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Resiliency: The Cornerstone of Air Defense

By Command Sgt. Maj. Richard C. Pyles Jr.

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We often talk about training for resiliency as if it's a separate block of instruction: something we pull off a shelf only when things suck. But the truth is, for air defense Soldiers, we don't just train for resiliency; we live it in the way we operate.

In our world, we exist in a state of constant strategic uncertainty. We don't always know when the next rotation is coming or when the world is going to kick us in the head next.

However, we create our own certainty. We stabilize the chaos through training reps and sets and unwavering commitment to the team. Resiliency isn't a buzzword; it's the trust that when everything else falls apart, your battle drill and your battle buddy will not.

Resiliency starts long before you get on a plane. It starts at the rear, in the mud, and in the training that we refuse to cut short. I'm small, and the Army's big — real

big. But my confidence never came from my size; it came from knowing we did the work. We knew how to march-order, how to emplace, and how to talk on the radio because we didn't take shortcuts.

In the Army, we train in peace to prepare for war. That training builds discipline that turns 10 individual pieces of a puzzle into one solid picture. When you're in the trenches together, you're refining yourself and your leadership. You learn that you can't control the enemy, but you can control your proficiency. If you don't know what to do in a crisis, you do what you know: so, we train until what we know is second nature.

I've never known how to separate my Army family from my biological one. Think about permanent change of station, or "PCSing" with your kids: if mom and dad freak out, the kids freak out. But if the parents bring stability, the kids feel certain even in a new environment.

Unit leadership is exactly same. Leaders are the mom and dad of the formation. If you establish those pillars of trust, your Soldiers will follow you anywhere because they know what they're going to get from you. They might not know the mission, but they know their sergeant is going to hold the standard. That consistency is what keeps morale high when rotations get extended and the mission gets heavy.

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There is no perfect Soldier. We meet people where they are to help them reach potential they might not yet see in themselves. It's a process of constant mentorship. I often use the analogy that you have to burp your Soldiers — meaning you have to put in the hands-on, sometimes uncomfortable work of coaching them through the early stages of their careers until they're ready to lead others.

The Army standard doesn't care about your feelings or where you're from. It is the minimum mark. As leaders, if we exceed that standard, our Soldiers will want to exceed it too. That's iron sharpening iron! That is leading from the front in action.

Trust is the key, but it's hard to earn and easy to lose. Your audio has to match your video every single day. I've kicked people out of the Army, but really, they kicked themselves out. My goal is to make good humans. If you're a good human, you'll be a good Soldier and a better parent, sibling, son, daughter, spouse, etc., when you eventually hang up the uniform.

I'll be honest: I never got on a plane just for my country. I got on that plane for the men and women I worked with directly. I loved them, and they loved me. That love is where the discipline and accountability come from.



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While many Army units now deploy for nine months, our Soldiers go on 11-month rotations every 12 months and still get extended. That's what the job demands.

That means they're training for the next rotation as soon as they get back. The air defense artillery (ADA) lifestyle requires great strength from our Soldiers and their families. Our air defenders are defined by their resilience. Their ability to stay committed to the mission and hold each other up shows just how important they are to what we do.

You don't charge a hill just because it's there: that's dangerous. You charge it because your buddy is charging it with you, and you aren't letting them go up there alone. We own the suck together.

In Air Defense, if one piece of the puzzle doesn't plug in, there's a gap in the coverage. We stay in sync because we refuse to let each other down. We know in our little world that we're going to do our job.

The world comes at you, but we're going to be tight. There's a reality that

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if Pyles is having a hard time, you lean on him and pick him up. The next guy's turn is going to come, and we do it over again, keeping each other upright.

We can't control the world or what it will throw at us, just how we react when it comes. You don't rise to the occasion in a high-stress situation; you sink to the level of your training and that's why it's so important. You stabilize those reactions with training reps and sets. That is the ultimate resiliency.

Being a U.S. Army Soldier is hard! Being an air defense Soldier is even harder, but they make it look incredibly easy. Their quiet professionalism and confidence are what make them special.

Training and resiliency take us a long way. Our buddies to the left and right take us even further. Nothing is ever uncertain when you can rely on the certainty that training and commitment provides. We give our teammates the best opportunities by upholding standards. When you don't know what to do, you do what you know to do. ■



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