

From 'Reaper Force' by Peter Lee

“Crew, all confirm happy.”

Quiet checks and double-checks are acknowledged by the three crew members. I feel queasy. What are they feeling?

“Cleared hot.” The voice of the JTAC fills my headphones.

“Roger.”

A countdown begins. “Three...two...one. Rifle.” The pilot gently squeezes the trigger. In the time it takes to read this sentence the Hellfire missile will accelerate off its rails towards the speed of sound.

For a moment, silence. I become aware that I have stopped breathing. Through my headset, I become aware that everyone has stopped breathing.

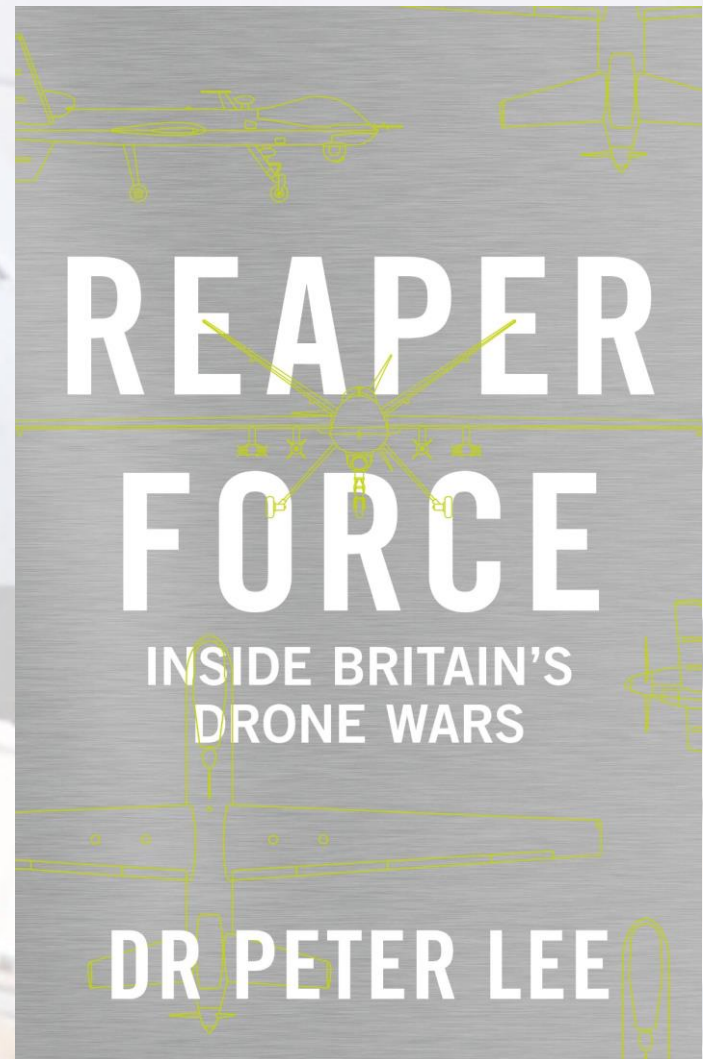
The Distance Paradox: The human dimension of remote air warfare and future challenges



