

# Improving Protection Training: How to Prepare for the Next Conflict

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To enhance protection training in the U.S. Army, we must implement comprehensive strategies that Soldiers continuously learn. On 2 April 2014, a U.S. Army specialist opened fire on Fort Hood, Texas (now known as Fort Cavazos), resulting in 16 injuries and 3 deaths. That event has led to discussions on mental health resources and security/protection measures on military installations. This article will substantiate that the implementation of realistic, scenario-based training and mental resilience should be a part of standard Army training to help Soldiers prepare for the next conflict. By prioritizing these elements, the Army can ensure that Soldiers have the necessary understanding and training to effectively respond to future conflicts—not only in a warzone, but also at home. This article will also highlight areas of protection that desperately need additional training, such as crisis communication and mental health support. Addressing these gaps will enhance military protection strategies in the future and prepare Soldiers to act appropriately when a conflict occurs.

Incorporating real-life scenarios into Army training is vital for protection and security during war and on military installations. As Irwin states, “One of the significant characteristics of militaries as organizations is that they can be described as ‘contingent’ organizations; designed to perform certain tasks that they may seldom or even never be called upon to perform.”<sup>1</sup> Soldiers should have constant access to real-life, protection-based scenarios if they need to use them. If Soldiers are not properly trained to handle conflicts at home, they will only learn how to handle war-based conflicts. Incorporating realistic, scenario-based training into Army training can be crucial for many reasons, including enhanced readiness, skill development, and stress management, which helps improve protection on military installations. For example, if Soldiers are placed in a scenario that involves active shooters on a military installation, they will learn to prepare for the complexities and unpredictabilities (such as school shootings or shootings that occurred on

post) that numerous Soldiers have encountered here in the United States. Training for active-shooter scenarios also prepares Soldiers for skill development; they can practice and refine their skills to know how to act in various complex situations. The article about the Fort Hood shooting in 2014, written by Hipona et al., states, “Higher levels of anxiety were indicated when participants were not engaged in an activity, such as searching for supplies or ensuring others were accounted for.”<sup>2</sup> Regular hands-on training in these types of scenarios allows Soldiers to experience stress, and it teaches them how to manage stress to remain calm and orderly. Simulations of high-pressure environments can be deemed essential for Soldiers to maintain composure during combat, a conflict, or an active shooter scenario. Soldiers will learn how to think more critically and will better adapt to evolving situations.

Mental resilience training is a phenomenally crucial aspect needed to prepare for protection roles in the Army. In his book *In Resilience and Mental Health: Challenges Across the Lifespan*, Southwick stated, “In fact, resilience to stress and trauma may be the norm rather than the exception.”<sup>3</sup> Soldiers are expected to cope effectively with the challenges or conflicts they face. However, there are healthier and more efficient ways to cope than those that are typically used. To improve protection training, Soldiers must be taught the proper stress management techniques. As they learn to recognize and identify their emotions, team confidence levels will increase. Soldier confidence levels can be boosted by teaching them new skills and decision-making abilities that they may have never before learned. Training them on new conflicts faced not only by the Army but also by the United States better prepares them for any task they encounter. This should not be taught with PowerPoint® presentations; Soldiers should receive proper resilience training in a team-based setting. If a group of Soldiers is placed in a room and an active shooter is simulated, those Soldiers will work together to build trust and confidence in each other to survive

as a group. Allowing Soldiers time to build a strong support network among each other enhances their individual resilience and builds a stronger team for when conflicts arise. When conflict (such as an active shooter on post) occurs, we need trained Soldiers who know how to recognize and manage their emotions appropriately and who know how to seek help if needed.

We can teach Soldiers how to know their triggers, understand the issues that cause stress or anxiety, and develop coping strategies to maintain their composure during conflicts. Remember—a mentally resilient Soldier is a Soldier who will be ready for anything that comes their way. Mental resilience is critical; however, Soldiers are seldom trained on two very important aspects of protection: crisis communication and mental health support.

There are numerous challenges associated with training on crisis communication. More time is focused on tactical training, there is a lack of training programs for crisis communication, and there are resource constraints. The Army's primary focus is to train the Soldier to be the best they can be, and a strong emphasis is placed on tactical and operational skills. However, communication in crisis situations does not receive the same level of attention. If more emphasis was placed on communication during conflicts or crises on military installations, Soldiers would learn to act accordingly.

Mental health support training in the military has also been a persistent battle due to the stigma surrounding it and the constant need for improvement. Mental health support training needs to be continuous, and Soldiers should be encouraged to seek help from the mental health programs provided. They are a valuable resource that must be preserved. Be the change we need, and help implement these training programs to better our troops.

The U.S. Army motto is, "This We'll Defend." The improvements to protection discussed in this article will help build a better Army and enable us to defend against all enemies, at home and abroad.



#### **Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup>Anne Irwin, "The Problem of Realism and Reality In Military Training Exercises," *New Directions in Military Sociology*, 2005, pp. 93-133.

<sup>2</sup>Grace Hipona et al, "An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of Shelter-in-Place: The Fort Hood Shooting," *ResearchGate*, May 2022, <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360709136\\_An\\_Interpretive\\_Phenomenological\\_Analysis\\_of\\_Shelter-in-Place\\_The\\_Fort\\_Hood\\_Shooting](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360709136_An_Interpretive_Phenomenological_Analysis_of_Shelter-in-Place_The_Fort_Hood_Shooting)>, accessed on 17 March 2025.

<sup>3</sup>Steven M. Southwick et al, *In Resilience and Mental Health: Challenges Across the Lifespan*, 2011, Cambridge University Press.

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