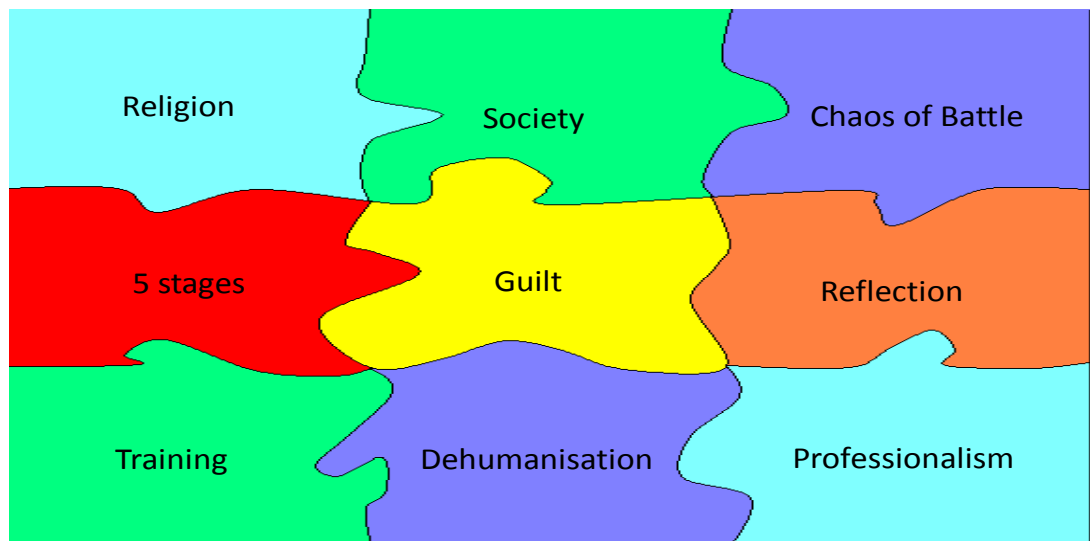


Guilt in the aftermath of killing in close combat

Guilt as an endorsement of one's essential goodness?



Master's Thesis

Tutor: Jan Hein Mooren

Martine Hulsman

Co-reader: Wander van der Vaart

Martine.hulsman@student.uvh.nl

External co-reader: Natasja Rietveld

March 2011

University of Humanistics, Utrecht, The Netherlands

Contents

PREFACE

1	THESIS OUTLINE	1
1.1	INTRODUCTION	1
1.2	CENTRAL QUESTION	2
1.3	JUSTIFICATION	2
1.4	METHODOLOGY	3
1.5	THESIS OUTLINE	4
2	KILLING IN COMBAT: THE LITERATURE	6
2.1	INTRODUCTION	6
2.2	IS IT DIFFICULT TO KILL?	6
2.3	WHY CAN A SOLDIER KILL?	8
2.4	FIVE STAGES IN THE PROCESS OF KILLING	13
3	LITERATURE ON GUILT	15
3.1	INTRODUCTION	15
3.2	GENERAL PERSPECTIVES ON GUILT.....	15
3.3	GUILT AND KILLING	18
4	CONCLUSIONS ON LITERATURE ON KILLING AND GUILT	20
5	CHAPTER ON METHODOLOGY	23
5.1	INTRODUCTION	23
5.2	RESEARCH DESIGN	24
5.3	DATA COLLECTION	26
5.4	DATA ANALYSIS.....	28
6	OUTCOME OF INTERVIEWS.....	31
6.1	WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A SOLDIER KILLS AN ENEMY IN CLOSE COMBAT?	31
6.2	WHICH PSYCHOSOCIAL AND BIOLOGICAL FACTORS PLAY A ROLE IN KILLING IN CLOSE COMBAT?	32
6.3	GUILT	37
6.4	REFLECTION ON AND COMMUNICATION ABOUT KILLING	42
7	INTEGRATING FINDINGS.....	49
7.1	INTRODUCTION	49
7.2	WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A SOLDIER KILLS AN ENEMY IN CLOSE COMBAT?	49
7.3	PSYCHOSOCIAL AND BIOLOGICAL PROCESSES	50

7.4	GUILT	55
7.5	COMMUNICATION ABOUT AND REFLECTION ON KILLING	57
8	CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS.....	60
8.1	SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS	60
8.2	EVALUATION OF METHODOLOGY	63
8.3	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH	64
8.4	RECOMMENDATION FOR MENTAL HEALTH WORKERS	64
	EPILOGUE	66
	REFERENCES	69
	APPENDIX I: FRAMEWORK INTERVIEWS	72
List of tables and figures		
	Figure 1: Research design	5
	Figure 2: Codes sub question A	28
	Figure 3: Codes sub question B	29
	Figure 4: Codes sub question C	29
	Figure 5: Codes sub question D	29
	Figure 6: Codes sub question E	30
	Figure 7: Conclusions	62

Preface

Having finished this thesis, I can look back at a very moving and interesting period in my life. Writing this thesis -interviewing the veterans and reading the literature on war, killing and guilt- was a project I thoroughly enjoyed, from the very start till the very end.