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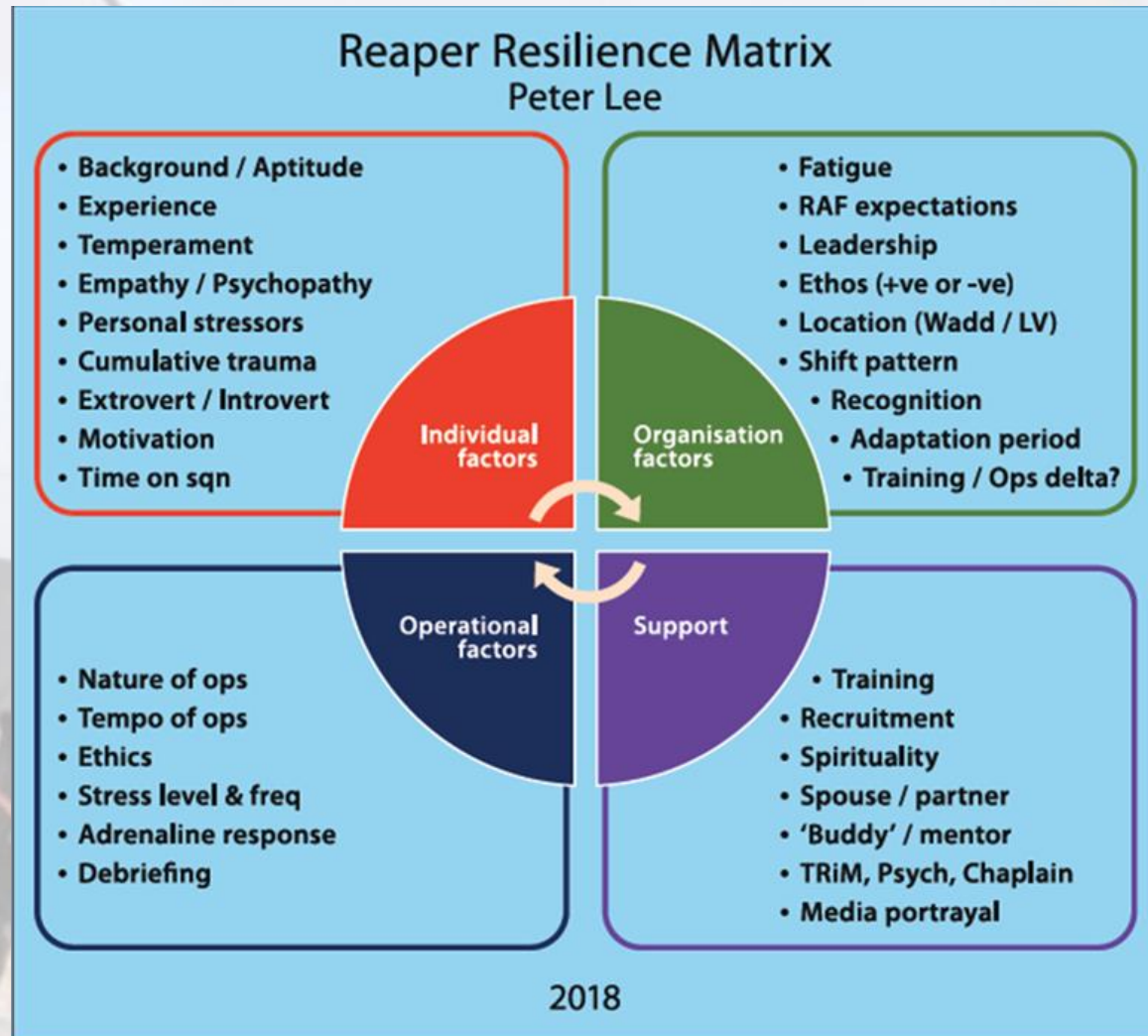
Introduction

- Research overview
- On Killing
- The distance paradox
- Human responses
 - Visual trauma
 - Moral injury
- Future challenges



Research

- 90 interviews
- Embedded field research
- Personal impact
- Research ethics



Remote air warfare – how it works

TITLE: ONE PGM STRIKE AGAINST DAESH SNIPER
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'On Killing' by Lt Col Dave Grossman

On killing from a distance (with reference to WWII bombers and artillery):

'[Most] important is the intervention of distance and machinery between them and the enemy; they can pretend they are not killing human beings.

On the whole, however, distance is a sufficient buffer; gunners fire at grid references they cannot see; submarine crews fire torpedoes at "ships" (and not, somehow, at the people in the ships); pilots launch their missiles at "targets." (p. 108)

The Distance Paradox - WWI

‘so when I got within good close range, about 100 yards, I pressed both triggers; my two guns responded well, and I saw pieces of three-ply wood fall off the side of the Hun’s fuselage. Then the L.V.G. went into a flat, right-hand spiral glide until it hit the ground a mass of flying wreckage ... I hate to shoot the Hun down without him seeing me, for although this method is in accordance with my doctrine, it is against what little sporting instincts I have left’.

- James McCudden



The Distance Paradox - WWII

'If what we saw below was true, Cologne was destroyed...Cologne was burning, it was burning as no city in the world can ever have burnt, and with it was burning the morale of the German citizen'.

