



Building Mental Resilience THROUGH THE GOSPEL

Struggles with mental health remain prevalent within the military environment, which affords Scripture Readers the opportunity to listen, to signpost to relevant agencies and to share something of the Light of this very dark world.

Conservatively, eighteen people take their own lives every day in the UK, mostly young men, and 88% of today's Armed Forces are young men. According to NHS England, last year nearly one in four (22.5%) young adults, aged seventeen to twenty-five years, 'had a probable mental disorder'. A report from February this year, sponsored by the Health Foundation, states that, 'Over one-in-three (34%) of young people aged 18-24 reported symptoms that indicated they were experiencing a common mental health disorder. The Armed Forces recruit primarily from this age group, mainly young men as stated, and the number one killer of young men is suicide—more than one in four (27.1%).'

In 2016, more than 2,500 veterans entered the prison system, a worrying statistic considering how values such

as integrity and discipline are such vital characteristics of service life. Experts like The Howard League for Penal Reform have previously warned of a disproportionate number of veterans being jailed for serious violence and sexual offences, raising concerns about the impact of military life and operations on our service personnel's mental health. In 2019, veterans accounted for more than 10% of maximum-security prisoners.

Incontrovertible evidence also shows that veterans are overrepresented in homelessness and living on the streets, with many being unable to cope with the transition to civilian life. Too many have mental injuries and scars, suffer marriage breakdowns and other traumatic experiences, all too often leading them to seek recovery through drink, drugs, gambling and aggression rather than the

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saving grace of the gospel. A comparison of Ministry of Defence data for the period 1984 to 2022 shows that during the period, more UK regular Armed Forces personnel took their own lives than were killed on operations by hostile engagement.

As awareness grows of mental illnesses, militaries seek to identify and mitigate causes and address effects. Retired US Navy psychiatrist William Nash raised the concept of moral injury (damage to one's deeply held beliefs about right and wrong), which seeks to assist with understanding the self-harm phenomenon. According to Nash, moral injury may be caused by something that someone does or fails to do, or by something that is done to oneself, but either way it breaks one's sense of moral certainty. Whether suffering from mental illness or moral injury, the greater the mental resilience and moral certainty, the less likelihood of soldiers suffering from psychological damage.

SASRA's mission remains the same: to spread the saving knowledge of Christ among those serving, partly through providing Christ-centred pastoral care, well-being and welfare. We've noticed the marked increase in stress-related illnesses in military personnel that we support. Our Scripture Readers have unique access to deliver the gospel to our soldiers, aviators and their families across the Army and RAF, including how it can comfort the soul, heal the body, recover the mind and indwell the spirit. In bringing the one true gospel to those we reach, we help to save souls for Christ, build mental resilience and moral certainty, so attenuating the causes of mental illness and moral injury that can



Every day, Scripture Readers minister to people who are under immense pressure and who are often living away from their main support networks.

lead to anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and even suicide. We have the belief that in the worst case, for any human, our Lord has the power to remove demons! (Mark 5:1-20.) The objective moral truth and reasoning that come with the limitless power of the gospel are also used by us, along with military core values, to shape the virtues, morality and ethical conduct of our soldiers and aviators, thereby preparing them for war, as well as peacetime and in retirement.

We are, therefore, discerning optimal ways for our Scripture Readers to support building mental resilience and to assist in signposting mental health issues, through the gospel message and godly pastoral care. Any training and development will be concordant with the services' directives and our agreements with them, such as the Army's General Administrative Instruction covering Vulnerability Risk Management. Such keeps us at the centre of the moral component of fighting power and the gospel ever-present in the spiritual, well-being and welfare support of our soldiers and aviators.

Lt Col (Retd) Dr Martin Gliniecki
QGM, Executive Director

