

Hearts & Minds

This is 1 of 7 illustrations I did as a series about my war experiences while serving in Iraq in 2003 through 2004. I have a very personal connection to this piece because during my time in Iraq the insurgents used the civilian population as pawns in the war on Hearts and Minds. They used women and children as human shields. Blew up schools and hospitals we were trying to build for the people of Iraq. The targeting of these facilities got so bad at times the Marines would be sent to guard these buildings and travel routes during the day so people could get to and from them safely.

One experience that still sticks with me to this day happened in the very early phase of the Iraq war. It was within the first 6 weeks of the invasion and the insurgency started using car bombs to attack US Military check points. This happened almost overnight all over the country and as a result Marines got more on edge when working vehicle check points on the roads. To try to deter Iraqi civilians from getting hurt at the check points and also looking out for the safety of the Marines. The Marine Corps ordered that we have signs put out 100 yards from each check point warning cars to stop immediately to be searched, if they don't stop warning shots will be fired and then followed with deadly force.

Shortly after this order was given, my platoon was ordered to set up a vehicle check point. We set up a check point and a defensive line on the main road. Minutes after we finished setting up a car came fast approaching on our position. It zipped past the sign that was written in Arabic telling them to stop, warning shots were fired. They still didn't stop. We engaged the car with two machine guns and our M16s. The car slowly rolled to a stop and was riddled with bullets holes.

It was a miracle that the driver and passenger survived. However, the son in the back seat was shot and killed. We tried to revive him and ordered a medevac, but there was nothing we could do. We all felt awful and consoled the parents. Surprisingly they weren't upset with us and told us, "it's ok, we are used to this in Iraq". When asked why they didn't stop? They told us they were fleeing the city because of the war and the brakes on their car were broken. This was a really surreal moment for me because I couldn't imagine being so used to the violence and death that you were ok with your child be killed.

This moment haunted me for years. I ended up creating this illustration to express this experience with my civilian counterparts. In this illustration I am trying to show a frantic Marine trying to scream for help and get the child medical attention. All while the mother of this child is trying to comfort this Marine and let him know it's not his fault and she is ok with what happened. Which is what I felt she was doing when I experienced this in real life. It was one of the hard realities of daily life in Iraq and I wanted to express this aspect to people here in America through my art.