When I left former Yugoslavia, after having worked there for several years, I still had the feeling that I didn't understand war. I knew that when circumstances are 'right', any person can be a 'killer' (the banality of evil). However, I was still wondering what happens when somebody kills: how does it feel, and how does one cope with it. I decided to take killing as central subject for my master's thesis.

I would like to stress that this thesis is anything but an attempt to judge: no judgement, no condemnation, just the remarkable power of understanding. What I wanted is to understand how a soldier, a normal soldier, not a lunatic who kills civilians, experiences killing someone in combat and how he copes with it afterwards. And I hoped to find answers for how we (mental health workers, friends and family of veterans, etc) can help soldiers in coping with acts of killing. The responsibility for killing is not on a soldier's shoulder alone: politicians, society, we all together decide that armies should intervene in other countries. We, society, send them to war, so we have a responsibility to deal with the consequences of it.

The result of my efforts is this thesis. I hope and believe it contributes to the goals pointed out above.

This thesis could not have been written without the support of many persons. First and mostly I would like to express my gratitude and respect for the veterans I interviewed: the long interviews on combat and killing opened my eyes to the reality of the world of thoughts and feelings of people who experienced traumatic experiences of killing. Experiences that also made them grow as a person. Their openness and trust in me were crucial in writing this thesis. Secondly I would like to thank my tutor Jan Hein Mooren: our lengthy discussions, be it at 7 in the morning or 11 in the evening effort kept me sharp and further motivated me. Your flexibility and relentless effort is much appreciated. Wander, your input was of great value: always short but very much to the point, thank you for helping to structure and being strict on methodology. Natasja, thank you for all your input and enthusiasm! As a person, and as a professional experienced in research on veterans, your contribution to this thesis is great. Marianne, thank you for being much more than a spelling check. Last but not least, I want to thank my partner for his moral support and being there for me.

1 Thesis outline

1.1 Introduction

Recent American research on service men returning from Iraq showed that:

‘Overall, 40% of soldiers reported killing or being responsible for killing during their deployment. Even after controlling for combat exposure, killing was a significant predictor of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, alcohol abuse, anger, and relationship problems. Military personnel returning from modern deployments are at risk of adverse mental health conditions and related psychosocial functioning related to killing in war. Mental health assessment and treatment should address reactions to killing to optimize readjustment following deployment’. (Maguen et. al., 2010, p. 86).

During my student placement as a Humanist Counsellor for Dutch war veterans, most veterans and pre-veterans spoke about a variety of positive and negative experiences during wars or peacekeeping missions: camaraderie, personal growth, lack of control, feeling guilty for not having done enough to protect comrades or the local population. Killing, however, was rarely spoken of.

Numerous books and articles have touched upon the subject of the morally and psychologically difficult act of killing at close range (Grossman, 2008, 2009, Mc Nair, 2002; Maguen, 2010; Baumeister, 1999; Bourke, 1999; Watson, 1995; Livingstone Smith, 2007). They all emphasise the necessity of research on killing and the traumatic impact it has:

‘Although we tend to emphasize the fear of being killed or injured, the fear of killing also plays an extremely important role in the desire to escape going to war. Killing at close range is one of the most traumatic aspects of combat, and many men will do almost anything to avoid it’. (Livingstone Smith, 2007, p. 151).

‘Looking another human being in the eye, making an independent decision to kill him, and watching as he dies due to your action combine to form the single most basic, important, primal, and potential traumatic occurrence of war’. (Grossman, 2009, p. 31).

‘Soldiers and veterans often carry an immense burden of guilt because they may have done things in the course of duty that violate the primal taboo against killing one’s own kind’. (Livingstone Smith, 2007, p.157).

‘The characteristic act of men at war is not dying, it is killing. For politicians, military strategists, and many historians, war may be about the conquest of territory or the struggle to recover a sense of national honour but for the man on active service warfare is concerned with the lawful killing of other people’. (Bourke, 1999, p. 1).