- Leonard Cheshire VC

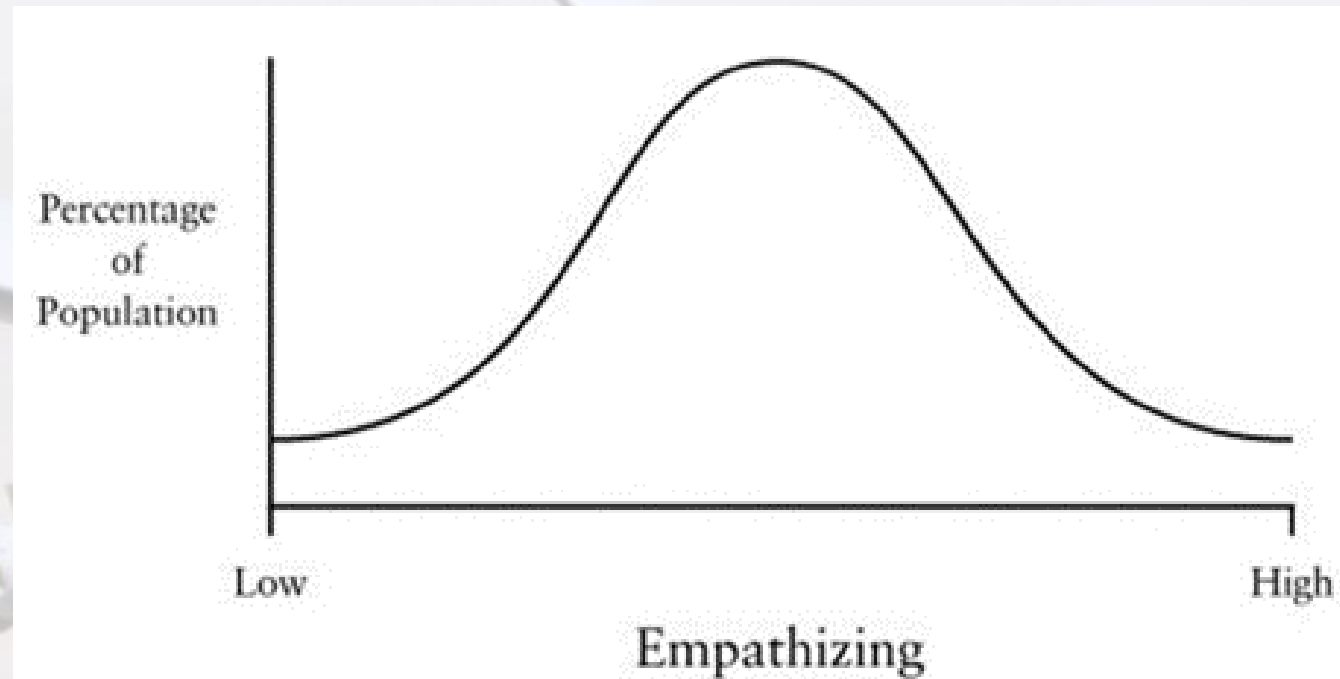


Human responses

- Powerlessness
- Visual trauma
- Moral injury
- Anxiety
- PTSD
- Empathy
- Guilt
- Relief
- Professional fulfilment
- Operational effect
- Protecting people
- 'In the fight'
- Satisfaction

Why are some people affected more than others?

Killing – Empathy Bell Curve



Simon Baron-Cohen (2012)

