

Readiness and Resiliency Go Hand in Hand

By BRYAN B. BATTAGLIA

Mashed and intertwined into a Servicemember's behavior and in the daily rhythm of a command, resiliency is a needed ingredient to maintain individual and unit readiness.

A command will have a natural dive and peak pattern during its life cycle, so the "band of readiness" is a wavering line. How deep the dive is, and how steep the peak, depend on several factors in this ebb and flow in the readiness and resiliency of a command. From an enlisted perspective, I hope to show that one is needed to achieve the other.

It is fair to say that both readiness and resiliency are perishable items in the life cycle of the Servicemember and organization. Also, commands and organizations that lack active resiliency programs will struggle to accomplish their assigned missions and associated milestones. The goal, of course, is for the band to remain shallow in its dip and dive, thereby minimizing time, effort, and resources needed in returning units to a level of optimal performance and maintaining that posture. Keep in mind that the center of gravity in every command is its people, because they shape and perform the very tasks that accomplish the mission. While this list is not all-inclusive, here are a few observations from a senior enlisted lens as to the why in the dip and climb and some avoidance measures to keep a minimally wavering band.

Change in Command/Directorship

When a unit receives new leadership, there is an initial period during which the men and women adjust and adapt. Just as important, the new commander needs to

make some adjustments and adaptations in his or her execution of duties. First, the departing commander may have set and shaped conditions over the course of the command tour in such a way that the unit remained operationally effective and in a high state of readiness. Any incoming commander (platoon through combatant command) would be fortunate to fall in on an outfit that lies in a high state of "ready, relevant, and capable." In such a case, the departing commander and his or her subordinate leaders set and maintained a healthy standard—a resilient climate to say the least. This is the kind of unit to which we all hope to be assigned. That said, setting a standard is one thing; how it is received and carried out is another. In this example, and barring the normal transfers and attrition of unit personnel, the new commander is essentially starting with a unit that is fit and proficient in both field and garrison. Therefore, the band of excellence and the band of readiness should remain shallow in dip and climb. As long as there are no major changes in the mission, the best thing an incoming commander can do is not to make any major rudder adjustments and allow the command to keep firing on its existing pistons. Sudden and significant modifications to a fit unit may be unnecessary and could cause underlying turbulence within the rank and file.

On the other hand, a commander may inherit a unit that has experienced disciplinary, proficiency, and ethical road bumps. The bands of readiness and excellence will obviously dip and dive more than they do in the previous example. Given a unit history of problems such as suicide, drug and alcohol

use, sexual assault, or leader misconduct, the new commander may need to make some immediate changes to put the unit back on course and refocus its strengths and priorities.

Said another way, if a unit's center of gravity is off keel, sudden and immediate change is indeed needed. If problems are unattended to, the command will struggle simply to achieve its mission.

Command Climate and Unit Atmospherics

Readers of *Joint Force Quarterly* certainly understand that commanders are ultimately responsible for the success or failure of their commands. From the start, this includes establishing and maintaining a positive climate. But all the responsibility placed on the shoulders of the commander needs to be shared among midgrade officers and senior noncommissioned/petty officers, who are a significant part of the unit's center of gravity. These officers have the ability to influence and shape the unit more quickly than the commander. This is a good thing because a commander who empowers his or her subordinate leaders to execute intent and command philosophy—one who rewards effective performance yet holds his people accountable—marks a holistic leader who will promote a positive atmosphere.

As you can see, I am an advocate for commanders who place trust and confidence in their subordinate leadership, but I would

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SEAC meets with Air Force members at Ramstein Air Base, Germany

U.S. Air Force (Caitlin O'Neil-McKeown)

be remiss if I did not say that this trust is a two-way street; it must be reciprocated. The absence of a dual bond will negatively impact the command. This is where I believe that while the ultimate responsibility lies with the commander, he or she cannot do the job alone. Thus, every leader shoulders responsibility in setting and maintaining the command climate and sustaining readiness. In many ways, we are aligned and designed similar to an NFL team. I can only partially accept the premise that when the team is not making the playoffs, we have the tendency to put all responsibility on the coach: “Get rid of the coach and the problem will go away.” As we peel back the onion, if I may mix metaphors, we see that we have only a linear assessment and inexact solution.

The climate that the commander initially sets will play a significant role in how far the band of readiness dips. A hostile work environment, a command atmosphere that does not promote good order and discipline, leadership by intimidation, and other negative practices will quickly change the band from readiness to *readiness*.

Modification of an Organization’s Mission

Many of us have been assigned to a command that experienced a change in unit mission. Perhaps it was a change from a traditional command mission the unit was tasked with since its inception, or an interim mission change while the unit operationally supported a combatant command, or a

complete unit deactivation. In each such case, deflection and elevation are experienced in the readiness band. Examples range from an existing unit whose traditional mission changes, such as 8th Army, U.S. Forces Korea, to a complete standup of a major organization such as U.S. Africa Command, to a total disestablishment of a four-star organization such U.S. Joint Forces Command. Changes in unit force structure, personnel/equipment, military occupational specialty, Air Force specialty code composition, core competencies, deadlines, dissipation of funding streams, and even geographical location all impact the bands of excellence and readiness for the command. These examples reinforce why individual and unit resiliency during a period of build, rebuild, or complete deactivation will help diffuse unnecessary turbulence and growing pains. Again, a unit and its members need resiliency embedded into daily rhythm and life cycle to achieve and sustain readiness.

Field vs. Garrison

The idea here is not to depict what our young force has come to see as the norm: the huge integration/reintegration phase of a major 6- or 12-month deployment we have seen time and time again. Rather, we must picture the Armed Forces in the absence of major combat operations when they are primarily living and operating out of a garrison setting at home base or home port.

A great number of senior leaders still in uniform grew up in a similar environment

to my own. We were training for a war we never fought—the Cold War. While training, education, and development were in fact executed, the bottom line is that during the 1980s, I believe our military was extremely proficient in garrison survival, field exercises, and rotational peacetime deployments. Actually, I think that on the heels of the Vietnam War, the garrison life we maintained in the 1980s to mid-1990s paid significant dividends in preparation and readiness for our military to defend the Nation today. Garrison enabled us to rebuild upon a basic yet solid foundation through persistent repetition of what I would describe as key tenets of soldiering and military living. Over the course of time, these basics have developed and shaped a fighting force in affairs such as advanced tactics, law of land warfare, code of conduct, field and barracks sanitation, marching, weapons-handling, squad/section gear inspections, knee-to-knee counseling, physical fitness, professional development, and other fundamental areas—all of which are key ingredients to building relevancy, resiliency, proficiency, and good order and discipline.

Even if we never get the opportunity in our life cycle to return to a persistent garrison environment, we should still take every opportunity to implement some of the basic tenets throughout our commands, ships, bases, and formations. Part of maintaining unit readiness in the training life cycle may be packing up the unit to go to the field for 5 days or even for 2 weeks. It may be an Air Force squadron running expeditionary airfield operations from an adjacent base, or a Marine or Army infantry battalion on field maneuvers rehearsing raids and ambush techniques, or a Navy Seabee platoon training in refortification at a neighboring state’s base.

My point is this: there are differences in maintaining proficiencies in a garrison setting compared to a field environment, and it is these differences that affect the bands. We should seek to keep the readiness and resiliency bands on a fairly level glide-slope. When moving from field to garrison and vice versa, good units can experience a slight variation in band wave with little adjustment in the ranks. Exceptional units can segue to either environment and not lose a drum beat. In any case, it is extremely important that no matter how long or short the field operation or sea trial may be, the transition from one to the other must be monitored by the leaders. **JFQ**