

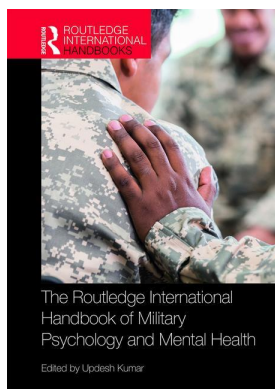
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### **Building resilience and hardiness in military leaders – Robustness training programs of the German Army**

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# 11

## BUILDING RESILIENCE AND HARDINESS IN MILITARY LEADERS – ROBUSTNESS TRAINING PROGRAMS OF THE GERMAN ARMY

*Oliver Krueckel, Annett Heidler, Nicola von Luedinghausen,  
Markus Auschek, and Matthias Soest*

### **Hardiness, resilience and military leadership training**

When soldiers and military leaders speak of “toughness” and “robustness” of their soldiers, they often envision them as mentally and physically invincible: men of steel that are able to cope with almost any dangerous situation, overcome any threat, or defeat any enemy. The most common questions the military has are how to select and most importantly how to train soldiers to become that tough super-soldier they imagine.

The psychological concepts that come closest to what the military envisions are those of hardiness and resilience, the latter having become a buzzword in the academic and civilian world.

First described by Werner in 1971 in her famous longitudinal study on the resilience of Hawaiian children, resilience is probably best described as the capability of an individual – or a society – to adapt to stressful and adverse life events and recover from them.

In contrast to the common metaphor of being “as tough as nails,” so that nothing is able to harm the outer and inner structure of the individual, resilience refers more to the ability to deform and bounce back when stress occurs. Hence, resilience is considered a process of the interaction of an individual with the environment; therefore from a psychological point of view, resilience is considered a “state” rather than a “trait” (Bartone & Hystad, 2010). Coping, stress management, “salutogenesis” and post-traumatic growth are psychological theories related to this state of resilience.

Hardiness (or mental toughness) on the other hand, as first described by Maddi (1967) and later by Kobasa (1979), is considered the key element within an individual for understanding resilience. Key traits of hardiness include the inter-related tendencies of commitment (versus alienation), control (versus powerlessness) and challenge (versus need for security) (Bartone, 2008).

Although there is still an ongoing academic discussion as to what extent resilience and hardiness can be taught, the fact that both are trainable seems undisputed. Many programs in the military, such as the U.S. Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program, focus on resiliency, mitigating the effects of stressful and traumatic events (Castro & Adler, 2011, Escolas, Pitts, Safer, & Bartone,

2013) and being seen as the “future of psychology” and as part of a positive psychology (Seligman & Fowler, 2011).

The German Army has come up with a comprehensive integrated program which faces today’s challenge of recruiting the right people for the right job in the military. It seeks to develop physically and psychologically fit young soldiers who are able to keep up with the challenges of the battlefield.

The program focuses on the fitness of soldiers throughout their military lifecycle, relying on courses and training already in existence in the Army for years or even decades, such as the ranger training course. This is in line with quite a few other armies in the world who are trying to adapt their training to a new generation of recruits, putting the focus on motivation and physical training. The Swiss Army, for example, has set up a program for the development and strengthening of the leadership personality and has integrated selected elements of resilience training into leadership training. Positive effects manifest in stress perception, stress management and emotion regulation, thereby reducing drop-out rates and attrition in army basic training (Annen, Niederhauser, & Zueger, 2018; Wyss & Annen, 2012).

Interestingly, some studies show that it is not overall physical fitness in soldiers that has been declining over time but specific factors such as running performance. This is possibly due to increased body weight, reduced experience with running or lower motivation (Knapik, Sharp, Darakjy, Jones, Hauret, & Jones, 2006; Knapik, Sharp, & Steelman, 2017). At the same time, operational physical challenges like carrying heavy gear have increased over time (Knapik, Reynolds, & Harman, 2004), as well as the need to operate high-tech equipment.

The basic principle in German Army training is the same for officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) alike. Classroom orientation to teach basic regulations and principles is followed by rock-drill training combined with simulation-based training to improve leadership skills. The most indispensable part and highlight of education is the real combat training and live firing exercise in one of the training centers of the Army. Subsequently, team training provides the units from platoon to company and even brigade/division level with the required training level.