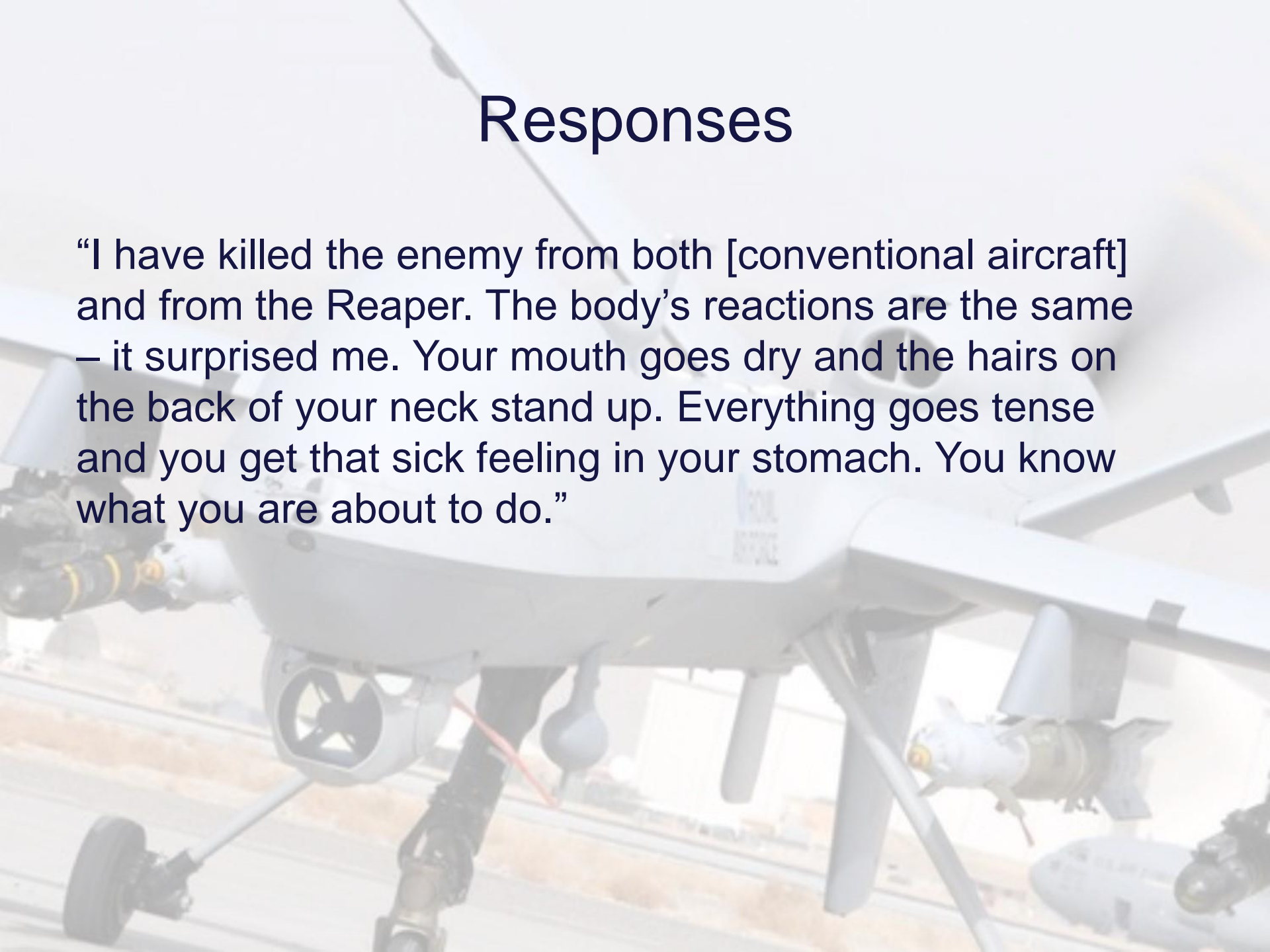
The Distance Paradox - Reaper

I am a parent governor for my local school and every year I volunteer to go away with the teaching staff and help the kids enjoy the great outdoors. It's only 3 days away but the kids get to abseil, canoe, pot-hole and do many other fun things. One year, I had a great time and thoroughly enjoyed the company of the children and the staff. Eighteen hours after I got back I was in work, watching a prisoner having his head cut off and being powerless to do anything about it. Oh how my life had changed – and not for the better – in such a short period of time!!!

- Simmo (Sensor Operator)

