



U.S. Army Spc. Emily Moller a chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear specialist, assigned to the 1st Battalion, 1st Air Defense Regiment, 94th Army Air and Missile Defense Command, leads a group of Soldiers to negotiate a complex task during the command's 2018 Noncommissioned Officer and Soldier of the Year Competition Leader Reaction Course lane in Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, May 6-11, 2018. The Leader Reaction Course helps Soldiers to learn to work together as a team and take control of a difficult situation. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Claudio Tejada, 94th Army Air and Missile Defense Command)

# The Army's Ready and Resilient (R2) Program

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Perhaps the Army's biggest transformation challenge has been embracing and navigating the right approaches to team building while cultivating mental and physical toughness in the individual Soldier. Old habits of thinking such as "suck it up and drive on," have indoctrinated past generations into believing that that was the way to accomplish the mission.

## The Solution

In 2009, Army psychologists collaborated with the University of Pennsylvania in an effort to establish a program dedicated to reinforcing a resilient culture based

off of the University of Pennsylvania's Positive Psychology Program (Reed & Love, 2009). As a result, the Army implemented its first resiliency program called Comprehensive Soldier Fitness (CSF). This eventually evolved into the U.S. Army's Ready and Resilient (R2) Program.

R2 performance centers are institutional domains where Soldiers, Department of the Army (DA) Civilians, and family members of Soldiers certify as Master Resilience Trainers (MRTs). They learn 14 resiliency skills in a span of 80 hours, and are then considered commanders' subject matter experts on *resilience excellency*.



Members of the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) watch the sunset from the top of the Thousand Steps Trail in Franklin Mountain State Park, Nov. 4, 2018, in El Paso, Texas. Soldiers took part in the hike as a Ready and Resilient training exercise to boost morale ahead of Warfighter 19-02. Warfighter 19-02 is a computer-simulated war game that is scenario based and integrates troops from Fort Bragg, N.C., Fort Stewart, Ga., Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., Fort Hood, Texas and Fort Bliss, Texas. 7th SFG(A)'s participation in the exercise promotes conventional and special operations integration and interoperability, which is critical to success on the battlefield. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Sean Hall)

The ultimate goal of the R2 program is to "empower individuals to achieve and sustain their personal readiness and resilience so that they are best equipped and enabled to support the U.S. Army mission in environments of uncertainty and persistent danger" ("R2: Personal Readiness and Resilience," 2015, para. 1).

## Capabilities

There are currently over 20 R2 performance centers located in the United States, Germany, and Korea, which can provide a variety of resources to any Army organization in support of multiple echelons (Army Resiliency Directorate, n.d.). Staffing consists of a number of Master Resilience Trainer-Performance Experts (MRT-PEs) who generally possess degrees in sports and performance psychology, one Performance Center Manager (contractor), and one Program Manager (senior noncommissioned officer).

To help illustrate the need for the R2 program, imagine your Soldier is attempting to qualify on a rifle qualification range. Distracted by high anxiety, stressful issues at home, and difficulties at work, the Soldier's performance begins to spiral. The Soldier becomes tense, their heart rate escalates, and they begin showing signs of agitation. As the squad leader, you attempt to coach the Soldier through their qualification, but it seems to worsen. Protocol suggests the Soldier receive remedial training, but nothing helps. The *four fundamentals of marksmanship* has rendered the Soldier combat ineffective.

Should you give up on your Soldier? Or should you utilize the Army's R2 Program to help them overcome their anxiety and proficiently perform their job?

## How Does It Work

"Ready and Resilient is a collection of comprehensive and far-reaching capabilities designed to guide the Army's efforts to build the physical, psychological, social, spiritual, and family preparedness and resilience of the Total Force" ("Ready and Resilient Campaign," 2018, para. 1). MRT-PEs help Soldiers optimize their performance while overcoming high anxiety. Anxiety and stress undermine positive decision-making skills during events ranging from physical fitness training to combat missions.