“Robustness training,” as the German Army calls it, is included in all levels of military leadership training. Some training like the ranger training course has been in existence since the founding of the Bundeswehr. Structured robustness training sets the framework for physical and psychological training over a soldier’s lifecycle from basic training to retirement, meeting state-of-the-science standards in sports, nutrition and mental training. The program focuses on persevering in combat, since this is a key attribute of the individual soldier and the basis for mission success of the Army.

### **German army training structure**

When a young NCO or officer candidate enters the Army, he or she will start with basic training and will slowly get accustomed to the challenges of military life. A special program has been designed to bring the young recruits up to speed, both mentally and physically, for meeting the standards of the German Army. From a psychological point of view, it is important that the first lessons include stress identification, stress management and psychological first aid as mandatory topics.

Later in their leadership training, officers and NCOs alike will have to pass their leadership training courses (officer and platoon leader course or senior NCO and section commander courses, respectively), as well as their military occupational specialty training (infantry, armor, logistics, etc.). Psychological training is included in some of the military occupational specialty training, for example, communication and negotiation for Human Intelligence troops (HUMINT), special training for Explosive Ordnance Disposal personnel (EOD) and Special

Forces training. Robustness training is a highlight of the ranger training course, which is mandatory for leaders in the infantry, as well as the increased infantry competencies course for non-infantry officers and NCOs, which is currently being reexamined and revised.

Mental training, which is common in sports psychology, can also be used in marksmanship training and during sniper courses, completed by lessons and discussions about the psychological effects of killing, getting killed or wounded and losing comrades in combat. For military leaders, theoretical lessons on how to convey a message of death are mandatory and supported by practical training exercises and role play. The military psychologists work hand in hand with social workers and military chaplains during those training courses, working closely together in a so called “psychosocial network of support.” Ethical issues are also consequently discussed, as mandatory in the German Army concept of mission type tactics (“Auftragstaktik”) and the German Army leadership development and civic education concept (“Innere Fuehrung”).

The highest level of leadership training regarding resiliency training is the combined arms operations training on the Task Force (battalion) level which occurs at the German Army Combat Training Center. Military leaders on all levels, but especially the officers on platoon, company and battalion levels, are trained and given feedback on their performance, supported by technical engagement simulators and video and voice-recorded assessment and evaluation. The focus of the feedback from the psychologist is the practical training that is mentally challenging such as leading in combat under stress, including mass casualty situations and direct engagement with civilian population.

### **Academic leadership training**

Future trends and developments will look deeper into leadership development training as a continuous process in a holistic approach, integrating theoretical knowledge about leadership theory taught at the military academies into practical exercises and training. The focus will be on the ability to self-reflect on one’s own leadership skills and behavior in peacetime and under stress. Coaching and mentoring can be some of the methods of choice in a future continuous leadership development training program and will fall in line with the efforts of life-long learning programs in the German Army.

### **Psychological and physical fitness in basic training**

German Army personnel must be physically and psychologically hardy and resilient to fulfill their mission. This is why, in future, the fitness of recruits is to be monitored and improved through a holistic program from day one of their service. To this end, basic training has been redesigned as part of a pilot project whose key element is the physical and psychological fitness of recruits. The aim is to improve the initial fitness of recruits through tailored training methods in separate performance groups, so that, after the first six weeks of training, all recruits will be able to successfully pass the German Army’s basic fitness test in order to fulfill the requirements for participating in combat training.

The pilot training course was conducted in an armored infantry battalion. In order to implement professional physical training that meets modern standards, the trainers were supported by additional sports instructors as well as trainers for military and physical fitness. Apart from the sports facilities available at the barracks (fully equipped gym including a workout room, a sports field with tartan track, several smaller sports fields and training grounds), a Tac Work container and a variety of additional sports equipment (such as TRX sling trainers, Flexi Bars, medicine balls, gym mats, marking cones, kettlebells) were procured to ensure a wide variety of training methods.

