Applied Psychology Research 2026, 5(1), 4075.
doi: https://doi.org/10.59400/apr4075

Review

Forging a military mindset: The psychology of success at basic training

Kevin M. Fisher

Department of Physical Education and Sport, Central Michigan University, 177 Student Activity Center, Mount Pleasant, MI 48859, USA; kevin.fisher@cmich.edu

CITATION

Fisher KM. Forging a military mindset: The psychology of success at basic training. Applied Psychology Research. 2026; 5(1): 4075. https://doi.org/10.59400/apr4075

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 24 February 2026
Revised: 17 April 2026
Accepted: 21 April 2026
Available online: 29 April 2026

Abstract: Each of the six branches of the United States Armed Forces requires individuals that are new to the military to attend and successfully complete an entry-level training course, commonly referred to as basic training or boot camp. These courses feature physical and psychological challenges that must be overcome if a recruit (trainee) is to graduate and pursue a military career. Although the specific location, length, training exercises, and criteria for evaluation will differ by the chosen branch, characteristics such as a high level of physical fitness and psychological readiness can facilitate success for a civilian who is embarking on the difficult journey of becoming a service member. A military mindset is not an inborn trait; it is a trainable adaptation produced through disciplined exposure to challenge, stress regulation, habit formation, identity transformation, and purposeful socialization into a mission-driven culture. Such a mindset may be described as mental fitness or mental readiness for duty. Specific physical demands may vary by branch and military occupation due to differences in purpose and scope, but universal psychological components, including resilient persistence (grit) and stress tolerance, emotional regulation, mindfulness (task-focused attention), self-discipline, coachability, confidence through mastery, growth-oriented thinking, adaptability, an attitude for teamwork, and purpose-driven commitment can help any enlistee be prepared to overcome the challenges of entry-level military training. This article addresses critical theoretical foundations and important psychological components that can facilitate success for a (prospective) recruit of any branch of service.

Keywords: basic training; performance psychology; readiness; United States military

1. Introduction

The purpose of the United States military is to support and defend the Constitution and ensure security of the U.S., its possessions, and vital interests (Department of Defense, 2021). Its core missions and responsibilities include deterrence and defense—preventing attacks on the U.S. and its allies, homeland security—protecting the American people and territory, global security—maintaining peace and stability in critical regions, national policy support—implementing foreign policy objectives and strategies, and crisis response—providing humanitarian aid and disaster relief, each of which may be accomplished through integrated operations on the land, on the sea, and in the air (Truman, 1947). The U.S. Armed Forces are composed of six coequal military service branches:

1. Air Force—The Air Force is tasked with aerial and space operations, including air defense, reconnaissance, strategic bombing, and maintaining global superiority in air and cyberspace (Air Force, n.d.; USA.gov, 2025). It was founded on

September 18, 1947 (Johnson, 2026).

2. Army—The Army is responsible for conducting prompt and sustained land combat operations (U.S. Army, n.d.; USA.gov, 2025). Founded on June 14, 1775, it is the oldest and largest service branch.
3. Coast Guard—The Coast Guard serves as both a military branch and a law enforcement agency. It is responsible for maritime law enforcement, search and rescue, and environmental protection along U.S. waters (United States Coast Guard, 2026; USA.gov, 2025). It traces its founding to August 4, 1790.
4. Marine Corps—The Marine Corps serves as an amphibious assault force and expeditionary ground force (U.S. Marine Corps, 2021; USA.gov, 2025). It is a component of the Department of the Navy and was founded on November 10, 1775.
5. Navy—The Navy is primarily responsible for seabound warfare, maritime security, and the projection of U.S. global power through its fleet of ships, aircraft, and submarines (America's Navy, n.d.; USA.gov, 2025). It was founded on October 13, 1775.
6. Space Force—The Space Force focuses on space operations and defense by managing satellites and technology critical for national security (United States Space Force, 2026; USA.gov, 2025). It was founded on December 20, 2019.

Those who graduate from initial entry training have earned the right to call themselves Airmen, Soldiers, Coast Guardsmen, Marines, Sailors, or Guardians, respectively, depending on the chosen branch of service. Initial entry training is generally referred to as basic training, recruit training, or boot camp, and varies by location and length as indicated in **Table 1**.

Table 1. A Comparison of Entry-level Training across U.S. Military Branches.

Military branch	Name(s)	Location(s)	Length
Air Force	Basic Military Training (BMT)	Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas	7.5 weeks
Army	Basic Combat Training (BCT)	Fort Jackson, South Carolina Fort Moore, Georgia Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri Fort Sill, Oklahoma	10 weeks
Coast Guard	Basic Training (Boot Camp)	Cape May, New Jersey	8 weeks
Marine Corps	Recruit Training (Boot Camp)	Parris Island, South Carolina San Diego, California	13 weeks
Navy	Recruit Training (Boot Camp)	Great Lakes, Illinois	9 weeks
Space Force	Basic Military Training (BMT)	Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas	7.5 weeks

The goal of basic training is to turn civilians into members of the military who are ready, willing, and able to execute operational orders and tasks as directed. This transformation can be a difficult process that is demanding for enlistees, both physically and psychologically. Although numbers can fluctuate on a yearly basis, data sources indicate the following attrition rates for basic training: Air Force and Space Force—6–8%, Army—8–12%, Marine Corps—12–16%, and Navy—8–11% (Christenson, 2023; Faram, 2018; Harkins and Cox, 2020; Winkie, 2021). For the Coast Guard, definitive numbers are difficult to pinpoint, but some resources indicate similar

numbers to the overall military average—approximately 10–15%, while other resources suggest a range that is slightly higher. Reasons for failing to graduate typically fall into categories such as medical issues, a failure to adapt to the environment, physical fitness, disciplinary issues, and academic performance. While individual experiences will vary drastically by branch, location, instructors, and peers, the aim of this article is to address important theoretical foundations and psychological components that can facilitate success for a (prospective) recruit of any branch. What follows is a theory-driven narrative review and synthesis of psychological theoretical frameworks and the resulting psychological traits and skills that could facilitate success in a basic training environment. Relevant frameworks were determined by analyzing the characteristics and demands of a basic training environment and subsequently chosen based on the ability to explain a distinct psychological process. Multiple theories were selected based on a logical, functional approach rather than a single-theory approach and the proposed framework is heuristic rather than exhaustive. The resulting psychological components were then grouped and organized into three broader domains based on similarities and conceptual overlap to create a practical structure that mirrors how recruits actually experience basic training: first by learning to remain functional under pressure, then by learning to perform reliably to standard as a group, and ultimately by internalizing the values, purpose, and collective identity of military service.

2. Theoretical frameworks

Mental fitness may be defined as the proactive, dynamic capacity to manage life's challenges, adapt to change, and maintain a positive, balanced psychological state (Robinson et al., 2015). Similarly, the U.S. Army's Holistic Health and Fitness (H2F) doctrine defines mental readiness as the ability to think, feel, and act in ways that optimize performance in demanding environments and treats this domain as a trainable component of overall readiness for duty and service (Bekesiene et al., 2023; Thompson et al., 2026). A military mindset, therefore, can be understood as a trainable psychological adaptation rather than a fixed personal trait. The mindset required to succeed in basic training is forged through a structured process in which recruits are exposed to repeated stress, taught to regulate their responses, socialized into a collective identity, conditioned through repetition and routine, challenged to improve through feedback, and strengthened by resilient attitudes toward adversity. Empirical evidence from military psychology and adjacent performance domains (i.e., similar high-stress training and learning environments) supports the idea that effective adaptation in demanding environments is best explained not by one theory alone, but by an integrated framework consisting of six complementary pillars: stress inoculation, resilience or hardiness, self-determination, habit formation through behavioral conditioning, growth-oriented mastery using deliberate practice, and social identity (Jackson et al., 2021; McDonald et al., 2026; Raabe et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2020).

2.1. Stress inoculation theory: Controlled adversity as psychological conditioning

The first pillar of a military mindset is stress inoculation, which suggests that exposure to manageable, progressively challenging stressors can improve coping, performance, and emotional regulation under future pressure. Basic training is intentionally designed around this principle. Recruits are repeatedly exposed to time pressure, fatigue, uncertainty, social evaluation, and physical discomfort in ways that are difficult but not random. The goal is not merely to test them, but to teach them how to function effectively under these conditions. Empirical studies of stress inoculation training have shown that individuals who receive structured exposure plus coping strategies display lower self-reported distress, reduced behavioral signs of anxiety, and improved performance in stressful tasks compared with controls (Mace and Carroll, 1989; Mace et al., 1986). In military-specific contexts, a modern performance protocol based on this theory called Stress Inoculation Training, Northern California (SIT-NORCAL) was developed and preliminarily evaluated with positive results across 44 cohorts and roughly 300 special warfare and first-response personnel, providing applied evidence that stress inoculation can be translated into performance-enhancement systems for operational settings (Jackson et al., 2021). In basic training, this means that discomfort is not merely endured—it becomes the medium through which recruits learn confidence, emotional control, and reliable action under pressure.