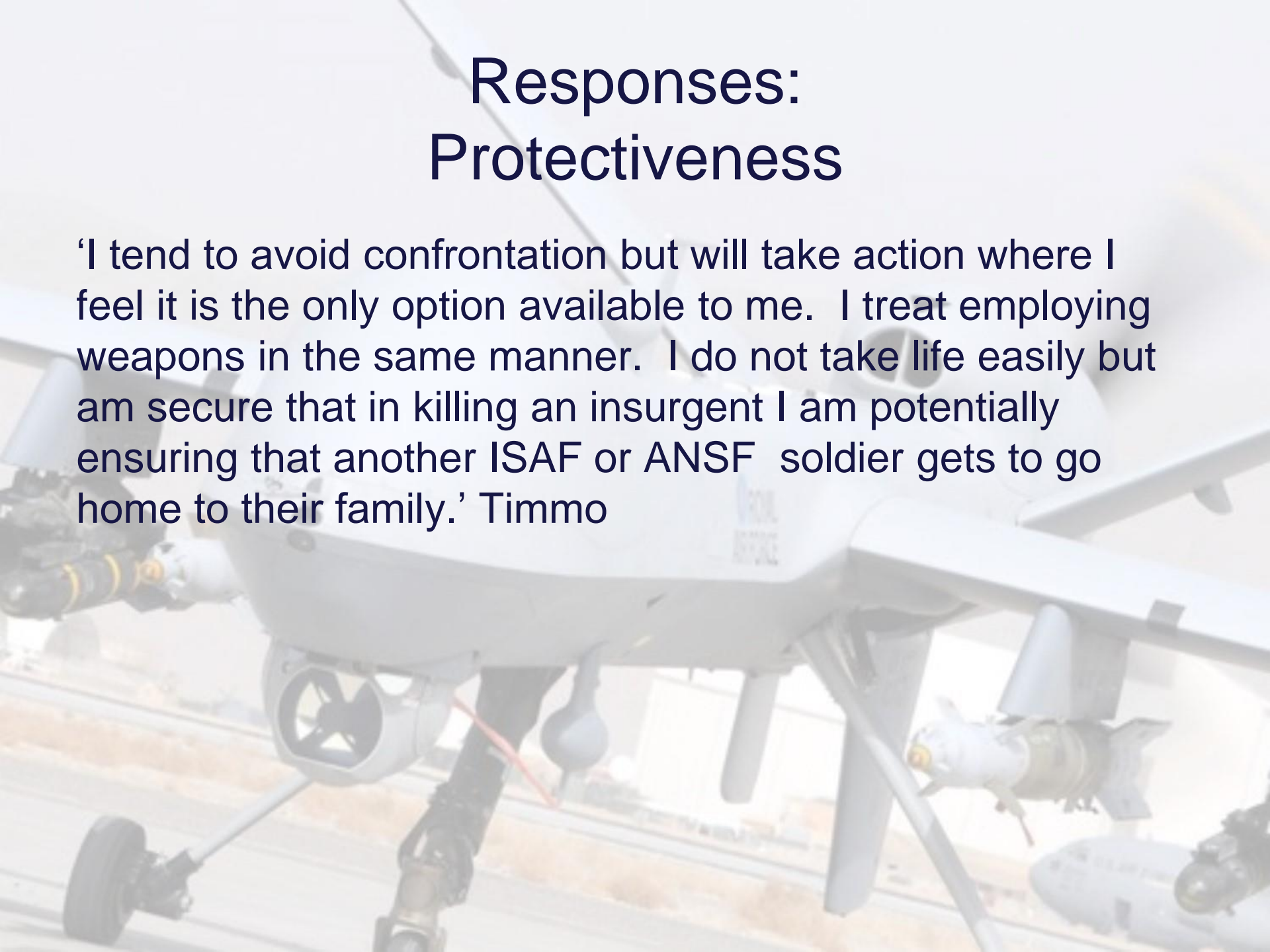
Responses

“I have killed the enemy from both [conventional aircraft] and from the Reaper. The body’s reactions are the same – it surprised me. Your mouth goes dry and the hairs on the back of your neck stand up. Everything goes tense and you get that sick feeling in your stomach. You know what you are about to do.”