Before the pilot course started, the instructors attended a “train-the-trainer week,” where they were instructed on the new objectives of basic training and received information on issues like heat prevention, healthy diet, sports and motivation by different Bundeswehr agencies.

In their very first week of training, the new recruits completed the German Army’s basic fitness test for the first time to assess their initial fitness level. Based on the results, the recruits were sorted into three performance groups.

The focus during the first six weeks was on physical training. In the morning, a platoon-level sports session was integrated into the duty roster, and in the afternoon a longer sports session was conducted in the performance groups. The training comprised elements of activation, mobilization, strength and endurance enhancement as well as active regeneration.

In the sixth week of training, the recruits repeated the basic fitness test. At the same time, they completed the soldier’s basic fitness tool for the first time. The results showed a significant improvement in performance for all recruits across all performance groups. Furthermore, all participants now met the standards of the basic fitness test and, by implication, fulfilled the requirements for participating in combat training. As the recruits entered the physically demanding combat training, the afternoon training sessions in the performance groups were reduced. The morning sports routine remained unchanged during the whole time of basic training. In total, the pilot course comprised 70 net hours of physical training. In the 12th week of training, the recruits again repeated the basic fitness test and the soldier’s basic fitness tool. The results once again showed an increase in performance for all recruits, although the improvement was not as pronounced as the one achieved after the first six weeks.

During the pilot run, the military psychology focus for the improvement of psychological fitness was on the issue of motivation. The aim was to raise awareness of this topic among recruits and instructors, to initiate a process of reflection and to build competence in selected motivation methods. During classes, the influence of motivation on human performance was explained to the recruits, and the basic motivational processes were described. Furthermore, reflection was encouraged among the recruits, for example, on their personal motives with regard to basic training. Scientific evidence has shown that setting specific goals has a positive influence on the motivation and performance of human beings (Locke & Latham, 1990). The recruits were therefore encouraged to establish individual goals for basic training.

For the recruits, the instructor is a key figure in their training. For this reason, the focus of military psychology during the training was on “training the trainers.” In the instructors’ seminar, the motivational process was explained in more detail, compiling internal and external factors that affect motivation and reflecting on the possibilities and limitations of influencing the motivation of recruits. The following aspects of motivation were specifically dealt with: incentives, objectives and positive feedback. Methodologically, both classes used a combination of theoretical instruction, practical elements and reflection.

At the end of basic training, a final workshop was held with the instructors, where they reflected retrospectively on the motivational factors that had influenced recruits and instructors during the pilot run. It was found that while the physical strain was relatively high, the motivation of the recruits remained at a continuously high level. The low dropout rates and the comparably low sickness rates were cited as indicators for a high level of motivation. Nevertheless, it is difficult to make a definitive statement on the cause of this positive effect since various interacting factors come into play. The intense and professional sport sessions in the performance groups and the resulting improvement of individual fitness is certainly one key influencing factor. The excellent instructor-recruit ratio was identified as another factor. The small size of the learning groups made it possible to convey the learning content and the physical training elements in an individual and goal-oriented manner. From the instructors’ point of view, the daily sports sessions

in the morning led to improved activation and receptiveness of the recruits. This was especially demonstrated by the fact that training levels were reached more quickly than in the traditional training runs. Less repetition was required. Another factor was the strong group cohesion among the recruits, which was noticeable to the instructors from the second week of training. With the measures taken, it was thus possible to teach and exemplify comradeship as an important element for capable armed forces right from the start.

To sum up, the newly structured basic training with its intensive sports sessions had a positive influence on physical and psychological fitness (motivation, receptiveness and group cohesion). For future projects on the issue of enhancing performance capability, however, our recommendation and objective is to conduct a scientific evaluation of the motivation factor in order to come to reliable and measurable conclusions.

