



Challenging, realistic training is critical for developing Soldiers' resilience, combat readiness, and adaptability. In an increasingly complex global security environment, this type of rigorous preparation ensures that Soldiers are equipped to handle future conflicts' unpredictable and demanding conditions. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Luis Solorio)

Tough, Realistic Training Is a Form of Taking Care of Soldiers!

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Military preparedness is the foundation of national security. A well-trained Soldier is essential for defending a nation's sovereignty and protecting its citizens and interests.

However, an Army's effectiveness does not rest solely on its technology or the number of enlisted Soldiers. It depends on the level and quality of the training these Soldiers receive.

Challenging, realistic training is critical for developing their resilience, combat readiness, and adaptability (see ADP 7-0, Department of the Army [DA], 2024). In an increasingly complex global security

environment, this type of rigorous preparation ensures Soldiers are equipped to handle future conflicts' unpredictable and demanding conditions (JP 3-0, Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2022).

This paper explores why realistic, intense military training is indispensable for future success.

Mental and Emotional Preparation

One of the most critical reasons for tough and realistic training is the mental and emotional preparation it offers. Combat environments are inherently stressful, chaotic, and often traumatizing. Soldiers must navigate fear, uncertainty,

exhaustion, and potentially life-threatening situations.

Realistic training helps to simulate these stressors in a controlled setting, allowing Soldiers to experience high-pressure environments before facing them in real combat (FM 7-0, DA, 2021). By exposing them to situations that mimic the sensory overload, confusion, and stress of combat — such as loud explosions, simulated injuries, and extreme physical exertion — training helps build psychological resilience (FM 6-22, DA, 2022).

Such training can reduce the likelihood of panic, hesitation, or psychological breakdown in actual combat situations. Studies show that Soldiers who undergo more demanding training are less likely to experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) because they are better mentally equipped to cope with the pressures of war (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008). Tough training helps condition the mind to remain calm and focused, even under the most harrowing circumstances.

For example, in 2003, we had an M1A2 System Enhancement Package (SEP) tank destroyed by a deep-buried mine. When we arrived at the scene, it was chaotic. The explosion crater was about 8 feet

deep, and we couldn't see the crew. We only saw a tank hull with no turret, because it was lying upside down on the low ground.

Without hesitation, the first sergeant told us to find the crew. We ran into the darkness, yelling for them. When we got to the crater's far side, the second tank rolled up and identified where our Soldiers were.

We first found Sgt. Michael Barrera, who told us where Pfc. Lance Gieselmann and Pfc. Issac Campoy were. Gieselmann had superficial injuries, so our physician assistant started working on him. We split the group into two medical teams and one security. What we didn't know was that Barrera had many internal injuries, and he crashed as soon as we stabilized him.

Doc was able to resuscitate him with his team's help and keep him breathing. We also stabilized his severely wounded leg. As we worked through these lifesaving actions, I remember never being afraid — focusing on what we'd been taught and remembering my combat lifesaver (CLS) training. I remember Doc being calm while providing directions. Because of these actions, Gieselmann is alive and living a good life.



Realistic training helps to simulate stressors in a controlled setting, allowing Soldiers to experience high-pressure environments before facing them in real combat. Training strengthens psychological resilience by simulating sensory overload, confusion, and potentially life-threatening situations. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Maxwell Bass)

Physical Conditioning

Physical conditioning plays a part in any combat scenario, and physical endurance is just as important as mental resilience. Soldiers must often endure long periods of physical strain — whether marching long distances with heavy gear, engaging in field training exercises or live fire exercises, or navigating harsh terrain.

Tough, physically demanding training ensures that Soldiers are in peak condition and can perform at their best even when fatigued (TC 3-20.0, DA, 2019). In realistic training scenarios, Soldiers practice strenuous physical activities under high mental stress and some physical fatigue or extreme weather conditions.

In modern warfare, the length and intensity of engagements can vary dramatically. I use tank and Bradley gunnery as an example of realistic training. We use the Integrated Weapons Training Strategy (IWTS) to stress the crew members and their weapons system (TC 3-20.40, DA, 2019).

At the final table, the engagement is so complex you're firing all weapons in one engagement, and every crew member plays a part. This situation creates the stressors of being a part of a team and owning your part during a chaotic event. Moreover, we found that Soldiers with greater physical resilience are far more likely to qualify during their last table engagement.