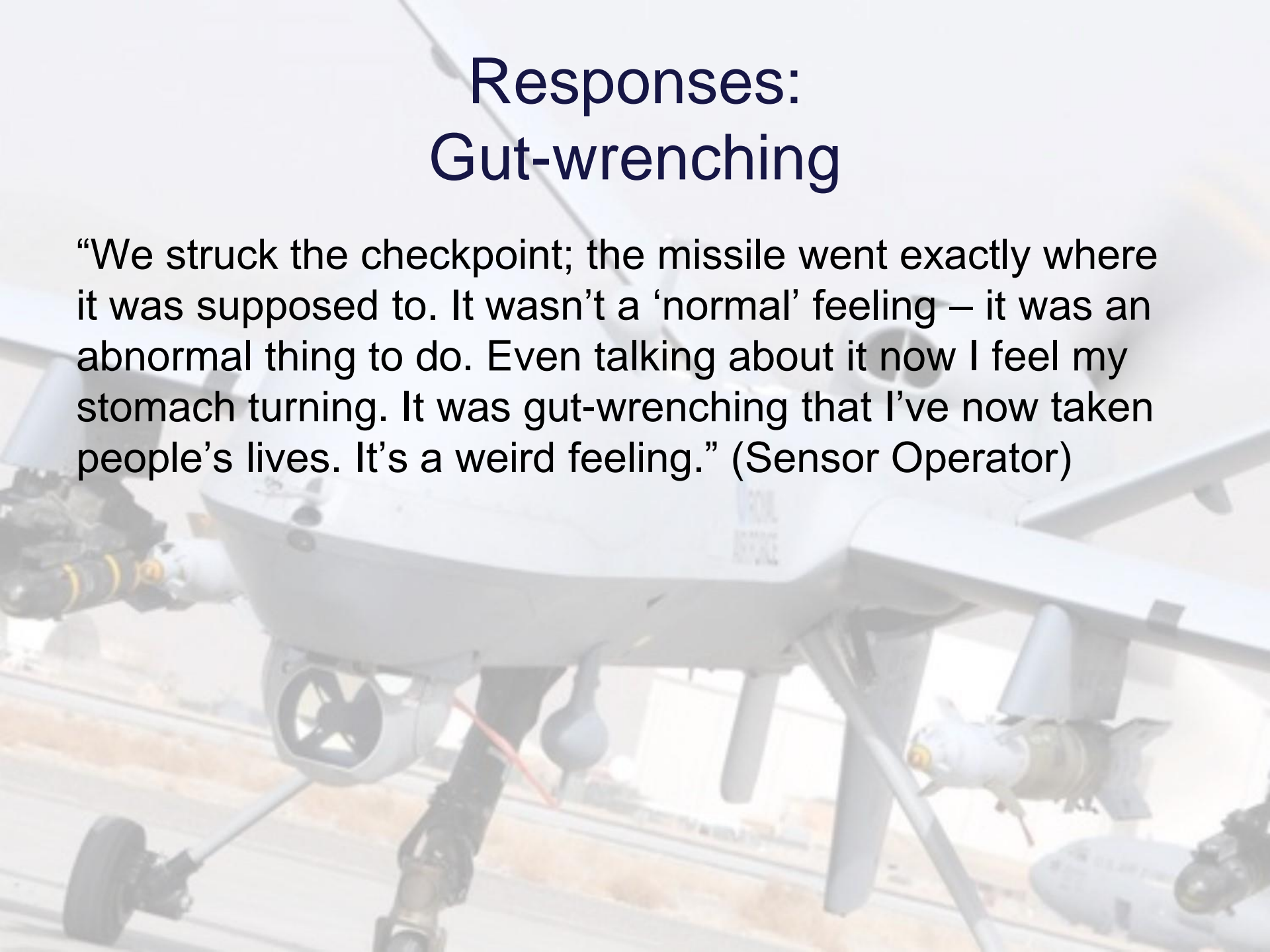
Responses: Protectiveness

‘I tend to avoid confrontation but will take action where I feel it is the only option available to me. I treat employing weapons in the same manner. I do not take life easily but am secure that in killing an insurgent I am potentially ensuring that another ISAF or ANSF soldier gets to go home to their family.’ Timmo