When it comes to increasing psychological fitness during basic training, we see the future role of military psychology in the teaching of recruits and, most importantly, in the training of instructors. In their key function, the instructors play a central role in influencing the individual and group dynamic psychological processes among recruits. Swiss colleagues (Wyss & Annen, 2012) have shown that a transformational style of leadership (characterized by goodwill, convincing communication and setting a good example) has a positive influence on the recruits' performance motivation. The aim is therefore to further increase awareness of psychological topics among instructors, to strengthen their capability for targeted observation and critical reflection and to improve their competence in applying psychological methods. During the pilot course the following topics were identified: motivation, communication, group dynamic processes, stress resilience and mental techniques. Another effect of such regular training courses is that they offer instructors an opportunity to practice mental hygiene, which in turn plays an important role in maintaining their motivation and psychological resilience in the long run. In addition, selective psychological supervision during the practical training is considered useful in order to assess and support the implementation of the psychological elements of training.

In conclusion, the new concept for basic training contributed to the improvement of physical and psychological performance capability. We therefore recommend continuing with the new concept – despite the fact that its implementation throughout the Bundeswehr will certainly give rise to challenges in the areas of personnel, equipment and organizational structures.

### **Psychological training at the German Explosive Ordnance Disposal training unit**

Kabul, Afghanistan/ISAF, 6 March 2002: Five NATO soldiers, including two German Explosive Ordnance Disposal technicians, died in an accident while disarming a surface-to-air missile. Additionally, German and Danish soldiers were wounded severely.

After an investigation and appraisal of the circumstances, significant deficiencies in leadership, procedures, education and training of the EOD specialists were identified and discussed (EOD Training Unit, 2018a,b). Consequently, the German Explosive Ordnance Disposal Training Center was established in 2005.

The goal of the newly established unit was to create a central training facility. Previously, EOD technicians had been employed piecemeal throughout the German Armed Forces. Bringing all the personnel together meant collecting and concentrating the specific knowledge and experience of both young and experienced specialists to the benefit of all. In this unit, noncommissioned officers and officers were to be taught and trained to equal standards at a high level before they returned to their various units. Thereby, further accidents and injuries were to be prevented.



Today the EOD Training Unit conducts the training for all basic, advanced and qualified explosive ordnance defense capabilities as well as the unique asset of K9 teams.

### ***Explosive Ordnance Defense***

Explosive Ordnance Defense is a function of all armed forces: it covers all measures to counter any threat posed by explosive ordnance in order to protect own units and installations and promote mobility and freedom of action operations.

We can define the knowledge and skills of Explosive Ordnance Defense at different levels. In basic training, every soldier in the German army is introduced to the threat posed by unexploded ordnance and mines (UXO/mine awareness), as well as improvised explosives devices (IEDs). In subsequent advanced training, every soldier is taught to conduct subtasks of Explosive Ordnance Reconnaissance (EOR), including searching, localizing, describing, marking the site and reporting the find.

There is also a requirement for more qualified personnel in every unit who not only can conduct EOR, but who can also advise the commanding officer and recommend and execute appropriate safety measures. If necessary, EOD assistance will be requested by them. They also train the soldiers of their unit in basic Explosive Ordnance Defense.

The highest level of training is Explosive Ordnance Disposal, which covers EOR, the identification of explosive ordnance, tactical site exploitation and the disposal of all sorts of explosive ordnance – including IED (EOD information briefing, 2018a,b).

Only a few specialists are able to delicately defuse manually without any detonation. This is especially important if area evacuation is impossible or (collateral) damage due to an explosion is unacceptable.

Nonetheless robots are used wherever possible and at a safe distance. But the task remains high risk and dangerous.

### ***Psychological training at the Explosive Ordnance Disposal training unit***

It is hardly surprising that there are not many such trained personnel.

Firstly, it is not everybody's dream job to disarm explosives. Secondly, the courses and the final exam are extremely difficult as well as physically and mentally demanding.

Candidates must not only be good team players and flexible, but also be persistent and accept responsibility not only for their own lives but also for those of other people. While grit, nerves of steel and a need for adrenaline are vital, "the right mindset" is the most crucial quality to perform these kinds of tasks successfully.

From the beginning, it was clear that the physical qualities alone are not enough. Like for winning a gold medal in a race, there is also a strong mental component in explosive ordnance disposal. Mind and body complement each other, so one has to train both for a best outcome.

