



Distant Wars, Constant Ghosts

Source: "Distant Wars, Constant Ghosts" by Shannon P. Meehan, the New York Times, February 23, 2010



In 2007, Army lieutenant **Shannon P. Meehan** called in an artillery strike on a house in Baquba, Iraq. It killed everyone inside.

He thought they had struck enemy fighters, but he was wrong. A father, mother and their children had been huddled inside.

He was tormented by the civilian deaths he had caused. Here are his reflections on the incident and war in general:

"It's been nearly three years, and I still cannot remove from my mind the image of that family gathered together in the final moments of their lives. I can't shake it..."

"For many soldiers, what follows a killing is a struggle of the mind. We become aware that what we've seen has changed us. We can't unlearn it, and we continue to think of those innocent children. It is not possible to forget."

"Killing enemy combatants comes with its own emotional costs. On the surface, we feel as soldiers that killing the enemy should not affect us - it is our job, after all. But it is still killing, and on a subconscious level, it changes you. You've killed. You've taken life..."

"War erodes one's regard for human life. Soldiers cause or witness so many deaths and disappearances that it becomes routine. It becomes an accepted part of existence. **After a while, you can begin to lose regard for your own life as well.** So many around you have already died, why should it matter if you go next? This is why so many soldiers self-destruct when they return from a deployment..."

"Those deaths are not tucked neatly away in a foreign land. They may seem distant, but they are not. Soldiers bring the ghosts home with them."

Wars inevitably rob us of our common humanity.



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