

"Writing the truth
as I see it;
trying not to
offend
those who will
disagree."

The truth as I see it™

Idaho Common Sense™



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We ask them to kill

November 10, 2008

We ask our military to do the unspeakable, the unthinkable. We ask them to kill fellow human beings. We ask of them what we are unable to ask of ourselves. Moreover, we do not want to see or know what they do. We are appalled when we see a television image of a marine killing an Iraqi who is "faking dead." We condemn that marine. We must or else we feel we are condoning it. It doesn't matter that he did nothing wrong. We saw it. We saw him kill that man. We are not supposed to see that happen. How dare he make it real.

How do they kill? Did they join the military because killing is easy for them? Do they have any remorse when they kill? A Special Forces soldier said, "I froze. It was a boy. He turned and looked at me and raised his automatic weapon. I opened up with a 20 round magazine. He just laid there. I dropped my weapon and cried."

Yes, it is difficult to kill a fellow human being, even if they are the enemy. During World War II only 15% to 20% of troops on a battle line fired their weapon because they just could not bring themselves to kill. The aversion to killing another human is tremendous and, at times, insurmountable.

Maybe it is easier when they kill someone "who needs to be killed." A marine remembers killing a Japanese soldier in hand to hand combat during World War II saying, "I whispered, 'I'm sorry.' And then I threw up all over myself."

Military personnel are just like the rest of us. They do not want war. They do not want to kill. Yet, they accept this unique calling the rest of us cannot hear. How can they do

what we cannot? I believe they have a bit more love of country, a bit more loyalty to country, and perhaps a bit more character than the rest of us.

Do they pay a price for choosing the military? Do they pay a price for being "both victim and executioner," as described by John Keegan and Richard Holmes in their book, *Soldier*.

In every war this century, the likelihood of psychological "injury" was higher than the likelihood of being killed. The most traumatic event in war turns out to be looking in the eyes of a fellow human being and watching him die because of your actions. Yes, they pay a price to kill.

Studies show that after 60 days of continuous combat, 98% of personnel suffer some psychological injury. It must be the unrelenting fear of death that overwhelms them. But the fear of death haunts much more the soldiers who have not been in combat. The combat soldier's greatest fear is failing to do his job, failing those who count on him. The fear of death is secondary.

Interestingly, medics on the same battlefield as the combat soldier often face greater risks of injury and death but suffer much less psychological injury than the combat soldier. How can that be? Simple; the medic's primary responsibility is not killing. Rather than killing, he is helping. His psyche can handle that.

Can our military do anything beyond recognizing and treating these psychological injuries when they occur? Yes, they are "inoculating" soldiers during training to help protect them from the psychological injuries of war. The "inoculation" is harsh, bordering on brutal, using extreme physical and mental exhaustion

accompanied by starvation. A "survivor" of Special Forces training said, "We had been physically exhausted and starving for weeks. I had not eaten or slept for five days. Sitting there swallowing live baby frogs seemed perfectly reasonable."

How does this "inoculate" them from psychological damage? What did the training do? The most important part of the training was not what they did. It was what they learned about themselves; what they could do, what they could tolerate, what they could survive, how they could win. They learned that if they "survived" the training, they could keep their calm in horrendously stressful situations. They learned who they were and what they were. An Army Lieutenant Colonel said, "Limits are in the mind and can be overcome. I learned I could keep going despite fear, fatigue, and hunger." He was inoculated.

"The car kept coming toward us. We had to shoot. We had no choice. We had no option. The car ignored our warnings. What else could we do? We opened fire. The car stopped. All were dead; mother, father, children."

Another scar. Another memory. Another nightmare. Another lifetime. The memories of killing. The scars of war. These are rarely discussed because they never completely heal and are easily re-opened. Yes, they paid a price to kill.

Thank them. Hug them. Listen well and often, ask little. Let them heal. Let them find peace. They did it for us.