That is why the psychologist is involved in the training of the specialists: he/she trains them from the beginning in foundation classes up to the elite training in manual neutralization. Only the best candidates are selected for their ability to perform with willpower, awareness and intelligence.

The psychologist trains his or her students not only on the basis of well-established psychological research and theory but also knows recent literature. He/she is always up to date with the newest trends in the field, psychological methods and publications. He/she constantly upgrades his/her interdisciplinary knowledge to provide the best, most suitable and most effective

education and training. In that way, he/she reaches the highest professional standards and supports the students as much as possible in developing their full mental potential.

In the foundation class, the psychologist educates the future EOD officers and EOD NCOs in what stress is, what the various forms and indications of stress are and how to minimize and reduce the negative effects of stress. He/she also educates them about the consequences of long-term stress (for stress management techniques, see Kaluza, 2011).

He/she advises them about different coping techniques and teaches them stress-management methods like special breathing techniques, mini-meditations, imagination, power poses or progressive muscle relaxation according to the Jacobson technique. These techniques can be practiced regularly or used spontaneously in situations of extreme pressure. Using them daily could even shift one's mindset completely to a more relaxed state.

Mindfulness-based techniques are taught as well. This includes noticing and observing the environment and surroundings (situational awareness), the body, the feelings and the mind in an accepting and enquiring manner without judging (for mindfulness techniques, see Kabatt-Zinn, 2011).

The student also learns ways to stop brooding and how to rephrase negative thinking into positive and motivating soliloquies and slogans. As a saying attributed to Henry Ford goes, "Whether you think you can do a thing or you think you can't do a thing – you're right." (University of Michigan, 1962). So what one says to oneself will influence one's attitude, one's view of the world and one's self-confidence and self-efficacy.

The goal of the stress-management training is that the soldiers learn to understand and identify their triggers and acquire a deeper understanding of how to control and better handle their physical and emotional reactions during and after stressful situations. In that way, they learn to improve their physical and emotional well-being and are better prepared for the demanding situations they will get into as soldiers.

The psychologist also introduces the students to mental training methods and performance enhancement strategies that are already used successfully in sports (see Eberspaecher, 2011).

For EOD personnel, visualization training combined with real exercise is very helpful. Only dummy explosives are used during training so the only pressure for the students is failing the exam. Using visualization techniques, they can play out different kinds of tasks and try out different solutions. Thereby they experience different outcomes and familiarize themselves with pressure and learn to control emotions and excitement. For these specialists it is very important to find their own optimal level of heightened mental state and physical readiness in order to perform optimally. Experienced technicians often reach a flow-like state where they know exactly what to do with very clear, highly concentrated, calm thinking and being perfectly in the moment. Too little as well as too much heightening of the mental state will lead to suboptimal manual coordination, trigger nervousness and distress; cause a lack of concentration and finally lead to poor performance (Yerkes-Dodson-Law, 1908). To get in the right state of mind, building a routine before starting a task seems beneficial for many of them.

Also related to training are occasional visits to the department of forensic medicine. There the students are directly confronted with dead bodies and the phenomenon of death. They can reflect on the transitory nature of life and reflect on their own death as well as that of a possible squad partner. This kind of information and preparation is crucial to performing their tasks and dealing with life-and-death situations.

The psychologist also supports the specialist staff of the EOD Operations Company who are trained in manual neutralization with the aim of being able to best deploy their knowledge in mentally critical tasks such as dealing with suicide bombers or talking to hostages to calm them down and stabilize them.



Finally, he/she oversees all business at the Training Unit as the go-to person for psychological matters including counseling on demand.

### ***Chaos-Driven Situations Management Retrieval System***

Also used in the psychological training and mental preparation of the EOD technicians is the so called CHARLY (Chaos-Driven Situations Management Retrieval System) stress-management computer program.

CHARLY combines multimedia simulations and videos, biofeedback via skin response and heart rate variability measurement, computer gaming and a virtual coach who guides the student through 12 modules. The latest version also includes a smartphone application.