Whereas most other research has focused on the consequences of life-threatening situations and feelings of powerlessness, survival guilt authors like those quoted above, stress the need for research on the effect of killing someone.

1.2 Central question

This leads to the central question of this thesis, which is about the moral aspects (guilt) of killing a military opponent in close combat.

What is the role of guilt in killing a military opponent at close range?
--

The answer to this central question can be found by addressing the following sub questions:

- a) What happens when a soldier kills an enemy in close combat?
- b) Which psychosocial and biological processes play a role in killing someone in close combat?
- c) Which elements of guilt do soldiers experience (if any) after killing the enemy at close range?

1.3 Justification

The general aim of this thesis was explained above. Research on the effects of killing in close combat is crucial for a combination of reasons: practical (to advise mental health workers), social (to give killing the attention it needs) and theoretical (research on killing and ‘normal coping’ with killing is relevant, as most research is focused on PTSD).

Practical relevance

Mental health workers, especially spiritual or moral counsellors play an important role in helping (ex)-service men to incorporate their combat experiences into their world view. Improved insight into the process of coping with acts of killing could help counsellors in their work with (ex)-service men¹.

Social relevance

The striking element within media coverage of missions abroad, Ministry of Defence statements and books about the military, is that they always seem to deny that killing is a key issue in modern warfare. Reports on deaths of British soldiers, injured servicemen and PTSD are widespread, but do we ever hear about how many Taliban were killed, or Iraqis? Killing in combat is part of the

¹ In this thesis the words veterans, (ex) servicemen and soldiers will be generally used for all those that serve or have served in the armed forces, regardless of their rank or gender.

servicemen's experience and therefore it is part of society, because the service men are sent there in the service of their society. As Bourke states:

'Of course, the taking of human lives is not a necessary component of warfare. (...) human slaughter was at the heart of military strategy and practice. This fact is glossed over by most military commentators and denied by others. Accounts of the "experience" of war prefer to stress the satisfaction of male bonding, the discomforts of the frontlines, and the unspeakable terror of dying'. (Bourke, 1999, p. XIV).

The social relevance of this research is that it gives killing in combat the attention it needs.

Theoretical relevance

This thesis tries to fill in gaps within research on mental consequences of killing someone. Secondly, it tries to highlight a very specific part of combat: guilt and killing. By leaving out the other factors of guilt and war (survival guilt, fear of dying, losing comrades), insight into the processing of guilt and killing will be improved.

Most research on combat experience focuses on the negative consequences of combat: Post Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD) and other disorders. Although the percentage of veterans who do experience negative consequences of combat is alarming, some experience positive consequences and personal growth result from overseas missions and combat experience. This thesis will attempt to learn from subjective, personal, negative *and* positive experiences of acts of killing.

In the conclusion, some implications for mental health support practices will be considered and suggestions for further research will be made.

1.4 Methodology

This thesis is concerned with subjective interpretations of a very specific issue: feelings of guilt amongst ex-service men after killing someone in close combat. There has been research on the mechanisms of killing, and self-deception, and reluctance to kill and group pressure. This thesis however, is about the most intimate and hidden aspect of killing: feelings of guilt. These issues are difficult to access via quantitative questionnaires, and difficult to understand unless you know the intimate story. Qualitative research is therefore necessary. In the chapter on methodology (5) the motivation for and practices of qualitative research in this thesis will be explained.

To maximise the results of the interviews, we thoroughly researched available literature on killing and on guilt. Preliminary answers were sought to the sub questions of this thesis and are the basis for the interviews.