2.2. Resilience and psychological hardiness

The second pillar is resilience, particularly as expressed through the construct of psychological hardiness, which can be conceptualized through the interrelated attitudes of commitment, control, and challenge (Bekesiene et al., 2023). Recruits who are high in hardiness are more likely to stay engaged under strain, believe they can influence their response even when they cannot control their environment, and interpret hardship as challenges to be met rather than a threat that should be avoided. Military research with Norwegian Navy cadets undergoing a highly stressful field exercise found that hardiness predicted more adaptive physiological responses to stress, suggesting that hardiness is not merely a subjective trait, but one that can produce objective differences in bodily responses under strain (Sandvik et al., 2013). In military leadership selection, hardiness has also been shown to predict performance, with part of its effect mediated through self-efficacy beliefs, indicating that hardy individuals are not only more stress-tolerant but also more likely to believe they can act effectively in demanding contexts (Nordmo et al., 2022). Among military reservists, hardiness has been linked to perceived performance, with resilience, cohesion, and stress perceptions shaping that relationship (Bekesiene et al., 2023). Recent developmental work with new recruits undergoing Basic Combat Training conceptualizes resilience not as a fixed endpoint but as a dynamic process of adaptation across training stressors, which aligns with the format of basic training as a progression of challenge and recovery (McDonald et al., 2026). Together, these findings support the argument that one should not seek to eliminate adversity but to meet adversity with adaptive endurance and sustained commitment.

2.3. Self-determination theory: From external compliance to internal discipline

A third pillar is self-determination theory which explains how externally imposed rules and standards can become internally owned and self-sustaining. Although basic training initially relies on command structure, correction, and strict accountability, long-term success depends on whether recruits internalize the standards rather than simply comply when supervised. SDT proposes that durable motivation is strengthened when three basic psychological needs are supported: autonomy (a sense of independence or self-governance), competence (belief in one's capability), and relatedness (a sense of belonging). In military settings, recent empirical evidence supports this framework. Among U.S. Army ROTC cadets, perceived cadre behaviors that were more need-supportive were associated with greater basic psychological need satisfaction and more adaptive forms of motivation, indicating that military leadership style influences whether discipline becomes internalized rather than merely imposed (Raabe et al., 2020). Similarly, an exploratory study in a military learning environment found that cadets' perceptions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness were closely tied to motivationally significant events, suggesting that military pedagogy can either strengthen or weaken motivational internalization depending on how standards are delivered (Lepinoy et al., 2022). In the context of basic training, SDT helps explain the crucial shift from compulsory obedience to discipline that manifests because one identifies with the standard.

2.4. Habit formation through behavioral conditioning

The fourth pillar is habit formation through behavioral conditioning, which explains how disciplined action becomes increasingly automatic under repeated exposure to stable cues, expectations, and consequences. In basic training, many desired behaviors such as rapid response to commands, attention to detail, equipment accountability, posture and bearing, hygiene routines, movement standards, and time discipline should occur with minimal deliberation, often under conditions of fatigue. For this reason, military training relies heavily on repetition, immediate correction of errors, standardized procedures, and consistent environmental cues. Empirical research on habits shows that repeated behaviors in stable contexts increase behavioral automaticity, making actions easier to initiate and sustain over time (Keller et al., 2021; Stojanovic et al., 2022). Studies of habit development further show that stable cues are especially important because disruptions in context interrupt automatic responding, whereas consistency strengthens it (Keller et al., 2021; Lally et al., 2011). Experimental evidence also indicates that once habits are established, goals can trigger well-learned responses automatically, reducing the need for conscious effort at the moment of action (Aarts and Dijksterhuis, 2000). When applied to basic training, cadre (instructors) seek to cultivate desired conduct that becomes habitual default behavior. Under stress, people are not likely to perform based on abstract (e.g., noble or lofty) intentions. Instead, they rely on what has been most consistently practiced and reinforced.

2.5. Growth-oriented mastery through deliberate practice

A fifth pillar is growth-oriented mastery through deliberate practice, which combines a growth mindset (the belief that capability can be developed) (Dweck, 2006) with deliberate practice (structured skill repetition with feedback that is aimed at improvement) (Ericsson et al., 1993; Lee and Schmidt, 2025) to achieve mastery experiences (Bandura, 1977a, 1977b, 1986). Basic training routinely challenges recruits with tasks they initially cannot perform well such as performing on physical assessments, acting in accordance with drill and ceremony, learning standardized procedures, excelling under scrutiny and evaluation, and functioning while exhausted. If these early failures are interpreted as proof of fixed inadequacy, motivation deteriorates, but if they are interpreted as feedback within an ongoing developmental process, confidence and self-efficacy increase as persistence and adaptation increase (Bandura, 1977a, 1997b). Empirical evidence from elite military training supports the importance of adaptive mindsets under stress. In Navy SEAL candidates, more adaptive mindsets were associated with a greater likelihood of success in Special Warfare training, suggesting that how candidates interpret stress influences persistence and performance in highly demanding environments (Smith et al., 2020). Similarly, research on psychological attributes predicting successful military basic training found that the characteristics recruits bring at entry can shape retention and performance outcomes, reinforcing the importance of trainable psychological factors early in training (Beattie et al., 2025). The role of deliberate practice in learning and refining skilled performance is supported by empirical findings from skill acquisition research: learners improve more when practice is structured, effortful, metric-based, and paired with targeted feedback rather than unguided (Ahmed et al., 2018; Ericsson et al., 1993; Moon et al., 2019). In basic training, this framework suggests that confidence is built when recruits fail (repeatedly), receive correction, improve, and eventually achieve mastery. Competence is earned and demonstrated through performance.

2.6. Social identity theory: From civilian to military servicemember

The final pillar is social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, 1986), which provides a powerful explanation for how basic training transforms recruits from isolated individuals into members of a collective. A military mindset constitutes an identity shift from an individualized focus to a status in which the recruit increasingly interprets the self through the lens of the group, the mission, and the institution. Shared hardships, standardized uniforms, synchronized routines and rituals, a common language of expression, and collective accountability all function as mechanisms of identity restructuring. Empirical research with military populations supports the importance of cohesion and group attachment in demanding environments. A large-scale longitudinal study of the Army Study to Assess Risk and Resilience in Servicemembers (STARRS) unit cohesion scale found that unit cohesion is a measurable and consequential feature of military functioning, reflecting whether service members feel supported, committed, or alienated within the unit structure (Sherman and Lucier-Greer, 2025). In addition, a recent randomized study of Soldiers undergoing Basic Combat Training found that changes in social cohesion could be influenced during training, underscoring that cohesion is not just due to a predisposition but a trainable group property within basic

training environments (Gutierrez et al., 2026). Longitudinal military cohesion research more broadly indicates that cohesion predicts psychological, social, and behavioral outcomes relevant to performance and persistence (Fors Brandebo et al., 2022). Thus, basic training seeks to replace a sentiment of "I will do what is best for myself" with "I will do what is best for the group," which is a hallmark of military identity formation.

3. Psychological components of success

Taken together, these six pillars suggest that a military mindset may be conceptualized as a trainable system of adaptation rather than fixed personality traits. Stress inoculation explains how recruits learn to function under pressure; self-determination explains imposed standards become internalized; social identity explains how the individual self is reorganized around organizational membership and mission; habit formation explains how discipline becomes automatic behavior; growth-oriented mastery explains how confidence and competence are built through repetition and feedback; and resilience explains why some recruits are more likely to persist, recover, improve, and thrive under hardship. A military mindset is the outcome of structured stress exposure, identity transformation, motivational internalization, behavioral habits, developmental learning, and resilient meaning-making (Beattie et al., 2025; Jackson et al., 2021; McDonald et al., 2026; Raabe et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2020). Such a framework is practically useful because it aligns with how military training operates through a system of repeated challenges designed to transform behavior, identity, and performance over time. From these theories, we can discern three categories of important psychological components and mental skills that can facilitate mental fitness and mental readiness. The first category is stress management and coping skills for staying functional under pressure and includes resilient persistence (grit) and stress tolerance, emotional regulation, and mindfulness (task-focused attention). The second category is discipline and performance skills for task execution and includes self-discipline, coachability, confidence through mastery, growth-oriented thinking, and adaptability. The third category is identity and commitment skills for transitioning from an independent civilian to a servicemember that internalizes standards and functions as a member of a group and includes an attitude for teamwork and purpose-driven commitment. These categories and components are summarized in **Table 2**. Before addressing these items, let us first examine a prerequisite to success that underlies all of them: preparation.

Table 2. Categories and Components of a Military Mindset.

Category	Components
Stress management and coping skills	1. Resilient persistence (grit) and stress tolerance 2. Emotional regulation 3. Mindfulness (task-focused attention)
Discipline and performance skills	1. Self-discipline 2. Coachability 3. Confidence through mastery 4. Growth-oriented thinking 5. Adaptability

Table 2. *Cont.*

Category	Components
Identity and commitment skills	1. An attitude for teamwork 2. Purpose-driven commitment

3.1. Mental (and physical) preparation

Before addressing the psychological components, it is first important to note that a candidate should do their due diligence and their homework in terms of both mental and physical preparation to increase their chances of success. These psychological areas are meant to be a supplement to, rather than a substitute for, the physical fitness requirements that are needed to succeed at basic training. It is only through a high level of both physical and psychological preparedness that one has the greatest chance of success. The specific areas of fitness that are needed or emphasized will vary somewhat by branch, but being well-rounded in areas such as cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, muscular endurance, and body composition is recommended. Although specific plans for increasing physical readiness are outside the scope of this article, speaking to a recruiter about this topic or seeking trustworthy online sources can be helpful. In general, strive for healthy amounts of exercise, good nutrition, and adequate sleep as you prepare. If you are already active, continue to set fitness goals and pursue them. If you are starting from a largely sedentary standpoint, begin your fitness pursuits long before your departure date and use gradual progressions to avoid injury or burnout. Performing a diagnostic simulation of your chosen branch's physical fitness test and comparing your results to the normative data of other individuals can be a good starting point.

