

## Defending Normal

by Mark Majors

I twisted the blade slowly, strategically, ensuring whatever life remained would be gone soon, but not before the attacker had one final gaze into my eyes, knowing who had taken his life from him. The gaze was hauntingly familiar, one seen many times on the battlefield. A gaze I had hoped had been left behind years ago, in that endless desert of what seemed like an endless war. At first there was pleasure knowing his last vision was a reminder of the mistake he had made, but like too often before, the burden of taking a life overwhelmed any lust for vengeance.

Once the gaze became a lifeless stare, I took my left hand and shut the lids of the eyes I no longer cared to see. I used the same hand to push the man away from me while sliding the blade out with my right. The man crumpled as he fell back, collapsing in on himself. He now laid on a floor full of debris, the remnants of what had been no more than a minute's worth of struggle, and death.

I caught my breath and gathered my bearings, trying to make sense of what had just happened. I looked at my alarm clock, which had somehow ended up on the other side of the room. 2:47 am. For once the backup battery actually worked on the damn thing. Too many times I had been awakened by the morning sun rather than the sound of the clock's alarm because of a storm that had passed through the night before. I had been meaning to get rid of the half-working piece of shit for a while now, but after tonight it might have bought itself one more chance.

The last glance of the clock I remember was shortly after midnight. It wasn't until I heard footsteps in another room that I woke up. I slowly reached for my knife, located in its sheath,

mounted to the back of my headboard. The same knife attached to my waist during door-to-door raids on the other side of the world had now become my apartment's security system. It had performed well once again, ending the life of another man who had tried to do me harm.

Now that my adrenaline had returned to normal levels, I took inventory of my injuries. The task made much easier since the only clothing on my body was a pair of boxers. I had a busted lip and could taste a slow stream of blood spilling from the corner of my mouth, but that seemed to be my only contribution to the warm red smudges covering my torso. My right arm and hand were understandably soaked with the man's blood. My grip on the knife was still so tight that my hand started to cramp. Considering the fate of the man below me, I felt it was a small price compared to the one he had just paid. However, even in this brief chaos, I began to imagine the shit I would have gotten from my brothers-in-arms if they knew I had considered a cramp as an injury. Can't say I'm upset with my lack of practice since being stateside.

The informal medical check concluded with a glance into the mirrored door of my closet, directly across from where I stood. I could also see the reflection of a full moon, courtesy of my cheap ass not buying curtains. My mom had scolded me on her first visit to my apartment about not having something on the windows. I believe "civilized" was the word she had used for her justification to lament her youngest son. I'd be sure to let her know that my lack of civility could have been the difference between her getting the call that her son was dead versus this poor bastard's mom.

I had found out later on that this guy did have a mom. In fact, he had a whole family who had been dreading the day that they would get "the" call. A kid, who like me, wanted to be his own man and decided to do the exact opposite of what his family had mapped out for him. That's where the parallel in our lives ended. He gave his middle finger to the world and decided

to experiment with substances that wouldn't let him go. I told my parents college could wait and went down to the armed forces recruiting station to enlist. I became a soldier while he became a junkie. That night when our paths crossed, our training played out in my small one bedroom apartment. I took the life of an intruder and he died the life of one.

Now, what to do? The clock read 2:56 am. In combat, if I was in the same spot nine minutes after a kill it would be because I was dead myself. A soldier always knows his time, and I had gotten sloppy, let my mind wander. I allowed the moment to come over me instead of fighting through. I had become a civilian. I had started to become human again.

I looked for the phone and found it just under the edge of my bed. As strange as it felt, I needed to call the authorities. I had to let uniformed officers come into my home and question me. I had to be looked upon as a suspect. I had to prove that I was not guilty of a crime.

For the first time since the incident I moved from the spot where I had killed the man. I took two steps back, trying to disturb as little as possible of what would now be considered a crime scene. I sat gingerly on the bed, picked up the phone with my left hand and dialed 9-1-1. As the phone rang I realized I was still gripping the knife in my right hand.

"9-1-1 what is your emergency," said the dispatcher.

"Yes," I said. "I'd like to report a burglary."