Honing Tactical Expertise

Another vital aspect of tough training is its role in honing tactical expertise. In combat, Soldiers must make split-second life-or-death decisions. The only way to ensure these decisions are accurate and efficient is through repeated practice in environments that simulate actual combat as closely as possible (ADP 3-0, DA, 2019).

Realistic training drills focus on everything from large-scale combat operations (LSCO) to close-quarters combat and advanced technology, such as cyberattacks, drones, and robotics (JP 3-12, Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2022).

Repetition of these drills under high-stress, real-world conditions makes tactical and technical responses instinctive. In chaotic combat environments, Soldiers must rely on muscle memory and ingrained training — some call it experience — to react correctly and

efficiently (FM 6-0, DA, 2022).

Tactical training that mimics the complexity of modern warfare, including enemy unpredictability and diverse operational environments, ensures that Soldiers are prepared for any scenario they may face. We continue to adjust our training as we receive more information from the current fight in Ukraine and through After-Action Reviews (AAR) while we train (FM 5-0, DA, 2024).

Combat is unpredictable, and modern conflicts are increasingly changing to unconventional tactics, Multi-Domain Operations, and ever-evolving threats (JP 3-0, Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2022). Adaptation is essential when dealing with insurgent forces or cyberattacks, such as radio and system jamming (JP 3-12, Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2022).

Realistic training prepares Soldiers to respond and remain flexible to the shifting dynamics of combat environments. Training Soldiers to expect the unexpected through realistic simulations, such as our Combat Training Centers (CTCs), ensures they can think on their feet and adapt plans as the situation evolves (TC 25-1, DA, 2020).

Moreover, complex and evolving security threats, such as cyberattacks or drones, require Soldiers to be physically capable and technologically adept (JP 3-12, Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2022).

Tough training environments expose Soldiers to these emerging challenges, ensuring they are well-rounded and able to respond appropriately to technological threats on the battlefield. As we live and train on the Eastern Front, we continually identify the danger

and importance of Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS).

We regularly train to protect our Forward Operating Stations (FOS) with available equipment to save lives and follow this up with as much medical training as possible (FM 4-02, DA, 2020). This approach allows Soldiers to stay focused and reduces complacency.

Unit Cohesion

Tough, realistic training also significantly builds unit cohesion, critical for operational success, as Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-0 notes (DA, 2019). Soldiers in combat rely heavily on their team members for survival and mission success. Realistic training environments foster



Soldiers assigned to 144th Infantry Regiment, Texas Army National Guard, respond to an attack in a realistic training environment at Fort Johnson, Louisiana, July 25, 2024. Such training can reduce the likelihood of panic, hesitation, or psychological breakdown in actual combat situations. (Oregon Army National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Kayla Fleshman)

a sense of camaraderie and trust among them by putting them through shared hardships (FM 6-22, DA, 2022).

Whether enduring a grueling physical exercise, facing simulated ambushes, or working together in dangerous conditions, Soldiers develop deep bonds based on mutual reliance. This sense of cohesion is vital in high-stress combat situations, where clear communication, trust, and teamwork can mean the difference between success and failure (FM 6-0, DA, 2022).

Unit cohesion ensures that Soldiers function well as individuals and as part of a well-oiled machine, able to execute complex operations seamlessly.

Conclusion

Tough, realistic training is indispensable when preparing Soldiers for the complexities of future warfare.

It develops psychological resilience, physical endurance, tactical and technical proficiency, and adaptability — essential for overcoming combat environment challenges (see ADP 7-0, DA, 2024).

Furthermore, it fosters strong unit cohesion and builds trust among Soldiers, which is crucial to ensuring mission success (as ADP 6-0 notes, DA, 2019). As technology and threats evolve, the importance of rigorous, realistic training will only grow (JP 3-0, Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2022).

In an uncertain world, we must invest in ensuring that Soldiers are ready to face today's conflicts and tomorrow's unknown challenges (FM 7-0, DA, 2021). Without this investment, the U.S. Army risks sending its nation's most significant resources into battle unprepared, with potentially disastrous consequences. ■

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10th Mountain Division Soldiers conduct a 15-mile ruck march at Fort Drum, New York, Feb. 12, 2025. Physical endurance is just as important as mental resilience. Soldiers must often endure long periods of physical strain — whether marching long distances with heavy gear or engaging in field training exercises under challenging conditions. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Elijah Campbell)



Realistic training, like tank and Bradley gunnery, stresses Soldiers and their weapons systems to build physical resilience and prepare them for complex, high-stress combat situations. Soldiers with greater physical resilience are more likely to succeed during critical engagements. (U.S. Army photo by Michelle Gordon)

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