For many people, the prospect of leaving one's home and the comforts associated with it to enter a strict, largely unknown, and potentially hostile environment can be a daunting one. To ease these feelings and concerns, recruits should seek as much knowledge and information prior to departing. An expression states, "Prior preparation and planning prevent poor performance." Adequate preparation can build confidence, reduce anxiety, and enhance execution and productivity (Yusefzadeh et al., 2019). Engage in research on what to expect as far as timelines, events, special skills, and required knowledge that can facilitate completion of training. Search for information on trustworthy websites and ask about the experiences of recruiters and current or prior service members. All branches have areas that require memorization such as history, traditions, customs and courtesies, creeds, general orders, manuals, ranks, and protocols. Start this process early to minimize the stress of having to do it all during training. The last thing an exhausted person wants to do is sacrifice sleep because they have extra duty or additional reading and studying.

3.2. Stress management and coping skills

The first domain of a military mindset is stress management and coping skills, which are the mental abilities that keep a recruit performing at a functional level when the environment becomes uncomfortable, chaotic, demanding, or emotionally intense (Smith et al., 1995). Basic training is designed to elevate pressure. Recruits

are placed under time constraints, corrected publicly, deprived of comfort, pushed physically, and required to perform while fatigued and uncertain of themselves. Under these conditions, many failures are not failures of intelligence or physical capacity, but failures of psychological regulation. A recruit may be intellectually and physically capable of completing a task but become overwhelmed by frustration, embarrassment, panic, or self-doubt. Stress management and coping skills can help prevent that collapse and allow a recruit to stay operational in a training environment. The three key skills that may facilitate performance in this domain are resilient persistence (grit) and stress tolerance, emotional regulation, and mindfulness (task-focused attention).

3.2.1. Resilient persistence (grit) and stress tolerance

Grit is a personality trait characterized by passion, resilience, and sustained perseverance for long-term goals, even in the face of adversity (Duckworth et al., 2007). It may be thought of as resilient persistence and constitutes an ability to recover from setbacks and continue purposeful effort despite correction, discouragement, fatigue, or failure (Duckworth et al., 2007). This character trait can aid a person not only in military pursuits, but also in all areas of life, including academic and career opportunities. Basic training is not a single test; it is an environment of cumulative assessment based on repeated demands. Every recruit will make mistakes and is likely to experience moments of mental frustration and physical depletion. Those who excel recover quickly after difficulty. Setbacks are treated as temporary interruptions rather than final verdicts. A failed inspection, a humiliating correction, or a miserable physical event can trigger negative self-talk. The recruit who lacks resilience may turn one failure into a self-fulfilling prophecy: "I'm not cut out for this," while a resilient recruit turns the same experience into a task: "I will fix it with improvement and keep going." Basic training is not a process centered around being perfect all the time. Successful recruits are often the ones who learn to reset quickly, continue effort under stress, and refuse to let a bad moment become a negative identity.

At the core of grit is stress tolerance, the ability to remain effective at a task in the presence of discomfort, pressure, fatigue, and uncertainty (Simon and Gaher, 2005). It does not mean feeling calm at all times or enjoying hardship. Instead, discomfort does not automatically control or dictate behavior. In basic training, recruits who lack stress tolerance may interpret demanding moments as a sign that something is wrong: the pressure feels unbearable, the yelling feels personal, and the fatigue feels catastrophic. Recruits with stronger stress tolerance learn a different interpretation: this is difficult, but difficulty is part of the process. It encourages a recruit to keep moving when the body is tired, to keep listening when the environment is loud, and to keep functioning when the mind wants immediate relief. In accordance with stress inoculation theory and training, it is one of the first and most essential elements of a military mindset because basic training is intentionally structured to force adaptation through controlled adversity. The recruit who can tolerate discomfort without mentally quitting gains a major advantage over the recruit who interprets discomfort as defeat.

In conjunction with grit, a training environment seeks to build mental and emotional fortitude, the presence of which is theoretically consistent with the process of stress inoculation. Mental fortitude (mental toughness) is the psychological strength,

resilience, and capacity to maintain focus, confidence, and performance under stress, adversity, or pressure (Mahoney et al., 2014; Weinberg et al., 2016). It consists of the four C's: control, commitment, challenge, and confidence (Clough et al., 2002).

- Control: Take responsibility for the current situation and maintain a firm belief that you can directly influence the outcome. Even when much of an environment is dictated or externally controlled, learned hopefulness suggests that emphasizing purposeful action and maintaining control over minor aspects can have benefits for resilience and motivation (Magness, 2022).
- Commitment: Be dedicated to the pursuit of goals through full involvement and engagement in the current endeavor and maximum effort.
- Challenge: View stressful situations as grounds for growth and an opportunity to actively pursue success rather than an attempt to avoid failure. Focus on what can be gained from these situations rather than the (perceived) implications of failure.
- Confidence: Maintain a strong belief in personal capability to improve and achieve success.

Although a recruit may lack confidence prior to basic training, it is a quality that tends to accompany competence (being able to do something effectively and efficiently), which is developed through increasing levels of knowledge and experience (Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Emotional fortitude involves self-awareness to understand one's own emotional responses, coupled with the courage and inner strength to act constructively, learn from setbacks, and maintain hope, rather than suppressing or avoiding emotions (Aziz et al., 2024). For example, when an instructor is offering correction, whether through verbal statements or physical means (e.g., the front leaning rest position), remember that they are there to do a job and their words and sentiments should not be taken personally. The instructors' assignment is to prepare individuals to meet standards, fulfill orders, accomplish missions, and potentially fight in combat—they are there for this purpose alone and are not interested in making friends or enemies. Training outcomes, rather than the social ramifications of their interactions with recruits, will be the priority. In a given moment, recruits may feel tired, frustrated, and generally discontented with the overall situation, but as time passes, the days (and eventually the weeks) continue to pass, and so too will a negative situation and many of the sentiments associated with it. The passage of time often grants a different perspective, or a new way of thinking about or understanding an issue or event. For example, something that seems negative in the moment may be reflected upon with humor later.

3.2.2. Emotional regulation

Emotional regulation is the ability to manage internal reactions so that feelings do not interfere with performance (Gross and John, 2003). At some point during training, recruits are likely to experience negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, discouragement, embarrassment, frustration, and self-doubt. These reactions are natural, so the issue is not whether the emotion occurs but whether it takes command. A recruit who fails a task may feel anger or shame, a recruit who is corrected sharply may feel embarrassed, and a recruit who is exhausted may feel discouraged or even

hopeless for a moment. What matters is whether the recruit can contain the reaction, reset quickly, and act according to standard. A recruit having a difficult experience may benefit from thinking, "That was rough. Reset. Next task." This skill is especially important because basic training can amplify emotion on purpose. Correction is immediate, feedback is public, and standards are uncompromising. The recruit who becomes emotionally reactive may sacrifice valuable attention, decisional capability, and energy. The recruit who can stay composed can gain credibility, learning capacity, and stability. Emotional regulation is not about suppressing or denying that emotions occur, it is about preventing a temporary reaction from sabotaging long-term gains in performance.

Emotional regulation can be conceptualized as a multistep process involving the sequential capacities of emotional awareness, interpretation, cognitive appraisal, and active regulation. First, emotional awareness refers to the ability to accurately detect and attend to one's internal affective states, which serves as the foundational prerequisite for any subsequent regulatory effort. Without awareness, emotions remain diffuse and are more likely to influence behavior implicitly. Second, emotional literacy involves identifying, labeling, and interpreting these emotional experiences within context, allowing individuals to distinguish among nuanced affective states and recognize their potential causes and implications. Third, individuals engage in cognitive appraisal, a process through which an emotional stimulus is evaluated and given meaning. For optimal performance, some emotional experiences may require reappraisal from that which is initially applied, with emotions perceived as negative being reframed to alter their psychological impact. This step is particularly important in high-stress environments, as it allows individuals to reinterpret discomfort or anxiety as facilitative rather than debilitating. Finally, active regulation involves the deliberate modulation of emotional responses through strategies such as attentional control, breathing techniques, behavioral adjustment, or expressive regulation. This staged process aligns with contemporary models of emotion regulation that emphasize both antecedent-focused and response-focused strategies (Gross, 1998, 2015), while also reflecting applied perspectives that highlight the importance of awareness and interpretation as precursors to effective regulation in performance settings (Magness, 2022). Conceptualizing emotional regulation in this structured manner provides a theoretically grounded, practical framework for understanding how individuals can maintain behavioral effectiveness under conditions of stress and emotional arousal.

3.2.3. Mindfulness (task-focused attention)

Mindfulness encompasses a range of practices centered on deliberately directing attention to the present moment while maintaining a nonjudgmental awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations (Andoh, 2025). Sometimes referred to as "attentional fitness" within military populations, mindfulness practices, including breathing techniques, grounding exercises, meditation, and yoga, are designed to reduce maladaptive attachment to intrusive thoughts and emotional reactions while enhancing focus on task-relevant demands (Ludwig and Kabat-Zinn, 2008). In addition to improving attentional control, mindfulness facilitates greater awareness of interoception, or internal physiological states such as breathing, fatigue, heart rate,

hunger, and pain. These internal signals are dynamic and influenced by cognitive and emotional processes, and increased awareness of these relationships allows individuals to better regulate their responses. Through this process, individuals can interrupt unproductive thought patterns, reduce the intensity of reactive emotions, and make more deliberate and adaptive behavioral choices. Empirical research supports the effectiveness of mindfulness training across domains relevant to military performance, including attention, emotional regulation, working memory, mood, morale, and perceived social support, while also reducing anxiety, depression, impulsivity, and stress (Hepner et al., 2022). Notably, these benefits can be achieved with relatively brief but consistent practice, with evidence suggesting that as little as 12–15 min per day, three to four days per week, can produce measurable improvements in attentional and psychological functioning (Zanesco et al., 2019).