1.5 Thesis outline

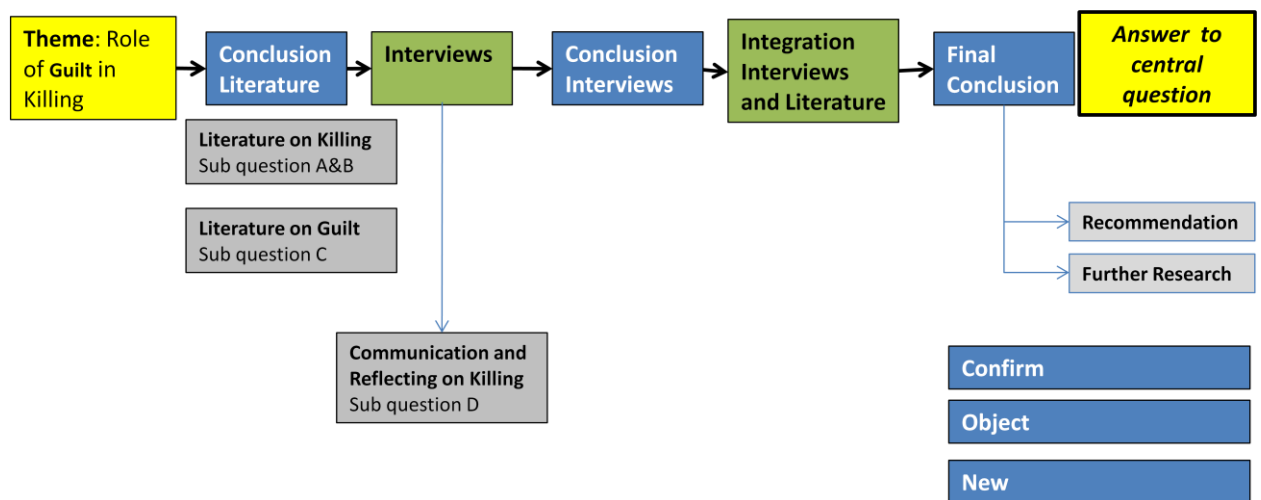
Having described the aim and the central question of this thesis and the methodology used, the results of the literature research will be presented: literature on killing (chapter 2) and literature on guilt (chapter 3) and summarised in a conclusion on literature (chapter 4). The empirical part of the thesis consists of a chapter on methodology (chapter 5) and the data from the interviews (chapter 6). In the conclusion and integrative chapter (chapter 7) the conclusions from the literature chapters will be linked to the data from the interviews. In the final chapter, conclusions & recommendations (chapter 8), we will explore the weak and strong points in the methodology used for this thesis, make some recommendations for mental aid for soldiers in relation to guilt and killing, and recommendations for further research.

To understand if a soldier feels guilty about killing someone, the first thing needed is a clear picture of what happened and the circumstances: *What happens when a soldier kills an enemy in close combat?* (A) How a soldier judges the act of killing someone depends on what made him kill that person: *Which psychosocial and biological processes play a role in killing someone in close combat?* (B) These might be conscious or subconscious processes. Knowing the circumstances and the psychosocial processes of killing someone, we can look at the third sub question: *Which elements of guilt do soldiers experience (if any) after killing the enemy at close range?* (C) These three sub questions were analysed based on available literature, and preliminary conclusions were drawn. The second phase was the interviews. After having analysed the literature, we decided that a fourth sub question should be added: *What is the role of communication about and reflection on killing someone?* (D)

In the third phase conclusions from literature and the interviews were integrated and recommendations for mental health workers and further research were made.

Figure 1 represents the research flow, starting with the central question, working through literature, interviews, integration of literature and interviews towards the conclusion and recommendations. To summarise the research outline Figure 1 shows the flow of the research thesis, starting with the central question: *'What is the role of guilt in killing a military opponent at close range?'* (yellow) through conclusions on literature (based on sub questions A, B and C) and outcomes of interviews (sub questions A, B, C and D) to an integration of interviews and literature. This provides the conclusion, the answer to the central theme (second yellow block) and recommendations for further research and mental health workers.

Figure 1: Research design



2 Killing in combat: the literature

‘It was like a volleyball game, he fired, I fired, he fired, I fired. My serve- I emptied the rest of the magazine into him. The rifle slipped from his hands, and he just fell over... It sure wasn’t like playing army as a kid. We used to shoot each other for hours. There was always a lot of screaming and yelling. After getting shot, it was mandatory that you writhe around on the ground. ... I rolled the body over. When the body came to rest, my eyes riveted on his face. Part of his cheek was gone, along with his nose and right eye. The rest of his face was a mixture of dirt and blood’.
(Grossman, 2009, p. 239).

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter literature on killing will be explored, based on the two sub questions as posed in the thesis outline:

- a) What happens when a soldier kills an enemy in close combat?
- b) Which psychosocial and biological processes play a role in killing someone in close combat?

In the following paragraphs, the focus is on the main factors that make killing difficult (2.2), and the elements that take away inhibitions to kill (2.3). The last paragraph (2.4) is dedicated to the five stages a soldier goes through in relation to killing, as it represents the conclusions from the paragraphs on what enables and inhibits a soldier to kill and serves as an introduction to the chapter on guilt.