The soldiers are first educated about stress and the fight-or-flight response and learn how to calm themselves using stress-management techniques. They have to play different stressful computer games and then apply these techniques. Their heart rate is measured before and during the games as well as after using the relaxation techniques. CHARLY provides a clear visualization of the results and shows that stress-management techniques really work by changing attitude towards and knowledge about stress (Krueckel, 2018; Wesemann et al., 2016).

In 2002, a disastrous accident occurred as EOD specialists were trying to dispose of an air-to-ground missile. There were deaths and injuries. Learning from that, the German EOD Training Center was established in 2005. That unit consists of selected robust specialists and experts who are educated, taught and trained in one central training facility. Because it is perfectly obvious that explosive ordnance disposal is a mental activity, these experts are also intensively trained by a psychologist.

Stress-management training helps the soldiers to be better prepared when they are suddenly confronted with incidents. Thus, they are well prepared to work in all kinds of operational theatres. Mental training, which is also used in sport and exercise psychology, is of particular benefit to these elite soldiers in realizing their full potential and better preparing them to successfully perform their critically important tasks.

### **Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Extraction (SERE) training as a tool to develop resilience**

#### ***SERE as a tool to develop resilience***

“We don’t know what we are capable of until we have to survive. Each of us is stronger than we know – the key is to tap the power at will” (O’Grady, n.d., Motivational Speeches).

The power O’Grady refers to is resilience. He was an F16 pilot and was downed over Bosnia. Owing to his faith, his positive attitude and his training he was able to survive behind enemy lines for six days. A Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Extraction (SERE) course had been part of his training. In SERE courses, soldiers learn how to survive until they are rescued after getting isolated behind enemy lines and being left to their own devices, how to evade enemy forces and how to resist exploitation by interrogation in the event they get captured. In SERE training, soldiers are confronted and must cope with the extreme physical and mental challenges associated with such situations in order to train and enhance their resilience (Southwick & Charney, 2012). Starting from the quote from Scott O’Grady, this part intends to describe the psychological components in SERE training in the context of resilience. For a better understanding, a brief summary of the contents of SERE training will be provided in the first part of this section. This is followed by a description of the development of the psychological components of SERE training and of the methods used for conveying knowledge on the latter.

### ***Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Extraction training in the German armed forces***

In the German Armed Forces, soldiers who are at a high risk of getting isolated and/or being subject to enemy exploitation – namely Special Forces (SF), Special Operations Forces (SOF) and Special-Purpose Forces personnel in particular – undergo Level C SERE training. In these courses, knowledge is taught in a classroom environment and applied in realistic exercise scenarios (Salas, Priest, Wilson, & Burke, 2006). Over a period of 4–5 weeks, students acquire knowledge on survival, namely immediate measures in situations of emergency, priority survival principles that can be broken down into Protection, Location, Water and Food (PLWF). Furthermore, they learn why it is necessary to take care of these priorities both for physiological and for psychological reasons, and they are taught how to best use their individual equipment. Dealing with the component of evasion, students are taught how to prepare and apply evasion plans, avoid detection by enemy forces and navigate safely and accurately. As to the component of resistance, one aspect covered is the legal framework of captivity as a prisoner of war and hostage. On the other hand, students gain knowledge on the physical and mental challenges posed by captivity, isolation and interrogation and acquire a set of coping techniques. In the last field covered, namely extraction, students learn all procedures necessary for supporting a safe extraction and recovery by own forces. Owing to the increase in practical training elements, intensity gradually increases over time and culminates in a final exercise going on for several days. During this final exercise, students are required to retrieve and apply the skills they have learned in a real operational environment. The exercise comprises all phases relevant to survival in a military environment, namely survival, evasion, resistance and extraction. The aim is to impart knowledge to students and to have them successfully apply it under conditions simulating an operational environment in order to enhance the students' competence and resilience in such a way that they can return from a real SERE event without having lost their dignity.

#### ***Psychological components of Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Extraction training***

Psychological aspects are incorporated in SERE training at two different levels. As to the first level, psychological knowledge and techniques are taught in order to enable the students to cope with the above general challenges associated with each of the SERE phases. The students are expected to draw upon their general abilities and military skills under most adverse conditions. As to the second level, the students acquire specific knowledge and techniques helpful with regard to Resistance to Interrogation (RTI). The knowledge is about the challenges associated with isolation, captivity as a hostage or as a POW, interrogation and torture and about the techniques which can be applied for coping with these challenges. This section describes the techniques that are used and also explains why they are used.