The effectiveness of mindfulness is closely tied to its impact on attention, which can be understood as the general cognitive capability to process information (Lee and Schmidt, 2025). Attention involves selectively concentrating on specific stimuli while filtering out competing distractions, functioning as a mental "spotlight" that directs perception, learning, and memory processes. However, attention is inherently limited in both capacity—individuals can effectively focus on only a small number of stimuli at a time—and duration, as sustained attention depletes cognitive resources and leads to fatigue or increased distractibility. These limitations are particularly relevant in basic training, where recruits must rapidly acquire, retain, and apply large amounts of information while operating under stress and fatigue. Because attention governs how information is perceived, encoded, and acted upon, it serves as a gateway to subsequent cognitive and behavioral processes. The allocation of attention also reflects underlying priorities, as individuals tend to devote cognitive resources to what they perceive as most important. In high-demand environments, competing demands can create a sense of constant busyness; however, effective performance depends on the ability to selectively prioritize task-relevant information while also recognizing the importance of rest and recovery for sustained functioning.

One of the most critical applications of attention in basic training is task-focused attention, defined as the ability to direct concentration toward the immediate requirement rather than becoming distracted by discomfort, emotional reactions, future concerns, or past mistakes. When attention shifts toward fatigue, perceived unfairness, or prior errors, performance on the present task deteriorates. In contrast, research suggests that successful recruits should narrow their attentional focus to the next instruction, the next repetition, or a short, manageable time interval, thereby reducing feelings of overwhelm and enhancing execution quality. This capacity to anchor attention to immediate demands allows recruits to remain functional even in highly stressful conditions and may be strengthened through deliberate habits such as careful listening, executing one standard at a time, and maintaining focus on actionable steps within complex environments. Closely related is attention to detail, which refers to the precise and consistent execution of tasks to ensure quality, adherence to standards, and safety. In military contexts, even minor lapses in attention can have significant consequences, as errors in tasks such as equipment maintenance, weapons handling,

or technical procedures may compromise mission effectiveness and endanger lives. Consequently, attention to detail is emphasized even in routine activities to establish it as a habitual standard across contexts, reinforced through strict adherence to standard operating procedures, inspections, and peer accountability. Developing this precision prior to training through structured routines, checklists, and deliberate practice can facilitate the internalization of disciplined behavior.

The relationship between mindfulness and attention is further clarified within a broader behavioral framework in which attention functions as the entry point to a chain of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes. Because psychological activity and physiological states are interconnected, attentional focus influences cognitions and emotional responses, which in turn shape choices, actions, and ultimately outcomes. This sequence is consistent with principles from applied behavior analysis, particularly the ABC model, which conceptualizes behavior in terms of antecedents, behaviors, and consequences (Banks et al., 2014; Meadan et al., 2014; Skinner, 1953, 1988). Within this framework, attentional focus, along with associated cognitions and emotions, constitutes part of the antecedent conditions that set the stage for behavior. Putting all these elements (attention, cognitions, emotions, choices, actions, and consequences) together forms a behavioral chain as depicted in **Figure 1**. By developing greater awareness and control over these antecedent processes, particularly through mindfulness and attentional training, individuals can influence downstream behaviors and improve performance outcomes. Collectively, these perspectives position mindfulness and attention as foundational components of psychological readiness, as the ability to regulate attention ultimately shapes how individuals interpret, respond to, and perform within demanding environments such as basic training.

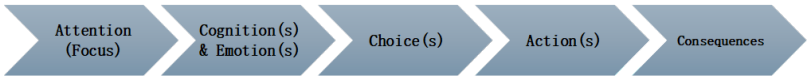

Figure 1. Components of a Behavioral Chain (ACECAC).
Source: Adapted from the ABC behavioral chain used in ABA (Skinner, 1953).

3.3. Discipline and performance skills

The second domain of a military mindset is discipline and performance skills, which determine if a recruit can absorb corrections, consistently meet expectations, and improve under pressure. Basic training does not reward sporadic bursts of motivation or occasional effort; it requires reliability and rewards repeated behavior. Actions such as being on time, following instructions closely, maintaining standards, learning from mistakes, and performing correctly even when frustrated or tired facilitate success. Skills in this domain that are theoretically consistent include self-discipline, coachability, confidence through mastery, growth-oriented thinking, and adaptability. Together, these skills can transform raw effort into structured improvement.

3.3.1. Self-discipline

A recruit or trainee who wants to improve capability or increase rank should learn discipline, the practice of training yourself to follow a code of behavior, which involves internal self-directed strategies to achieve goals (Oxford University Press,

2001). Important aspects of discipline include self-control (i.e., resisting immediate temptations or impulses), self-regulation (i.e., managing thoughts, emotions, and behaviors), and habit formation (Lakes and Hoyt, 2004; Lally et al., 2010; Tangney et al., 2004). Psychiatrist Phil Stutz discusses three practical forms of discipline for self-mastery and behavioral growth in applied clinical psychology (Sauer, 2023). Reactive discipline is your ability to control your thoughts and actions when responding to a situation or event. Structural discipline involves creating and adhering to a certain order in your days to support acting and living in ways that support your goals and values. Expansive discipline is focused on growth, which requires stepping out of your comfort zone and seizing opportunities rather than reverting to old habits that feel safer. Having a successful military career is likely to require each of these types. A person who has taken the steps to join the military has already displayed expansive discipline. At basic training, structural discipline will largely be provided, as each daily routine and specific activities will be largely dictated. Reactive discipline involves remembering that while you cannot always control the events around you as they unfold, you can control your response to those events. Even if things do not go as planned, remain steadfast and strive to moderate verbal and emotional responses, never getting too high (i.e., happy, elated, excited) when something goes well or too low (i.e., sad, depressed, distraught) when something goes poorly.

People generally want to increase the prevalence of positive habits while decreasing that of negative habits, but there is often a gap between intention and action, making it difficult to implement lasting behavioral change. One approach to improve self-discipline and enact behavioral change is to start with atomic habits, small, incremental changes that add up over time (Clear, 2018). With areas such as exercise, nutrition, sleep, or studying, be intentional about taking steps in the right direction that are consistent, even if they do not seem to immediately produce drastic or immense results. Exercise may be added to a daily routine by taking the stairs instead of the elevator or parking farther away from a destination. Eliminating one soft drink, snack, or dessert each day cuts empty calories and improves daily nutritional habits. Establishing a bedtime routine and eliminating screen time before bed can lead to higher-quality sleep. Reading and studying for a short period (i.e., 15–30 min) each day can lead to significant gains in knowledge when repeated on a regular basis. These daily accomplishments also build confidence to handle bigger challenges in the future. Prioritizing these areas and starting with small steps gradually changes sporadic behavior and intermittent motivation into consistent, disciplined habits that are reliable, compounding sources of meaningful change.

Self-discipline is the ability to consistently align behavior with required standards regardless of comfort level, convenience, mood, or motivation. This is important because motivation is unreliable. Some days, a person may feel energized and motivated, while other days, they may feel exhausted, irritated, or mentally drained. A recruit who depends on motivation becomes inconsistent, while a recruit who has self-discipline becomes dependable. Self-discipline is also the bridge between external control and internal ownership. Initially, recruits often follow standards only because they are being observed. Over time, the goal is to follow standards because they have

become an integral part of how the recruit operates. At this point, discipline begins to look less like forced compliance and more like a military mindset.

3.3.2. Coachability

Coachability describes responsiveness to instruction and consists of a person's willingness and openness to receive corrections, adapt behavior accordingly, and improve without ego interference (i.e., defensiveness due to fears, insecurities, a need for control, or a desire to feel superior to others) (Johnson et al., 2021; Smith et al., 1995). Some recruits struggle because they resist the learning process by taking corrective action personally or interpreting feedback as disrespect rather than useful information, but the instructional process of basic training is built on constant correction. Recruits are told what they did wrong, how to fix it, and are expected to improve quickly. The recruit who can emotionally tolerate correction without becoming stubborn gains an advantage by learning faster and reducing repeated mistakes. Coachability involves absorbing the lesson and responding appropriately even when the delivery is intense or entices a person to react otherwise. This skill is important because basic training compresses a substantial amount of learning into a relatively short time frame. There is little room or tolerance for prolonged resistance, overexplaining, or wounded pride. Recruits should learn to receive corrective feedback productively.

Coachability also reflects a broader capacity for self-regulated learning, in which individuals actively use feedback to guide ongoing performance adjustments rather than relying solely on external correction. In this sense, coachability is not only reactive but increasingly proactive, as recruits begin to anticipate standards, identify their own errors, and implement corrections before they are formally addressed. This shift from externally driven correction to internally guided refinement is critical for long-term development, particularly in environments where independent performance becomes necessary. Research on feedback processing and learning suggests that individuals who view feedback as informational rather than evaluative are more likely to engage in adaptive performance behaviors, persist through difficulty, and demonstrate greater improvement over time (Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Kluger and DeNisi, 1996). Within basic training, this means that highly coachable recruits gradually transition from simply responding to instruction toward actively seeking it, reflecting a deeper commitment to mastery and continuous improvement. Over time, this orientation supports the development of autonomy and professional competence, as recruits learn not only *what* to do, but *how* to refine their performance in alignment with standards.

