialog is not possible.

Each option is secretly graded as **Neutral, Positive,** or **Negative**, influencing the likelihood of a favorable outcome.

Once a choice is made, 2d6 are rolled against a **target number of 7**. The roll is modified by:

- **Response quality**: 0 (Neutral), -3 (Negative), or +3 (Positive)
- **Personality score** of the character presenting the event (if personalities are enabled)

The character assigned to resolve the event is chosen from leaders of units assigned to security forces. If none are available, the **senior-most Admin/Transport character** is selected. If no suitable character exists, the check **automatically fails**, resulting in a negative outcome—though this is rare in a non-test campaign.

If the final roll **meets or exceeds 7**, a **positive** outcome occurs. Otherwise, the outcome is negative. However, a **positive outcome does not always mean good effects**—it simply means that among the two possible results for the chosen option, the better one occurs. Some events offer no "good" choices, only varying degrees of bad. Additionally, not all events strictly contain a neutral, positive, and negative option—the goal is to create **meaningful player choices** that reflect their commander's decision-making.

Contract Conclusion Events

When the player selects **"Complete Mission"**, *MekHQ* provides a final reminder if any prisoner defectors are available for recruitment. If the player proceeds past this point, they **lose** the opportunity to recruit them.

Ransoms

Any ransoms processed during contract resolution are calculated **without** applying the multipliers or dividers mentioned in the *Ransom Events* section. This makes it **cheaper** to ransom back allied characters and more profitable to ransom away enemy prisoners at the end of a contract. The system encourages players to **retain** prisoners longer, increasing their interaction with the prisoner mechanics.

Player Character Prisoners

The fate of player characters in captivity is determined next. First, the game checks whether their outcome will be **positive or negative**. By default, there is only a **1 in 20 chance** of a negative outcome. However, if the campaign has committed crimes **during the contract**, the number of sides on this "die" is **reduced by 1 per crime point accumulated**. This means that repeated misconduct **rapidly** increases the risk of negative consequences for captured player characters. The exact nature of these outcomes is **not** detailed here to preserve the experience.

NPC Prisoners

After resolving player character prisoners, the game determines outcomes for remaining NPC prisoners. The **chance of a negative event is always 1 in 20**. Otherwise, NPC prisoners follow the same resolution mechanics as player character prisoners.

The ordering of these dialogs is intentional—if the player receives a **negative** outcome for their own people, they may be **tempted to take revenge** when asked to return enemy prisoners. This creates potentially interesting and memorable narrative beats.

Conclusion

The **Prisoners of War and Abstracted Search and Rescue** system offers players a complex and nuanced approach to handling captured personnel. Whether managing security forces, negotiating ransoms, or deciding the fates of prisoners, every choice carries weight and potential narrative and mechanical consequences.

With multiple capture styles, dynamic prisoner capacity mechanics, and a range of emergent events, the system encourages players to engage with the moral, strategic, and logistical challenges of handling prisoners. Players must carefully balance their resources, reputation, and ethical considerations while adapting to unforeseen incidents such as riots, escapes, or ransom offers.

The **Prisoner Capacity Events** and **Search and Rescue** mechanics are designed to create meaningful decision points throughout the campaign, ensuring that the fate of both player and enemy combatants is never purely random. By incorporating elements of *Campaign Operations* while expanding upon them in the **MekHQ** capture style, this system provides a more immersive and interactive experience.

Ultimately, how a player treats prisoners—whether with mercy, pragmatism, or ruthless efficiency—shapes the legacy of their unit and influences their standing in the wider galaxy. Every decision, from execution to negotiation, carries the potential to affect both short-term survival and long-term campaign progression, making prisoner management an integral part of the *MekHQ* experience.