Circumstances in a Soldier's personal life can also negatively affect their emotional well-being, which can result in mission failure, injury, or death. To minimize negative effects on performance,

MRT-PEs integrate perpetual cognitive training skills which combine Army-based physical training, plyometric exercises, and hands-on practical exercises. By encompassing all three, it assists Soldiers with successfully meeting the physical demands of the job while simultaneously making cognitive decisions as it pertains to job responsibilities.



Cpl. Janelle Travis, a combat medic assigned to 2nd Combined Arms Battalion, 69th Armor Regiment, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, mentally prepares to engage in the M249 squad automatic weapon and M240B general-purpose machine gun qualifications for the 3rd ID's Best Warrior Competition May 3, 2018, at Fort Stewart, Ga. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Arjenis Nunez)

Consider the Soldier mentioned earlier who experienced difficulty qualifying on their assigned weapon. Had the Soldier received previous training on deliberate breathing techniques, or efficient use of vision for target acquisition, or even the Army's *Engage* training module to reduce the amount of stressors in their lives, the qualification process could have gone a lot smoother and the Soldier's, and unit's, readiness scores would be higher ("Leader's Guide," 2016).

Implementation of cognitive skills training is critical to individual and collective tasks, but it is important for leaders to know the intent is not to teach Soldiers how to perform their military tasks. Instead, MRT-PEs assist Soldiers in refining the skills they already possess. They do not train Soldiers how to fire weapons, conduct convoy operations, or instruct physical fitness. Rather, they coach them how to fire more proficiently, enhance situational awareness, and practice energy activation techniques to increase physical endurance. The ultimate goal is to optimize performance after Soldiers have learned the basic fundamentals of their military tasks.

Some other capabilities R2 performance centers can provide are team building events, 10-day MRT certifications, Executive Resilience and Performance Course (ERPC), Leadership Development Course, Deployment Cycle Resilience Training (DCRT), Resilience Challenge Course for Families, and Engage Training (based on bystander intervention). Leaders at the brigade level or below may coordinate for MRT-PEs to provide training at qualification ranges, Field Training Exercises (FTXs), Army training centers, physical training events, FRG events, etc.



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Michael McMillan, 35th Infantry Division, behavioral health noncommissioned officer in charge, confers with Capt. Trever Patton regarding the mental and behavioral health of Soldiers returning from combat deployments at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, Oct. 30, 2017. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Tina Villalobos, 35th Infantry Division Public Affairs)

## Use Your MRTs

How can Soldiers "promote and safeguard the morale, the physical well-being, and the general welfare of the officers and enlisted persons" (Department of the Army, 2014b, p. 2) as deemed essential in *AR 600-20: Army Command Policy*? The simple answer is the proper use of the unit MRT. Unit MRTs serve as the commander's consultant for resilience training. They allocate resources, manage the Digital Training Management System for resiliency training updates, and monitor Global Assessment Tool (GAT) statistics.

Soldiers, DA Civilians, and family members of Soldiers may certify as MRTs. Utilizing the *train-the-trainer* concept, students participate in a 10-day course (80 hours) where they learn core competencies, resilience, and performance enhancements skills. When used properly, MRTs can positively impact the culture of an entire organization and enhance unit readiness by promoting better health, increasing optimal performance, and building connections.

Note: MRTs are not counselors. While the curriculum is psychology-based, MRTs are only trainers of resilience concepts. In accordance with *AR 350-53*, 12 of the 14 skills should be taught to all Soldiers annually. This includes the annual requirement to complete the GAT survey.

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## Conclusion

The Army's Ready and Resilient program

is as diverse as it is unique. Its capabilities and resources are critical to unit readiness and focus on both leader and Soldier development. The MRT-PEs and MRTs are essential as they broaden our learning of cognitive and performance-level skills at the organizational level.

"Ultimately, the goal of R2 is to assist in the facilitation of positive change through leader engagement" ("Ready and Resilient," n.d.). ■

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