3.3.3. Confidence through mastery

Confidence through mastery is a subjective but realistic belief in one's ability to meet demands through personal experiences involving effort, adaptation, and repetition (Bandura, 1977a, 1977b). It is not a false sense of confidence, but an earned form that develops when a person faces a challenge, improves, and sees evidence of progress. Many recruits arrive at basic training with their confidence at a level that is less than optimal. Some may doubt their physical capability or mental toughness, some are unsure whether they belong in the military, and some have never operated in a highly demanding, structured environment. Gaining confidence from

previous accomplishments increases self-efficacy and teaches a recruit to seek out challenges, identify improvement, handle being uncomfortable, and exceed their own initial expectations through hard work. This form of confidence can help stabilize performance because a person that has seen repeated adaptation does not assume each hard moment indicates failure. They have internal evidence that they can recover from mistakes, continue moving forward, and improve on the next trial. This skill is theoretically consistent with self-efficacy and may determine whether a recruit can convert instruction into execution.

Confidence through mastery is further strengthened by the quality and structure of the experiences from which it is developed, rather than simply their occurrence. Specifically, confidence is most robust when it is built through progressively challenging tasks that are matched to an individual's current ability level, allowing for repeated cycles of effort, feedback, and successful adaptation. This process aligns with research on mastery experiences as the most influential source of self-efficacy, as individuals derive confidence not only from success, but from overcoming difficulty through sustained effort (Bandura, 1997a, 1977b). Importantly, setbacks within this process do not undermine confidence when they are interpreted as part of development rather than as evidence of inability. In basic training, this means that recruits benefit from viewing incremental progress, such as improved physical performance, faster task execution, or fewer corrections as meaningful indicators of growth. Over time, these accumulated mastery experiences contribute to a more stable and transferable form of confidence that extends across tasks and contexts, enabling recruits to approach novel challenges with the expectation that effort and persistence will lead to improvement rather than failure.

3.3.4. Growth-oriented thinking

In psychology, a mindset is a cognitive framework consisting of a set of assumptions, beliefs, and expectations that shape how a person interprets events, processes information, and approaches challenges (Blackwell et al., 2007; Dweck, 2006). It acts as a lens for viewing the world and can be helpful or maladaptive. Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck developed a mindset theory that focuses on the idea that our inherent beliefs about our abilities and intelligence dictate our actions and results (Dweck, 2006). She identified two distinct mindsets: (1) A fixed mindset that believes abilities, intelligence, and talents are innate and static, leading to an avoidance of challenges, a fear of failure, and giving up easily and (2) a growth mindset that views these areas as changeable through learning and effort, which encourages a person to embrace challenges, learn from mistakes, and persist in the face of adversity, thus fostering resilience and achievement. A person with a fixed mindset sees effort as pointless or a sign of weakness, ignores or gets defensive with feedback, and tends to feel threatened by the success of others. A person with a growth mindset views effort as essential to mastery of a task, takes feedback as useful information necessary for improvement, and finds inspiration in the success of others. When trying something new or stepping outside our comfort zone, a growth mindset can foster motivation, resilience, and long-term achievement. Even if a person starts with a fixed mindset, it is possible to switch to a growth mindset by focusing on the process of development

rather than the outcomes, reframing negative self-talk (internal dialogue) with more positive, motivating, or instructional messages, and viewing setbacks as a hard but necessary part of the learning experience. Before and during training, it is important to embrace discomfort by intentionally seeking out difficult or challenging situations to build mental fortitude.

Another area related to mindset is a person's general attitude toward upcoming and unfolding events. An optimist tends to be hopeful and confident about the future or success of something (Tough, 2013). They are inclined to have an "attitude of gratitude"—a conscious choice to celebrate even small victories and appreciate what they have rather than what they are lacking (Emmons and McCullough, 2003). A pessimist tends to see the worst aspects of things or believe that the worst outcome will happen. Some people may suggest that they are a "realist," meaning that they tend to see things simply as they are, without adding any type of spin. In the case of completing something difficult like training, it may be helpful to be a "realistic optimist," who searches for and emphasizes positive aspects of situations or events without distorting or ignoring aspects that are negative or difficult to address. This person accurately identifies a problem or issue that needs to be corrected but does not spend an overly abundant amount of time dwelling or ruminating on adverse aspects. They recognize mistakes, accept them for what they are (difficult but beneficial avenues to learning and growth), correct or adjust course, and move on. To bolster this attitude, seek out and interact with positive individuals with similar outlooks and beliefs that support your goals and bolster your energy and motivation. Avoid people who are constantly negative or complaining. At basic training, any degree of positivity and enthusiasm can be contagious, and these interactions can bolster the capacity to endure. Meeting and interacting with individuals who are like-minded can also help combat feelings like homesickness, loneliness, and isolation.

3.3.5. Adaptability

Military endeavors often involve the logistical challenge of coordinating numerous troops and supplies to conduct complex missions involving many moving parts, each of which may require successful execution before moving on to the next. On the battlefield, an enemy strives to be unpredictable and deceive their counterpart. The very nature of these undertakings requires a service member to expect the unexpected and be prepared for anything, including potential problems or issues. Murphy's Law states, "Anything that can go wrong will go wrong." Thorough preparation and contingency plans are a vital component of military leadership because conditions can be dynamic, ever-changing, and difficult to predict (Shattuck et al., 2009). These aspects require service members to possess a unique combination of adaptability in strategies and tactics while maintaining rigidity in standards and principles. Adaptability is the quality of being able to adjust to new conditions or changing circumstances; it involves changing one's cognitions (thoughts), behaviors, or emotions in response to uncertain situations (Martin et al., 2012). There are several ideas or expressions from the military that encapsulate this concept:

- "Rigid flexibility": a leadership concept that implies the need to remain flexible

in methods while holding firm to core values and principles that should not be sacrificed.

- "Improvise, adapt, overcome": a popular Marine Corps mantra focusing on surpassing obstacles or difficult circumstances by thinking outside the box and making impromptu adjustments as needed
- "No plan survives first contact with the enemy." Enemy forces can be a difficult variable to predict, which may require fast, effective decision-making under pressure.
- "Semper Gumby": A dual reference to the Marine Corps motto, "Semper Fidelis," meaning "Always Faithful" and the classic cartoon character Gumby, this phrase means "always flexible" and emphasizes the need for this mentality in all situations (Sturgell, 2022).

While resilience involves recovering from adversity, adaptability is focused on navigating change, uncertainty, and novelty. Qualities that can aid adaptability include patience and composure. For example, some tasks require a person to "hurry up and wait," meaning that you rush to be on time, arrive at the right location, and be in the proper uniform just to find that there is a delay in the schedule or a change of plans. Getting overly frustrated or upset in this situation will neither change nor improve it, so it is usually best to remain flexible. In situations where stress levels or threats are higher, remaining poised and composed may facilitate performance. The phrase "stay frosty" has been used as a form of military slang to encourage a person to stay calm, cool, and collected under stress, duress, and pressure (Dabbs, 2024). It also implies remaining alert and ready for action without allowing emotions such as fear or panic to take over. This allows logic, reason, and strategic decision-making to remain the driving forces behind action.

3.4. Identity and commitment skills

The third domain of a military mindset is identity and commitment skills, which are psychological abilities that make the person's mindset durable. If a recruit can tolerate stress and perform tasks well, they may seem successful on a surface level, but if their reasons for training remain driven by extrinsic factors, motivation and dedication may collapse when discomfort accumulates. Durability in a military mindset results from a shift in identity and meaning. Initially, the recruit may be asking themselves, "How do I get through this?" or "What do I need to do just to survive?" However, they should also consider questions such as "Who do I want to become?" and "What values do I want to represent?" Looking prospectively into the future prior to embarking on the journey of basic training can be difficult because the present moment is powerful and the future is uncertain, but examining one's attitude and purpose for approaching a daunting task may drive a deeper internal dialogue. Skills in this domain that are consistent with psychological theory include an attitude for teamwork and purpose-driven commitment.

3.4.1. An attitude for teamwork

An adage states, "If you want to fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." Learning how to function as a team is necessary for success at basic training. A "lone wolf" approach is not optimal for military pursuits—the sheer scope of most tasks is simply too large. Teamwork is the collaborative effort of a group to achieve a common goal, such as completing a mission. It involves building relationships and working with other people using skills such as cooperation and communication, strategies such as mutual performance monitoring, and habits such as disciplined effort and respectful interaction (Salas et al., 2005). Cooperation involves a willingness to set aside personal interests or feelings to create a collaborative atmosphere that is conducive to accomplishing tasks and meeting goals. Good communication involves sending and receiving information clearly and efficiently. At times, it may be necessary to listen and follow orders. At other times, deliberation that requires discussion and participation in decision-making processes may be required. Effort stems from a sense of accountability for one's actions and responsibility for the group's successes and failures. Each team member actively contributes time, energy, and skills to maximize the chances of mission success. Respect involves a healthy, balanced deference for others. With the diversity of individuals in the military, a person will likely encounter a comrade with differences in opinions, customs, or individual preferences. These differences may lead to disagreements, but these cannot be allowed to escalate to a point at which the team becomes dysfunctional. Conflict resolution involves settling disagreements by finding common ground and mutually acceptable solutions. For younger individuals of lower rank in a military structure, learning the value of teamwork and becoming an effective member of a team facilitates the development of leadership skills.