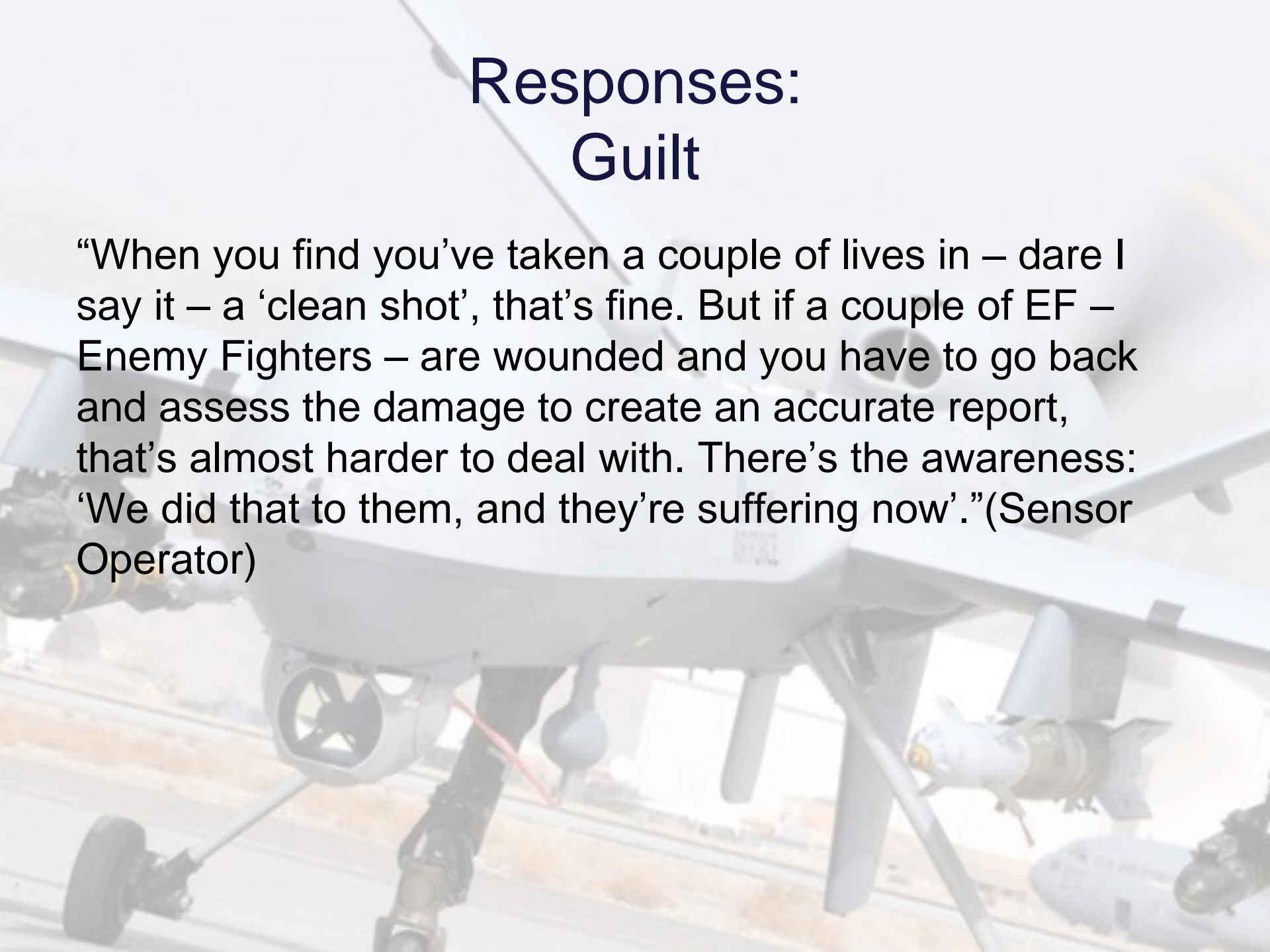
Responses: Gut-wrenching

“We struck the checkpoint; the missile went exactly where it was supposed to. It wasn’t a ‘normal’ feeling – it was an abnormal thing to do. Even talking about it now I feel my stomach turning. It was gut-wrenching that I’ve now taken people’s lives. It’s a weird feeling.” (Sensor Operator)



Responses: Guilt

“When you find you’ve taken a couple of lives in – dare I say it – a ‘clean shot’, that’s fine. But if a couple of EF – Enemy Fighters – are wounded and you have to go back and assess the damage to create an accurate report, that’s almost harder to deal with. There’s the awareness: ‘We did that to them, and they’re suffering now’.”(Sensor Operator)