As this thesis is about killing in combat, it is important to stress that it is not about:

- Atrocities or genocide; this thesis is about killing that is considered ‘normal’ in a war. It is very difficult however to draw a moral line of what is justified killing or atrocity. Since this is qualitative research on subjective experiences, I will focus on the definitions of ‘normal killing’ as used by the soldiers, and not look at it from a legal perspective.
- Long-distance killing; killing as a result of air bombing or long range artillery is irrelevant for this study because the soldier is not confronted with his deeds of killing a human being. As we are interested in the human aspect, one human killing the other human, close combat killing is central.

2.2 Is it difficult to kill?

All authors we came across (Bourke, 1999; Livingstone Smith, 2007; Baumeister, 1999) agree that people have to cross difficult barriers before they can kill. There are moral, social, psychological and biological inhibitions involved in attitudes to killing. The difficulty of killing somebody in close

combat is shown by the biological physical processes that take place during killing. Many soldiers throw up after their first kill.

The most important moral / social inhibition is the taboo that says one should not kill. As a child, we learn that hurting others, and even more so killing them, is bad. Consciously or unconsciously, we are afraid that if we kill someone, something bad will happen to us. Humans are social beings, and fear of losing social esteem or being punished by others is crucial, and is also an important inhibition to killing.

Most religions place restrictions on killing: in the Christian religion, 'thou shall not kill' is one of the Ten Commandments. Depending on the interpretation one has, it means either restriction on all killing, or that killing might only be allowed in some circumstances.

From a psychological perspective it is especially difficult to kill someone at close range. According to Sartre we feel a moral duty towards the other, because the other is not only victim but also eye-witness of our act. The moment the victim and perpetrator look each other in the eye, they are deprived of their autonomy and their indifference. There is a direct relationship between the empathic and physical proximity of the victim.

The resultant difficulty and trauma of the kill is bigger for killing at close range, compared to long-range killing, bombing or artillery. What Grossman (2009) says about the distance factor, and what others (Baumeister, 1999) say about killing people who are like us is that: the more the enemy resembles the soldier, the more difficult it is to kill him. It is less difficult to kill an enemy who is from another race or colour (white-skinned Caucasian killing yellow-skinned Japanese), culture or language. Killing a human being, one of one's own kind is against nature. As long as we see them as human, it is difficult to kill them. Having killed an enemy soldier, and then finding a picture of the enemy soldier with his wife and child, makes it more difficult for the soldier to cope with this killing: he was just like me, it could have been me. Also there can be sympathy for the enemy: he is just a guy like me, sent here by his government.

That killing is difficult for the psychological, biological and social reasons mentioned above was also concluded by General Marshall (1978). During WWII up to 80% of the soldiers aimed their shots into the air, instead of trying to kill the enemy. Although his work was later heavily criticised for not complying with the present scientific standards, his conclusion was confirmed / validated by most other research. Consequently, the US army changed its training methods to alter this reluctance to shooting at the enemy. In Vietnam, the non- direct firing rate was close to five percent. (Grossman, 2009, p. 252).

The answer to the question ‘Is it difficult to kill’ is yes, because of social, psychological and physical processes as demonstrated above. This conclusion is important because it shapes the experience of killing. More important, however, is that this process of inhibition is essential in coping with the experience of killing. The reluctance to kill, which can be temporarily overcome by the circumstances of combat and training, is an indicator that having killed someone might have consequences for coping with it.

2.3 Why can a soldier kill?

As we have seen in the previous paragraph, it can be very difficult to cross the barrier and kill, but this obviously does happen, and on a large scale. The question is: what makes killing possible? Is it because Man is biologically programmed to kill? Is it necessary to kill to survive? Is it an ideological consequence, or does propaganda make the soldier do it?

There is not just one simple answer to that question: it is the combination of all factors that enable killing. Using several books and articles on killing (in combat), we will combine killing from an evolutionary, (psycho) social and psychological perspective.

2.3.1 Biologically

The evolutionary question is: do men kill to survive, is killing part of humanity? Some authors (Livingstone Smith, 2007; Freud; Watson, 1995) say that man is a natural killer: that it is in our genes to kill. It is a fascinating debate, but unfortunately it is beyond this thesis to compare the different opinions.

We would like to paraphrase Livingstone Smith (2007) and Watson (1995). They are of the opinion that, historically, the men who were best at killing the enemy were those with the biggest chance of survival. They would return, and could reproduce themselves. Women were unconsciously selecting the strongest males, so their offspring would have the best chances of survival. Nature is all about survival and sex. Throughout history, including after WWII, soldiers coming home from war were embraced by women. Uniform emanates a power and masculinity which has a symbolic significance in its power to attract women.