A prerequisite for optimal functioning within a team is mutual trust between members. Trust is having faith in the people around you to follow orders and perform their respective duties to the best of their capability. This aspect is especially important in the military because, unlike teams that work together in an office or sports setting, those that operate in military environments involving war and combat rely on one another to survive, so the stakes are significantly higher. To encourage teamwork and build trust, the military uses the concept of shared suffering, which is a collective experience of hardship or adversity that strengthens social bonds, fosters empathy, and builds resilience among individuals (Bastian et al, 2014). It involves enduring difficult and often unknown situations together, which can build strong connections and a sense of mutual reliance to transform a group of strangers into a cohesive unit in a relatively short period of time. Facing adversity together unites people and helps them overcome previous divisions to foster a sense of shared purpose and solidarity. It also acts as a catalyst for personal growth, teaching individuals to endure hardship and develop internal strength. Empathy involves feeling or understanding the thoughts, feelings, experiences, or perspectives of others (Hartmann, 2023). According to census data, approximately 6–7% of the overall U.S. adult population are veterans, and active-duty service members make up less than 1% of the population (Schaeffer, 2023; U.S. Census Bureau, 2025). This relatively small but distinguished group has a unique perspective

and set of experiences that civilians do not possess, so empathy for one another becomes important. Additionally, members of a high-functioning team tend to have clearly defined roles, and the military is no different. Being able to place yourself in the role of a fellow squad member is a valuable skill because you may very well have to do just that, if the situation dictates.

An attitude for teamwork is one that is collaborative and selfless. The individual has the capacity to subordinate ego, personal comfort, and preference to the needs, standards, and success of the group. A recruit who thinks in terms of the group often becomes stronger under pressure because the reason to endure is no longer purely personal. Social identity theory suggests that people will often tolerate more hardship for the group than they will for themselves. This attitude also builds accountability because recruits who see themselves as responsible to the team, squad, or platoon become more attentive to standards. They understand that their conduct reflects not just on them, but on the collective. This identity shift is a powerful force in forging a military mindset because it transforms discipline into loyalty and generic hardship into meaningful contribution.

3.4.2. Purpose-driven commitment

Purpose-driven commitment is the internalized sense that hardship is worth enduring because it serves a larger mission, identity, system of values, or transformative process (Sheldon and Elliot, 1999). In a basic training cycle, personal motivation levels will rise and fall. There will be moments when the immediate experience feels miserable and the rewards feel distant. In those moments, recruits need more than temporary motivation; they need a reason that can withstand discomfort. For many, that reason may be noble service to country, pride, or family. It may be a personal drive to become a better version of oneself—stronger, more capable, more disciplined, or more honorable. It may be a deep need to prove that they can do hard things without quitting. Whatever form it takes or the specific reason, the key is that the recruit has attached meaning to the suffering. Without meaning, discomfort feels pointless, but with meaning, discomfort becomes investment. Purpose-driven commitment helps keep a recruit going when the environment strips away convenience. It stabilizes effort when emotions fluctuate and reminds the recruit that basic training is more than a sequence of unpleasant days or tasks; it is a transformational process with a larger goal and end state. Recruits who understand why they are enduring something are likely to be more resilient than recruits who are enduring only because they feel as though they must for vague, undefined reasons. This helps move the recruit toward a bigger purpose and personal transformation by internalizing the meaning of hardship.

When combined, these three domains form a practical model of the military mindset that is grounded in psychological theory. Stress management and coping skills help the recruit remain functional under pressure. Discipline and performance skills help the recruit improve through correction and execute a task to standard. Identity and commitment skills help the recruit internalize the purpose of training. The constructs within each domain represent distinct but interrelated psychological skills that operate across different timeframes and levels of behavior, contributing to a comprehensive model of performance and adaptation in basic training. **Table 3** offers a summative

comparison of the primary functions, temporal orientation, and behavioral expression of these constructs. Collectively, they form the skillset of a person with the potential to endure, adapt, and belong.

Table 3. Comparative Functions, Temporal Orientation, and Behavioral Expression of Military Mindset Constructs.

Core construct	Primary function	Temporal orientation	Behavioral expression
Resilient persistence (grit) and stress tolerance	Sustain functioning and effort under adversity and discomfort	Present → Long-term	Continues effort despite fatigue, setbacks, or hardship; resists quitting
Emotional regulation	Modulate emotional responses to maintain control and effectiveness	Immediate (moment-to-moment)	Maintains composure, recovers quickly from emotional reactions, and avoids impulsive behavior
Mindfulness (task-focused attention)	Direct and stabilize attention on present task demands	Present-focused	Attends to current instructions; avoids distraction from thoughts, emotions, or external noise
Self-discipline	Ensure consistent adherence to standards regardless of motivation	Present → Routine-based (habitual)	Follows rules, maintains routines, executes tasks consistently even when unmotivated
Coachability	Facilitate learning through feedback and correction	Immediate → Short-term improvement	Accepts correction without defensiveness; rapidly adjusts behavior
Confidence through mastery	Support performance through belief in learned capability	Past → Present (experience-based)	Approaches tasks with controlled assurance; persists due to prior success
Growth-oriented thinking	Frame difficulty as an opportunity for development	Future-oriented	Interprets failure as feedback; seeks improvement rather than avoidance
Adaptability	Adjust thoughts and behaviors to changing conditions	Present → Future	Modifies strategies, behaviors, or expectations in response to new demands
Attitude for teamwork	Align behavior with group goals and cohesion	Present (social context)	Supports peers, prioritizes group success, communicates and cooperates effectively
Purpose-driven commitment	Sustain motivation through meaning and identity	Long-term (end-state oriented)	Endures hardship due to commitment to mission, values, or identity

4. Conclusion

Choosing to serve one's country in the military is a noble pursuit and offers a difficult but rewarding path to learning new things, gaining diverse experiences, and crafting a better version of oneself. Each person will have their own unique journey as they embark on this endeavor, and basic training is an important introduction to this process that will likely have a lasting impact on thoughts, attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors. The current paper draws upon six theories or constructs for an integrative approach to examining the psychological demands of a basic training environment. An integrative approach is preferable because the development of a military mindset in basic training is a multifaceted process that cannot be fully explained by a single theory. Each theory encapsulates a component of adaptation: stress inoculation theory explains how recruits learn to function under pressure, resilience and psychological hardiness explains persistence under adversity, self-determination theory explains how discipline becomes internalized, behavioral conditioning explains how behavior becomes automatic, growth-oriented frameworks explain how recruits

improve through feedback, and social identity theory explains the shift from individual to unit member. An integrative framework allows these complementary perspectives to work together, providing a more complete, realistic, and applied understanding of how recruits actually adapt. This approach not only strengthens theoretical validity but also improves practical usefulness because it aligns more closely with the complex, layered nature of basic training, where psychological, behavioral, and social changes occur simultaneously.

This multi-theory framework moves the concept of readiness from a broad, descriptive construct to a trainable system of adaptation. Traditional discussions of readiness tend to define it in outcome-related terms (e.g., being physically prepared, mentally tough, or mission capable) without specifying how those qualities are developed, organized, or interactive under stress. As a result, readiness is often treated as something to be assessed or maintained rather than deliberately constructed. Breaking down readiness into underlying psychological processes (stress adaptation, resilience, motivational internalization, behavioral automation, skill acquisition, and identity transformation) shows that these processes collectively produce reliable performance in demanding environments. Organizing these mechanisms into the domains of stress control skills, discipline and performance skills, and identity and commitment skills provides a functional blueprint for both understanding and training readiness. It clarifies not only what readiness looks like, but why it develops and how it can be systematically built through structured experiences. This approach attempts to bridge the common gap between theory and practice. Rather than relying on abstract ideas, it identifies specific, evidence-based components that can be trained, observed, and reinforced within training environments. In doing so, it reframes readiness from a static state or checklist into a dynamic, developmental process that offers leaders, instructors, and recruits a more precise and actionable way to cultivate an appropriate mindset for military performance.

Although the information presented here is grounded in psychological theory and research in conjunction with a practical examination of the requirements placed upon recruits at basic training, it is important to address limitations of the current body of knowledge and potential directions for future research. This evidence base is drawn from heterogeneous military populations and training environments from varying branches, so it is unclear how much direct conceptual application there will be to a particular branch or class (i.e., cohort) of recruits. Additionally, where studies involving military populations were not readily available, adjacent high-stress performance contexts were examined. Although there may be parallels between such endeavors or groups, the capability to draw situationally specific conclusions is fundamentally limited by differences in these pursuits. Future empirical work should test the proposed framework across specific branches, trainee populations, and training stages to generate findings that will yield more robust conclusions and further insights.

Future research can strengthen and refine this model by examining it as a testable, multicomponent system. This process involves three key steps related to the domains and their associated mental skills: reliably measuring each construct, quantifying potential changes over the course of training, and predicting meaningful outcomes

such as adaptation, performance, and retention in training environments. Researchers could design psychometric instruments to assess the three domains at multiple time points (e.g., pre-, mid-, and post-training). Confirmatory factor analysis could test whether the proposed structure fits the data or the components cluster differently. This would help determine if the model is structurally valid or requires reorganization. Longitudinal cohort research could track recruits across the training cycle to determine how these components develop over time and how they relate to outcomes such as physical performance, evaluation scores, disciplinary incidents, injury rates, and attrition. Tracking this information could identify which components change most rapidly, which remain more stable, and which are most predictive of success. This would help clarify whether all components are equally important or whether certain "keystone" skills drive success.