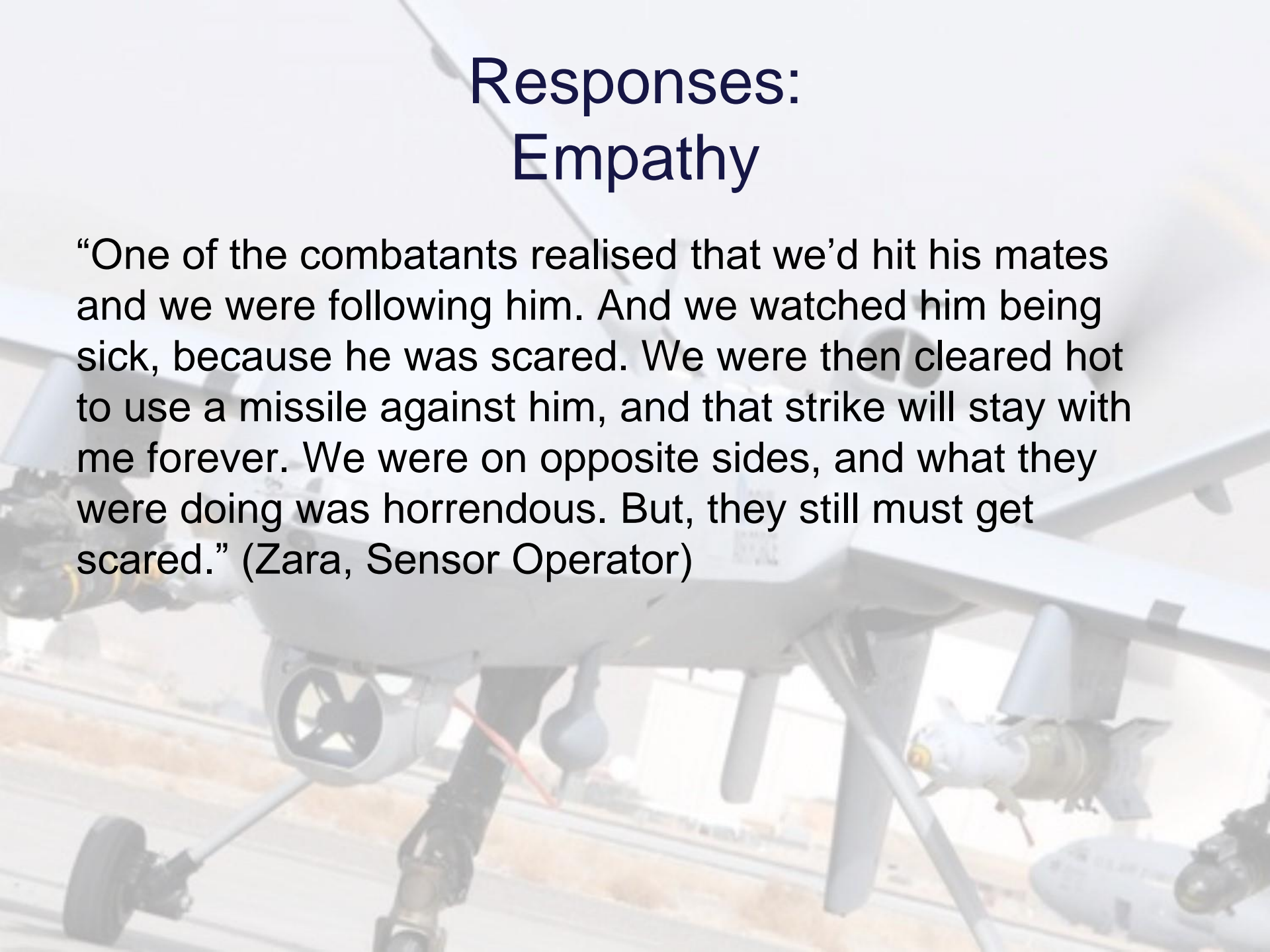
Responses: Empathy

“We rifled them [used a Hellfire missile]. They heard the sound of the missile as it approached, then one of them threw himself on top of the other one. And that’s just stuck in my head. I don’t know why it’s affected me. I believe they were father and son, because of the way the one threw himself on top of the other. And they were both lying there, dead. It’s just something that’s always stuck with me. They were just men like me.

And then I’d come home after the shift and I’d be handed a baby. Thirty-eight minutes was my drive home.”

Responses: Empathy

“One of the combatants realised that we’d hit his mates and we were following him. And we watched him being sick, because he was scared. We were then cleared hot to use a missile against him, and that strike will stay with me forever. We were on opposite sides, and what they were doing was horrendous. But, they still must get scared.” (Zara, Sensor Operator)



Responses: Powerlessness

Cpl Matt Richard, US Marine, KIA

As the Marine looked down towards the ground in front of him, Ross stared intently over his shoulder via a camera 20,000 feet overhead, trying to work out what he was seeing. Then the Marine bent down...and silently the screen exploded.

I have just seen a friendly soldier lose his life. What did I miss? What could I have done to have stopped it?

I knew of his death before his family did.

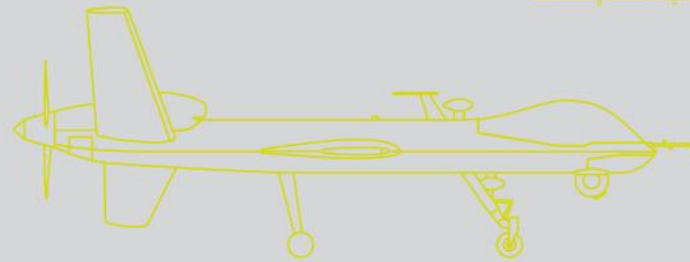
“This was, and still is, the one event which I recall the most. It is never far from my thoughts and I am glad of that.” (Ross, RAF Reaper MIC)

Future challenges

A white military aircraft, possibly a Predator or similar, is shown on a runway. The aircraft is viewed from a low angle, highlighting its wings and the various weapons and pods mounted underneath. The background is a bright, hazy sky. The text 'Future challenges' is overlaid at the top in a dark blue font. A list of seven bullet points is on the left side of the image.

- Selection
- Training
- Tour length
- Desensitization
- Trauma
- After-care
- Applying lessons elsewhere
- Political expectations

Any questions?



**“THERE ARE, PERHAPS, NEVER
THE ‘RIGHT’ PEOPLE TO DIE IN
WAR, BUT THERE ARE DEFINITELY
THE ‘WRONG’ PEOPLE TO DIE”**

JOSH, SENSOR OPERATOR



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