If you look for suitable techniques with regard to providing the best possible training to soldiers for future SERE events, you have to look for techniques enabling individuals to consistently retrieve abilities and skills in situations requiring maximum performance. "Be good when it matters" (Eberspaecher, 2011) is a credo of sports psychology. Top athletes are expected to deliver a specific performance in a competition, that is, at a specific time and under specific conditions. Conditions prior to, during and after a competition, such as safe and comfortable accommodation, regular meals, a safe venue for the competition, the availability of material and social resources meet a high standard.

During the past decades, top athletes have increasingly used sports psychology techniques as a response to expectations requiring them to repeatedly deliver their top performance and to

develop maximum performance capabilities and expertise. These techniques have an influence on mental factors such as emotions (Tenenbaum & Sacks, 2007), perception (Farrow & Abernethy, 2007), concentration (Moran, Toner, & Campbell, 2018), decision-making (Tenenbaum 2003; Yates & Tschirhart, 2006) and motivation (Beckmann & Elbe, 2007).

Considering the operational reality for Special Forces, Special Operations Forces/Special-Purpose Forces and the challenges arising from this operational reality, the wording of Eberspaecher's aforementioned credo must be expanded as follows: "Be good when it matters, even under most adverse conditions" (Eberspaecher, 2011). A top level of proficiency is required from SF/SOF/Special-Purpose Forces personnel not only for a range of fundamental military skills but also for specific skills associated with their respective specialization. Conditions to be coped with may range from lack of food, water and sleep, unclear situations, hostile climatic conditions, flora and fauna to being under an extreme threat from enemy forces. In a SERE scenario, all this is complemented by isolation and an even greater degree of uncertainty, as well as by physical and psychological violence.

With regard to the mental capabilities and skills SF/SOF/Special-Purpose Forces personnel need in SERE situations, and to the aim to increase their resilience by means of special training (Greene & Staal, 2017), it is only logical to make use of sports psychology techniques adapted to a military context. A conceptual similarity (Wagstaff & Leach, 2015) suggests a use and adaptation of sports psychology techniques in the military. The replies obtained in a non-representative survey from soldiers who successfully completed the aptitude test for future assignments to the German Special Forces KSK (Kommando Spezialkraefte) and long-range reconnaissance forces showed that such personnel intuitively made use of the entire portfolio of sports psychology. This includes breathing techniques, stress-relief techniques, routines, self-talk, goal setting, visualization and so on. Prior to the beginning of the course, the students successfully underwent selection procedures pushing them to the limits of their physical fitness and mental resilience. Requirements to be met resemble the challenges arising in a military survival situation. In order to get through such a situation, many soldiers use mental techniques without being aware of it. Lessons taught mainly focus on making students aware of these techniques used intuitively and to categorize them before the students are made to train and apply them in a structured and target-oriented manner. The advantage is the students' high commitment to the techniques taught.

As mentioned above, resistance is particularly important. The focus lies on making the students live through a realistic situation of being held hostage, including interrogations and Conduct after Capture (CAC). Appropriate psychological training is the first thing necessary for ensuring that this challenging training achieves its aim, namely to train soldiers in such a way that they can survive with dignity (Eid, Brun, Laberg, & Johnsen, 1998; Laberg, Johnsen, Eriksen, & Zachariassen, 2000). The first part of the psychological theoretical education comprises interrogation methods, exploitation, possible sexual violence and so on and their psychological effects on individuals. In the second part, students tackle the motivational basis of survival, starting from a quote from Victor Frankl (2006), namely "Those who have a 'why' to live, can bear with almost any 'how'." In the third part of classroom training, the sports psychology techniques covered in the general SERE training are dealt with in greater depth and adapted to the needs of SF/SOF/Special-Purpose Forces personnel. The final part deals with procedures such as reintegration (Personnel Recovery) which are applied in order to help soldiers recover from a kidnapping ordeal and return to normal life as quickly as possible. Knowing that you will be given good support, care and counseling in a real emergency will also strengthen your morale and "will to go on." Furthermore, the training situation and the attitude of the instructors/Conduct after Capture Instructors (CACIs) must be conducive to enabling the students to apply what they

have learned and thus experience positive things, small victories for increasing their self-efficacy. CACIs undergo specific psychological training with regard to this task.