Further research could be conducted in the form of predictive and comparative studies, experimental and intervention-based studies, or multilevel and contextual studies. For example, baseline levels of the proposed mental skills could be used to predict training success. Specific training interventions could be designed to target individual domains, such as stress exposure protocols for stress control, feedback and correction training for coachability, or identity-based interventions to strengthen unit cohesion. Randomized controlled trials could then test whether enhancing specific components leads to improved training outcomes. Contextual research could examine how the training environment interacts with the model by examining factors such as leadership style, unit culture, and training intensity, which may moderate the development of these psychological skills. Multilevel modeling could explore how individual traits and group factors (e.g., climate, cohesion) combine to influence outcomes, helping refine the model to better reflect real-world training systems. Future work should focus on model refinement. It is possible that some components overlap or that a smaller number of core factors account for most of the variance in success. Identifying the most critical elements could create a more parsimonious model without losing predictive power. These directions would allow the framework to evolve from a well-reasoned theoretical synthesis into a validated, evidence-based model of military mindset development.

In the book *Do Hard Things*, author Steve Magness defines real toughness as "experiencing discomfort or distress, leaning in, paying attention, and creating space to take thoughtful action. It's navigating discomfort to make the best decision you can" (Magness, 2022). This modern update on the concept of toughness could be applied here as well. A military mindset is not merely blind aggression, emotional numbness, and "being tough" by denying the presence of pain or discomfort. It is forged when structured hardship, disciplined repetition, and collective purpose transform ordinary behavior into reliable performance under pressure. Being prepared, both physically and psychologically, gives an individual the best chance of success in joining the profession of arms. In a training environment, each day will bring new challenges, but one can rise to meet those challenges with a high level of physical and mental readiness achieved via thorough preparation, strategic planning, and disciplined effort.

Funding: This work received no external funding.

Institutional review board statement: Not applicable.

Informed consent statement: Not applicable.

Data availability statement: No new data were created for the purposes of this review.

Conflict of interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

Aarts, H., & Dijksterhuis, A. (2000). Habits as knowledge structures: Automaticity in goal-directed behavior. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 78(1), 53–63. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.78.1.53

Ahmed, O. M. A., Azher, I., Gallagher, A. G., et al. (2018). Deliberate practice using validated metrics improves skill acquisition in performance of ultrasound-guided peripheral nerve block in a simulated setting. Journal of Clinical Anesthesia, 48, 22–27. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclinane.2018.04.015

Andoh, E. (2025). Building mental strength in the military. Monitor on Psychology, 56(8). https://www.apa.org/monitor/2025/11-12/mental-strength-military

Aziz, A. M., Majeed, F., Qaiser, A., et al. (2024). Exploring emotional control and emotional fortitude among preclinical undergraduate medical students: A qualitative study. Annals of King Edward Medical University, 30(3). https://doi.org/10.21649/akemu.v30i3.5545

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. Psychological Review, 84(2), 191–215. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191

Bandura, A. (1986). Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Bandura, A. (1997). Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control. New York, NY: W. H. Freeman.

Banks, T., Sapp, M., & Obiakor, F. E. (2014). Understanding B. F. Skinner: Building emotional competence in students with diverse learning needs. Multicultural Learning and Teaching, 9(1), 53–66. https://doi.org/10.1515/mlt-2013-0021

Basic combat training. Available online: https://www.goarmy.com/army-life/basic-training (accessed on 15 January 2026).

Basic military training. Available online: https://www.airforce.com/training/military-training/bmt/overview (accessed on 15 January 2026).

Basic training. (2026). Available online: https://www.gocoastguard.com/get-started/basic-training (accessed on 15 January 2026).

Bastian, B., Jetten, J., & Ferris, L. J. (2014). Pain as social glue: Shared pain increases cooperation. Psychological Science, 11, 2079–2085. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797614545886

Beattie, S., Du Preez, T., Hardy, L., et al. (2025). What do you bring to the table? Exploring psychological attributes that predict successful military training. Military Psychology, 37(1), 50–61. https://doi.org/10.1080/08995605.2023.2285693

Bekesiene, S., Smaliukienė, R., & Kanapeckaitė, R. (2023). The relationship between psychological hardiness and military performance by reservists: A moderation effect of perceived stress and resilience. Healthcare, 11(9), 1224. https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare11091224

Blackwell, L. S., Trzesniewski, K. H., & Dweck, C. S. (2007). Implicit theories of intelligence predict achievement across an adolescent transition: A longitudinal study and an intervention. Child Development, 78(1), 246–263. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2007.00995.x

Christenson S. (2023). At Lackland, Air Force brass aims to build a smarter boot camp. San Antonio Express News. Available online: https://www.expressnews.com/news/article/lackland-air-force-brass-aims-build-smarter-boot-18411650.php (accessed on 15 January 2026).

Clear, J. (2018). Atomic Habits: Tiny Changes, Remarkable Results. New York, NY: Avery.

Clough, P. J., Earle, K., & Sewell, D. (2002). Mental toughness: The concept and its measurement. In: Cockerill, I. (editor). Solutions in Sport Psychology, 1st ed. Thomson. pp. 32–43.

Department of Defense. (2021). Available online: https://trumpadministration.archives.performance.gov/defense/ (accessed on 15 January 2026).

Duckworth, A. L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M. D., et al. (2007). Grit: Perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92(6), 1087–1101. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.6.1087

Dweck, C. (2006). Mindset: The new psychology of success. New York, NY: Random House Publishing Group.

Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84(2), 377–389. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.84.2.377

Ericsson, K. A., Krampe, R. T., & Tesch-Romer, C. (1993). The role of deliberate practice in the acquisition of expert performance. Psychological Review, 100(3), 363–406.

Faram, M. D. (2018). Not your daddy's boot camp – why Great Lakes got tougher. Available online: https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2018/11/24/not-your-daddys-boot-camp-why-great-lakes-got-tougher-2/ (accessed on 15 January 2026).

Fors Brandebo, M., Börjesson, M., & Hilmarsson, H. (2022). Longitudinal studies on cohesion in a military context—A systematic review. Military Psychology, 34(6), 732–741. https://doi.org/10.1080/08995605.2022.2041995

Gross, J. J. (1998). The emerging field of emotion regulation: An integrative review. Review of General Psychology, 2(3), 271–299. https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.2.3.271

Gross, J. J. (2015). Emotion regulation: Current status and future prospects. Psychological Inquiry, 26(1), 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1080/1047840X.2014.940781

Gross, J. J., & John, O. P. (2003). Individual differences in two emotion regulation processes: Implications for affect, relationships, and well-being. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 85(2), 348–362. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.85.2.348

Gutierrez, I. A., Bliese, P. D., Nassif, T. H., et al. (2026). The effect of a mindfulness training and yoga intervention on unit cohesion in the military. Health Education & Behavior, 53(1), 103–109. https://doi.org/10.1177/10901981251358709

Harkins, G., & Cox, M. (2020). Fewer military recruits dropped out of boot camp in 2020. Here's why. (2020). Available online: https://www.military.com/daily-news/2020/12/18/how-pandemic-may-have-changed-military-boot-camp-forever.html (accessed on 15 January 2026).

Hartmann, H. (2023). Your pain in my brain. Nature Reviews Psychology, 2, 331. https://doi.org/10.1038/s44159-023-00189-6

Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. Review of Educational Research, 77(1), 81–112. https://doi.org/10.3102/003465430298487

Hepner, K. A., Bloom, E. L., Newberry, S., et al. (2022). The impact of mindfulness mediation programs on performance-related outcomes: Implications for the U.S. Army. Rand Health Quarterly, 10(1), 9.

Jackson, S. E., Baity, M. R., Thomas, P. R., et al. (2021). Stress inoculation training (SIT-NORCAL), Part 1: The development and preliminary evaluation of a psychological performance training protocol. Journal of Special Operations Medicine, 21(4), 37–45. https://doi.org/10.55460/HCUV-LP37

Johnson, M., Kim, K. H., Colarelli, S. M., et al. (2021). Coachability and the development of the coachability scale. Journal of Management Development, 40(7/8), 585–610. https://doi.org/10.1108/JMD-06-2020-0174

Johnson, S. (2026). How Many Military Branches Are There and What Does Each Branch Do? Available online: https://americanlegionpost142.org/us-armed-services-birthdays (accessed on 15 January 2026).