A Freudian explanation for killing, the need for aggression, is based on the death instinct. Men, like other animals, are inclined to resolve conflicts of interest by resorting to violence. The urges fuelling both individual and collective aggression are based on a self-destructive drive (the death instinct) that must – in the interest of self-preservation - be directed outward as aggression toward others. (Livingstone Smith, 2007).

Pacifistic and feminist authors state that war is an aggressive male trait. However we agree with e.g. Livingstone Smith (2007), Bourke (1999) and Swanwick (1935) that war is not an expression of human *male* nature, but that war is part of us all. It is about the banality of evil that is present in every human, as described by Hannah Arendt (1963). Women play an important role as well, as the following quotations demonstrate

‘Women satisfied their aggressive urges by pestering their menfolk to act on their behalf and decimate the enemy.’ (Bourke, 1999, p. 149).

‘Although men made war, they could not have done so had women not been so adoring of their efforts. (86) Women can’t bear arms, no women bear armies!’ (Swanwick, 1935, p. 246)

The biological key element to killing, manifesting as the common motivation to kill, is to survive and to reproduce: to kill or to be killed. Self-defence as motivation, even if your troops start the battle, is a very obvious motivator. The ultimate purpose is not just about surviving a battle; it is also about reproducing your gene. The best fighter, historically, and maybe even today, has the best chances to mate and multiply. According to some, the ability to kill in the service of genetic reproduction is part of men and women alike.

2.3.2 (Psycho-) social

Another approach to look at killing is from a psycho-social perspective. Man is a social animal, whose behaviour and morals are determined by nurture, interaction with and dependence on others. War or conflict makes group bonding stronger and that stimulates in-group behaviour. The essential psycho-social elements that enable killing are group cohesion, division of labour and obedience.

Group cohesion / pressure

The first social element for enabling killing is the strong cohesion within a group of soldiers. More than any other moment in life, in battle a soldier depends on his fellow-soldiers, who in turn depend on him. Friends and family are far away, so it is his fellow soldiers that are his world. A soldier is therefore very committed to protect his mates, and shooting at the enemy is crucial to this. Several researchers state that the primary factor in killing is this powerful sense of accountability to comrades on the battlefield, which is more significant than wanting to kill or self-preservation. It is bonding with, and the pressure of, this small group of men, that has much more influence than the bonding to the army or ideology.

Other mechanisms are more linked to group pressure than to group cohesion. Ardant du Picq (1946), French Army officer and military theorist calls it mutual surveillance: you can’t run away, there is peer pressure to stay. The mechanism of group pressure is well-known in socio-psychology.

Reluctance to killing is often not expressed by a soldier, out of fear of being an outsider or a coward. The consequence of being rejected by the group that you feel so close to would be catastrophic.

The overall conclusion of Grossman (2009) is that the individual must identify with and be bonded with a group that has a legitimate demand for killing. And he must be with or close to the group for it to influence his behaviour.

Division of labour and differentiation

Central to killing is the division of labour, the second social element to killing. In analyses of how war starts, division of labour and obeying orders are generally emphasised. There is an avoidance of feeling personally responsible for war or killing. Politicians, mostly supported by the population, take the decision to go to war. Through bureaucracy and division of labour, the individual soldier feels less responsible for the killing. Glover (2001) describes this process illuminatingly in his book, *'Humanity: a moral history of the twentieth century'*. Killing in groups is also easier because it gives a sense of anonymity. Responsibilities are shared; one's role in the killing is made to appear less significant.

Obedience

Never underestimate the power of the need to obey (Freud)

The third component of motivation to kill is the compulsion and need to obey. A soldier is just following orders, is the justification often stated. Obedience is an intriguing subject. Even more than being fired upon; being told to fire can be a critical factor that makes a soldier fire. Grossman (2009) also concludes that demand for killing actions from a leader is the decisive factor in killing: some commanders literally have to stand in front of their man to shout orders to fire, otherwise the soldiers wouldn't kill.

As was shown by the famous Milgram experiment, obedience to follow orders depends on the factors of proximity of the authority figure, respect for the authority figure, intensity of the authority figure's demands, and the authority figure's legitimacy. According to Shalit (1973), true bonding to the direct leader is essential and leaders must express a clear expectation of killing behaviour.