Future topics relevant to the further development of SERE training include research on the issue of efficiency in resilience training. “Do the techniques taught and the design of the practical phases serve their purpose?” and “In what way do the instructors’ personalities influence the success of training?” are only two among many other possible working questions. The use of biofeedback procedures is another topic. The purpose is to clarify the benefit of the respective procedures in SERE training. In conclusion, one can say that the SERE C course for German SF/SOF and Special-Purpose Forces provides demanding and realistic training to be considered a part of the resilience training the aforementioned assets are required to undergo.

### **Summary and outlook**

Even though there is still a lot of scientific research and dispute on the trainability of hardiness and resilience going on, the trend of armies finding or developing the particularly resilient soldier is presumably as old as warfare itself.

This chapter gave an insight on how applied military psychology tries to close the gap between scientific findings and the attempt to implement those results into day-to-day military training.

As for the German perspective, the Bundeswehr defines itself in the line of tradition with the Prussian reformers (Ephenhans, 2018). Already here it shows that the question of resilience has played a role in the thinking of military leaders. Clausewitz (\*1. July 1780 as Carl Philipp Gottlieb Clauswitz; †16. November 1831) writes extensively about the mental aspects of warfare in his book on the nature of war (Clausewitz, *On War*, 1832).

He characterizes the concept of “Gewohnheit,” which is best translated as accustomation. “Accustomation strengthens the body in great efforts, the soul in great danger, and the verdict against the first impression (of war). Everywhere a precious prudence is gained through them, which reaches from the hussar and shooter to the general of the division and makes the general’s actions easier” (Clausewitz, 1832).

In a broader sense, adapted to today’s terminology, one could equate accustomation to the concept of hardiness and resilience. From that point of view, in addition to the actual operational experience, realistic exercise and training are the keys to establish the resilience of the individual as well as of the whole army.

“It is infinitely important that the soldier, high or low, at whatever level he stands, should not first see for the first time in war the phenomena of war which, for the first time, put him in astonishment and embarrassment” (Clausewitz, 1832).

To build up hardiness and resilience, soldiers should therefore be confronted with the threatening environment of warfare as realistically as possible. One of the critical problems of this approach is balancing the increasing level of realism while mitigating the resulting increase in danger and keeping the soldiers mentally and physically out of harm’s way.

A crucial improvement in this context could be the utilization of immersive virtual reality training simulators. With the ever-advancing technological progress, training simulators play an increasing role in military training. While they have become a fundamental component of training in some fields, such as the training of aviators and crewmen, simulators are less common in others, for example, dismounted infantry training. Now that the recent development in technology provides portable virtual reality devices, which can display a complex scenario, there will be the question to what extent training in a virtual environment can be implemented. And if so, how effective is it? Is it possible to create and implement simulated training for resilience

training to the same extent it is already used within other fields, generating the same training and cost effectiveness?

Developing and implementing high-resolution realistic simulations can be a very cost-intensive process. Furthermore, there has been controversy in the pertinent literature as to the role of fidelity, amount of detail and originality in simulated training. Is it really necessary, for example, to use absolutely high-end graphics and a 3D sound system in order to get immersed in virtual reality? Or does less technological effort suffice to enthrall the soldiers? What is the impact of the soldiers' "immersion" into a virtual reality on the effectiveness of training projects using such virtual reality?

In conclusion, it can be said that the contribution of applied military psychology in building resilience and hardiness in military personnel contains several factors: from an academic approach by sharpening the conception of human behavior for leaders, to hands-on methods to cope with individual stress, psychology already has a big footprint in military training. The next milestone that has to be achieved will be integrating the advantages of this training in a virtual environment, being aware of and finding answers to the questions that will arise.

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