Keller, J., Kwasnicka, D., Klaiber, P., et al. (2021). Habit formation following routine-based versus time-based cue planning: A randomized controlled trial. British Journal of Health Psychology, 26(3), 807–824. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjhp.12504

Kluger, A. N., & DeNisi, A. (1996). The effects of feedback interventions on performance: A historical review, a meta-analysis, and a preliminary feedback intervention theory. Psychological Bulletin, 119(2), 254–284. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.119.2.254

Lakes, K. D., & Hoyt, W. T. (2004). Promoting self-regulation through school-based martial arts training. Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 25, 283–302. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2004.04.002

Lally, P., van Jaarsveld, C. H. M., Potts, H. W. W., et al. (2010). How are habits formed: Modeling habit formation in the real world. European Journal of Social Psychology, 40(6), 998–1009. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.674

Lally, P., Wardle, J., & Gardner, B. (2011). Experiences of habit formation: A qualitative study. Psychology, Health & Medicine, 16(4), 484–489. https://doi.org/10.1080/13548506.2011.555774

Lee, T. D., & Schmidt, R. A. (2025). Motor Learning and Performance: From Principles to Application, 7th ed. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Lepinoy, A., Lo Bue, S., & Vanderlinde, R. (2022). Basic needs satisfaction in a military learning environment: An exploratory study. Military Psychology, 34(1), 98–109. https://doi.org/10.1080/08995605.2021.1973793

Ludwig, D. S., & Kabat-Zinn, J. (2008). Mindfulness in Medicine. Journal of the American Medical Association, 300(11), 1350–1352. https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.300.11.1350

Mace, R. D., & Carroll, D. (1989). The effect of stress inoculation training on self-reported stress, observer's rating of stress, heart rate and gymnastics performance. Journal of Sports Sciences, 7(3), 257–266. https://doi.org/10.1080/02640418908729846

Mace, R. D., Carroll, D., & Eastman, C. (1986). Effects of stress inoculation training on self-report, behavioural and psychophysiological reactions to abseiling. Journal of Sports Sciences, 4(3), 229–236. https://doi.org/10.1080/02640418608732121

Magness, S. (2022). Do Hard Things: Why We Get Resilience Wrong and the Surprising Science of Real Toughness. San Francisco, CA: HarperOne.

Mahoney, J. W., Gucciardi, D. F., Ntoumanis, N., et al. (2014). Mental toughness in sport: Motivational antecedents and associations with performance and psychological health. Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology, 36(3), 281–292. https://doi.org/10.1123/jsep.2013-0260

Martin, A. J., Nejad, H., Colmar, S., et al. (2012). Adaptability: Conceptual and empirical perspectives on responses to change, novelty and uncertainty. Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 22(1), 58–81. https://doi.org/10.1017/jgc.2012.8

McDonald, M. A., Marquardt, C. A., Noorbaloochi, S., et al. (2026). Resilience as a dynamic process among military recruits exposed to basic combat training stressors. Development and Psychopathology, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579426101199

Meadan, H., Ayvazo, S., & Ostrosky, M. M. (2014). The ABCs of challenging behavior: Understanding basic concepts. Young Exceptional Children, 19(1), 3–15. https://doi.org/10.1177/1096250614523969

Moon, S. H., Myung, S. J., Yoon, H. B., et al. (2019). Deliberate practice as an effective remediation strategy for underperforming medical students focused on clinical skills: A prospective longitudinal study. Journal of Korean Medical Science, 34(11), e84. https://doi.org/10.3346/jkms.2019.34.e84

Navy boot camp. Available online: https://www.navy.com/navy-life/boot-camp (accessed on 15 January 2026).

Nordmo, M., Sørlie, H. O., Lang-Ree, O. C., et al. (2022). Decomposing the effect of hardiness in military leadership selection and the mediating role of self-efficacy beliefs. Military Psychology, 34(6), 697–705. https://doi.org/10.1080/08995605.2022.2054658

Oxford University Press. (2001). The Oxford Essential Dictionary of the U.S. Military, 1st ed. New York, NY: Berkley Pub Group.

Raabe, J., Zakrajsek, R. A., Orme, J. G., et al. (2020). Perceived cadre behavior, basic psychological need satisfaction, and motivation of US Army ROTC cadets: A self-determination theory perspective. Military Psychology, 32(5), 398–409. https://doi.org/10.1080/08995605.2020.1781028

Recruit training. (2021). Available online: https://www.marines.com/become-a-marine/process-to-join/recruit-training.html (accessed on 15 January 2026).

Robinson, P., Oades, L. G., & Caputi, P. (2015). Conceptualising and measuring mental fitness: A Delphi study. International Journal of Wellbeing, 5(1), 53–73. https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v5i1.4

Salas, E., Sims, D. E., & Burke, C. S. (2005). Is there a "Big Five" in teamwork? Small Group Research, 36(5), 555–599. https://doi.org/10.1177/1046496405277134

Sandvik, A. M., Bartone, P. T., Hystad, S. W., et al. (2013). Psychological hardiness predicts neuroimmunological responses to stress. Psychology, Health & Medicine, 18(6), 705–713. https://doi.org/10.1080/13548506.2013.772304

Sauer, M. (2023). Building self-discipline by age 27 is crucial, says psychiatrist from the Netflix doc 'Stutz': 3 ways to do it. Available online: https://www.cnbc.com/2023/01/14/psychiatrist-from-netflix-doc-stutz-how-to-build-self-discipline.html (accessed on 15 January 2026).

Schaeffer, K. (2023). The changing face of America's veteran population. Available online: https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/11/08/the-changing-face-of-americas-veteran-population/ (accessed on 15 January 2026).

Semper Gumby: Empowering our teams through flexibility. (2022). Available online: https://www.wpafb.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/3093441/semper-gumby-empowering-our-teams-through-flexibility/ (accessed on 15

January 2026).
Shattuck, L. G., Miller, N. L., & Kemmerer, K. E. (2009). Tactical decision making under conditions of uncertainty: An empirical study. Proceedings of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society Annual Meeting, 53(4). https://doi.org/10.1177/154193120905300417
Sheldon, K. M., & Elliot, A. J. (1999). Goal striving, need satisfaction, and longitudinal well-being: The self-concordance model. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 76(3), 482–497. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.76.3.482
Sherman, H., & Lucier-Greer, M. (2025). Assessing the psychometric properties of the Army STARRS' vertical unit cohesion scale: A large-scale, longitudinal study. Military Psychology, 37(4), 305–317. https://doi.org/10.1080/08995605.2024.2370705
Simons, J. S., & Gaher, R. M. (2005). The Distress Tolerance Scale: Development and validation of a self-report measure. Motivation and Emotion, 29(2), 83–102. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-005-7955-3
Skinner, B. F. (1953). Science and Human Behavior. New York, NY: Macmillan.
Skinner, B. F. (1988). The operant side of behavior therapy. Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry, 19(3), 171–179. https://doi.org/10.1016/0005-7916(88)90038-9
Smith, E. N., Young, M. D., & Crum, A. J. (2020). Stress, mindsets, and success in Navy SEALs Special Warfare training. Frontiers in Psychology, 10, 2962. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02962
Smith, R. E., Schutz, R. W., Smoll, F. L., et al. (1995). Development and validation of a multidimensional measure of sport-specific psychological skills: The Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28. Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, 17(4), 379–398. https://doi.org/10.1123/jsep.17.4.379
Stojanovic, M., Grund, A., & Fries, S. (2022). Context stability in habit building increases automaticity and goal attainment. Frontiers in Psychology, 13, 883795. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.883795
Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In: Austin, W. G., Worchel, S. (editors). The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations, 1st ed. Brooks/Cole. pp. 33–47.
Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In: Worchel, S., Austin, W. G. (editors). Psychology of Intergroup Relations, 1st ed. Nelson-Hall. pp. 7–24.
Tangney, J. P., Baumeister, R. F., & Boone, A. L. (2004). High self-control predicts good adjustment, less pathology, better grades, and interpersonal success. Journal of Personality, 72(2), 271–324. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3506.2004.00263.x
The birth of the United States Air Force. Available online: https://www.af.mil/About-Us/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/433914/the-birth-of-the-united-states-air-force (accessed on 15 January 2026).
Thompson, A. G., Subedi, M., Morrow, A. E., et al. (2026). Evaluating the return on investment of U.S. Army Holistic Health and Fitness Performance Teams: A matched difference-in-differences study of readiness and economic outcomes. Sports Medicine. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40279-026-02399-3
Tough, P. (2013). How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character. New York, NY: Mariner Books.
Training. (2026). Available online: https://spaceforce.com/training (accessed on 15 January 2026).
Truman, H. S. (1947). Executive Order 9877 – Functions of the Armed Forces. Available online: https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/232115 (accessed on 15 January 2026).
USA.gov. (2025). Learn about the U.S. military branches. Available online: https://www.usa.gov/us-military (accessed on 15 January 2026).
Van den Broeck, A., Ferris, D. L., Chang, C. H., et al. (2016). A review of self-determination theory's basic psychological needs at work. Journal of Management, 42(5), 1195–1229. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206316632058
Veterans. (2025). Available online: https://www.census.gov/topics/population/veterans.html (accessed on 15 January 2026).
Weinberg, R., Freysinger, V., Mellano, K., et al. (2016). Building mental toughness: Perceptions of sport psychologists. The Sport Psychologist, 30(3), 231–241. https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.2015-0090
What does stay frosty mean? (2024). Available online: https://www.thearmorylife.com/what-does-stay-frosty-mean/ (accessed on 15 January 2026).
Winkie, D. (2021). Army hits end-strength goals through high retention, lower basic training attrition. Army Times. Available online: https://wwwarmytimes.com/news/your-army/2021/10/20/army-hits-end-strength-goals-through-high-retention-lower-basic-training-attrition/ (accessed on 15 January 2026).

Yusefzadeh, H., Amirzadeh Iranagh, J., & Nabilou, B. (2019). The effect of study preparation on test anxiety and performance: A quasi-experimental study. Advances in Medical Education and Practice, 10, 245–251. https://doi.org/10.2147/AMEP.S192053

Zanesco, A. P., Denkova, E., Rogers, S. L., et al. (2019). Mindfulness training as cognitive training in high-demand cohorts: An initial study in elite military servicemembers. Progress in Brain Research, 244, 323–354. https://doi.org/10.1016/bs.pbr.2018.10.001