Following orders happens for several reasons. Firstly, in combat the soldier does not have a choice: obeying an order in the military is mandatory, unless one is absolutely convinced that it is against international law. As said before, in combat the distinction between right and wrong is often not so clear cut. Refusing an order, refusing to fight, is mutiny. Previously, the punishment would be death

penalty; nowadays it is imprisonment. Secondly, a soldier might look up to his superior. He would trust him to take decisions that the soldier himself does not necessarily understand, because he trusts the commander has the greater view. True bonding to a leader and the perception that the leader has legitimated authority is essential.

The final reason for obeying orders is that within the military one is taught that decisions about war in democratic countries are made by politicians: they decide on declaration of wars, the military is the subcontractor. If politicians and society support a war, then the soldier feels like he has a 'blessing' or approval or even obligation to kill.

In this paragraph the three psychosocial elements were mentioned that help a soldier pass the threshold to kill: group cohesion / pressure, division of labour and obedience. Needless to say, these elements are interlinked. It depends on the particular soldier and situation which psychosocial element proves crucial.

2.3.3 Psychological

Equally important as the psychosocial elements explained in 2.3.2, are the psychological processes that enable the soldier to kill. In the following paragraphs these psychological processes will be described: dehumanisation, desensitisation, revenge and ideology / media. Bourke (1999), Livingstone Smith (2007) and Grossman (2009) all mention psychological processes that enable soldiers to kill, although their emphasis on what is the most important differs.

Dehumanisation

The key element in passing the psychological barrier to shoot at another human being is to dehumanise that human being. Language is a tool in dehumanisation: the enemy is often described as animal or disease. Instead of talking about killing the enemy, soldiers, politicians or media speak about hunting down the beast, extinguishing the rats or preventing the spread of contagious diseases.

For soldiers fighting in close combat dehumanisation of the enemy is more difficult: they see their opponent; they get to see their victims. As said before (2.2) it is most difficult to kill an enemy that looks like you. How does a soldier feel when he kills someone who looks just like him, whereas in the media and the forces he is told to kill beasts, or extinguish diseases?

A common feature of combat is that soldiers see combat as a sport or a game: they want a better score and to kill more than the other platoons. Or it seen as hunting, trying to hunt down as many animals as possible. Seeing war as a game or a movie makes it easier at that moment to fight.

Asking yourself questions *at that moment* might be risky for yourself and others, thinking of it as a game, or acting in a movie, can be a way to increase the motivation to fight.

Desensitisation

The second psychological process that facilitates killing is that soldiers get desensitised. It is not possible within the framework of this thesis to go into the physiological processes during combat. This is superbly explained by Grossman (2009), Baumeister (1999), Livingstone Smith (2007) and Bandura (1973). The senses work differently during combat; often combatants do not have an accurate memory of the events. Sound might simply disappear, or appears to be much louder, time is experienced completely differently. Some think that they shot just a few bullets, whereas they shot many more. Or they think they were saved by someone else, whereas they themselves shot the enemy. This is essential when looking at coping with killing: do soldiers have a realistic picture of their killing? The second element of desensitisation is that soldiers sometimes describe feelings of being totally numb at the moment of killing.

Revenge

A third psychological process is revenge as motivation to kill. When soldiers see their mates getting killed or injured, or when a foreign enemy invades their country, the victim's assumed guilt provides relevance and rationalisation for his killing.

Ideology and media

Ideology is an essential factor in war, and crucial in convincing a society war is justified and necessary. Ideology is also a possible motivator for a soldier to join the forces and might contribute to the soldier's motivation to kill. To some soldiers, the cause they are fighting for is really important. They truly believe that the enemy is bad and needs to be fought and killed.

Media play an important role in distributing the above mentioned propaganda. Most authors (Grossman, 2009; Baumeister, 1999; Bourke, 1999) emphasise the role of the media in enabling soldiers to fight and kill, by showing an idealised picture of the war, appealing to men's masculinity, and by promoting the cause men are fighting for. The media depict a much more idealistic picture of battle than it is in reality. Mates or the enemy don't die immediately and peacefully as often depicted in media. Movies do not prepare for the horror of screaming, limbs flying around, men still walking although their bodies are only half intact etc. However, media might also influence the soldier by decreasing his motivation to kill, condemning the war and killing, as was the case during the Vietnam War.

Media also influence how soldiers experience their act of killing. Some soldiers say their combat experience was as if they were watching a film, they were acting, as if it was unreal. This somehow contradicts the statement above that real combat is so different from the movies. The way soldiers experience combat and killing greatly varies, and therefore different explanations can apply to different situations / individuals.

