



Editor's Note: This is the second insightful guest post by Zach. I highly encourage readers to check out his last post: [Be The Duck](#). Zach discusses the importance of leaders remaining calm in intense and chaotic situations.

By Zach Mierva

During the Battle of the Bulge, as Germany moved through Allied territory, 12,000 soldiers prepared to defend the town of Bastogne. Seemingly outmatched and completely cut off from support, Creighton Abrams said: "They've got us surrounded again, the poor bastards."

"If you put a rubber duck under water, what happens? It floats to the top. Every time. No matter how much water you put on the rubber duck, it rises to the surface. You can put a rubber duck at the bottom of the ocean, eventually it's going to make it back up."

I sat in stunned silence as my mentor spoke with me about resiliency (using another duck analogy), and the simplicity of the analogy washing over me, not unlike water over a duck.

The Army talks a lot about resiliency through Ready and Resilient Campaigns (R2Cs), dedicates agencies on installations whose sole purpose is to help foster resilient soldiers, and it's even codified in our doctrine. According to *ADRP 6-22 Army Leadership*, leaders should display "the psychological and physical capacity to bounce back from life's stressors repeatedly to thrive in an era of high operational tempo." I served with a battalion commander who expected his commanders to be resilient, regardless of the situation. But what does resilience look like?

Serving as a leader in the military or civilian sector comes with an incredible amount of responsibility, complete with a seemingly endless series of tasks to accomplish. Focusing on the military aspect, there isn't a single leader in the Army who would say they have enough time in the day to complete the laundry list of requirements. However, there are two methods to approach task-saturation: float or drown.

As you progress in your career, the complexity and volume of assigned responsibilities seems to increase exponentially. The days of planning a hail and farewell as a newly minted second lieutenant are replaced with planning a battalion-level gunnery with a combined arms live fire exercise (CALFEX) as a captain. Company executive officers soon find themselves as battalion XOs managing hundreds of vehicles, not just a dozen. In the face of these seemingly insurmountable odds, do you drown or float? Those who end up drowning are, at least in some aspect, those who cannot remain resilient in times of high stress.

The truly successful leaders, or at least those who survive with most of the hair after key developmental assignments (a benchmark for success in KD assignments for field grade officers), are those who respond to difficult situations by bouncing back. Or, for the purposes of coherent rubber duck analogies, float to the surface.

I propose a real-world situation: you're a battalion operations officer currently on red cycle who is planning for an upcoming battalion field training exercise (FTX). Just as you get into

your “planning groove,” you’re assigned as the investigating officer for a 15-6, while simultaneously your assistant operations officer is moved to another battalion to take command. You’re left with two inexperienced lieutenants to take the lead on planning a battalion-level field problem.

How do you respond? How *can* you respond?

The water was just dumped on you, and you have two options at this point: drown or float. Which do you do?

To return to the Battle of Bastogne and Creighton Abrams’ quote, his unit remained resilient despite overwhelming odds. In the book *Easy Company Soldier* by SGT Don Malarkey, the author reflects on 3rd Army’s relief and writes,

*“That was wonderful. The circle was broken. We could get supplies in and wounded out. But later, we heard that the 3rd [Patton’s forces] rescued us. That cockeyed idea is phonier than a three-dollar bill. **Easy Company didn’t need rescuing.**”*

Be the Rubber Duck

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