

# Tragedies Of **WAR**

By TSgt(Ret) Rodney R. Krause, Minot AFB, N.D.





Photo by Sgt. Jose M. Hernandez



Photo by SFC Johan-Charles Van Boeris

Life has a way of slinging an inside curve ball at your chin every once in a while, giving you a wake up call. For me, it happened on my last deployment to the AOR as an active duty Safety Technician when the war we all watch and read about materialized right in front of me. It taught me a valuable lesson in life and leadership.

After several previous fights into Kandahar hauling “beans and bullets,” the missions once filled with trepidation had now become routine. The fight was supposed to be just another “check ride,” flying with a crew handling an emergency aero medical evacuation mission out of Kandahar, Afghanistan.

That’s where the story all started.

All our crew knew was that someone had been shot in the face while on patrol. The critical care air transport team traveling with us also had very little information. Upon arrival, the surgeon tending to the patient briefed the medics, then the flight crew. “John” (not his real name, but nonetheless a very real person) had been leading his unit through a crowd in Kandahar, when out of nowhere someone shot him in the left side of his face with a small caliber weapon. The bullet shattered his lower jaw, traveled through his mouth and exited his right cheek. According to all accounts, he then walked to a vehicle and was driven to a medical care facility.

When I first saw him on the stretcher, his head was completely bandaged, much like a winter cap that only reveals your eyes, nose and mouth. On the 5-hour flight, the medical team worked to make him as comfortable as possible.

After we landed, a specialist immediately saw him and said he should continue his journey to somewhere with more advanced facilities.

While those arrangements were being made, I stopped to talk to John. Despite the numerous tubes and IV lines, he was in good spirits. I suppose enough morphine has a way of doing that for you. He communicated by writing questions on a note pad, and answered in the same manner. At one point, despite his condition, he had the energy to play an electronic game a nurse was carrying, which I found extraordinary.

John was one of the many members of the armed forces doing the work the President asked us to complete after Sept. 11, 2001. He did this dangerous task anonymously, in less-than-desirable conditions. Watching and talking to him, I suddenly felt the brutality and reality of war. Another human being with more guts than I will ever have was just doing his job when a nameless, faceless coward took a cheap shot, slithered back into the crowd and changed John’s life forever. These are the kind of people we are fighting.

The experience taught me a lesson in leadership. In 1910, President Teddy Roosevelt gave a speech in France entitled “Citizenship in a Republic.” His famous “Man in the Arena” comments were gleaned from it, and if you’ve never read the speech, I encourage you to do so. It is an excellent example of the men and women currently waging the war on terrorism -- the kind who put it on the line every day knowing the risk they take. They are the kinds who are not afraid to try and make the world a better and safer place for everyone. They are the kinds who, when the curve ball comes in chin-high, lean out over the plate a little more the next time. They are true leaders -- the ones who encourage others to keep fighting regardless of the odds against them.

I eventually helped carry John’s stretcher to a waiting ambulance. I gave him my squadron patch so when the morphine wore off, he would have a “road map” of those who helped get him to his destination. The nurse put it with his growing collection of unit patches, and with a handshake and a “thumbs up” they took him away. I hope to see him again someday, standing and smiling this time, so I can thank him for the lesson in life I learned that summer’s night.

They are the kinds of men and women President Roosevelt would have loved. They are the true heroes. 