Media appeal to men to prove their masculinity, as becomes clear from the next quotation about the war in former Yugoslavia, where proving masculinity was part of the motivation to fight.

‘To be brave and intentionally face the dangers of war presented the greatest test and prove of masculinity. For example, a commentary published in newspaper Javnost (November 12, 1994) was about a part of Sarajevo that was particularly dangerous for the Serbs who went there regardless of the danger for “they knew what was between their legs”. In addition, war propaganda, especially in military call-up, often equated the joining of the army with the initiation to the manhood.’ (Hrvatín, S.B & M. Tampuz, 2000, p. 80).

Ideology and media are mainly important in the initial stage. Once the soldier is in the field, they might be less important than the elements mentioned before: survival, group cohesion, and revenge.

2.4 Five stages in the process of killing

Having discussed the biological (survival and reproduction), psycho-social (thou shalt not kill, group pressure, division of labour and the need to obey) and psychological elements (dehumanisation, desensitisation, revenge and game / sport, ideology and media) that enable killing a sketch of the overall picture is necessary.

To understand why people kill, it is important to understand what the circumstances are. War in general is a chaotic situation, you don’t always know where or who the enemy is. It is a stressful situation, because close combat is often life threatening. There is time pressure, mostly no time for deliberation. Soldiers are surrounded by like-minded. Of course there is diversity, but the forces wouldn’t encourage too much discussion during a mission about the question whether what they are doing is right, is it all right to kill?

Another important factor is that soldiers can be exhausted and possibly there is lack of food. Alcohol or drugs might also contribute for doing things one would normally not do. As Baumeister (1999) points out, alcohol can’t make men do what they don’t want to do. However, it can make them lose control.

It is precisely in this chaotic, stressful situation that people take decisions to kill or not to kill. After the mission, however, a soldier will look back at his decision to kill at that time, and think they see the situation much clearer, or will look at it with the norms of normal society.

The difficulty in killing, the processes that make a soldier kill, and the feelings about being able to kill come back in the five stages a soldier goes through when killing. The researcher considered by many as the specialist on killing, is Lt Col Dave Grossman. He is a former ranger and paratrooper and a psychology professor at West Point. In his book '*On Killing, the Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*' (2009) Grossman describes five stages involved in killing that are essential to an understanding of individual responses to combat. His research is based on his work as psychologist, interviews with military and input from other professionals.

- 1) Concern about killing. The big question every soldier asks himself is will he be able to kill the enemy, or will he let his buddies down? These are deep concerns that exist on the part of most soldiers.
- 2) The actual kill. For a properly conditioned soldier, killing in the heat of a battle is often completed reflexively, without conscious thought. It is common however for a soldier to be unable to kill.
- 3) Exhilaration. Veterans describe this state as satisfaction. During an exchange of fire, the body releases a large amount of adrenaline into the system and a soldier can get combat high. There is a strong social stigma against saying that one enjoyed killing in combat.
- 4) Remorse, revulsion, nausea. After the exhilaration, a sense of identification with or empathy with the humanity of the enemy is very common. Some who killed deny this remorse; others deal with it, or are overwhelmed by it and never want to fight again. In general, remorse is intense, and it is something that he must deal with the rest of his life.
- 5) Rationalisation and acceptance. This stage is described as a lifelong process in which the killer attempts to rationalise and accept what he has done. Some soldiers never completely leave all remorse and guilt behind, but can usually come to accept that what he has done was necessary and right. In this rationalisation process, irrational and irrelevant supporting evidence is gathered. If the rationalisation process fails, it can result in PTSD.

Doubt about whether he is able to kill is overcome and the soldier kills. After having shot somebody, a soldier goes through a phase of exhilaration, immediately followed by remorse: he has killed a human being and feels happy about it. These feelings of guilt can be overcome in the final stage: rationalisation and acceptance. Those stages are essential to understand killing, and the key to understanding dealing with feelings of guilt. To understand feelings of guilt linked to killing, we will further research literature on guilt and killing in the next chapter.

3 Literature on Guilt

‘One of the things that seems to occur among men in combat is that they feel the high of the exhilaration stage, and then when the remorse stage sets in, they believe that there must be something “wrong” or “sick” about them to have enjoyed it so intensely. The common response is something like: “My God, I just killed a man and enjoyed it. What is wrong with me?”’. (Grossman, 2009, p. 245).

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we described what enables a soldier to kill and why it is so difficult, what are the impediments. For this we looked into the sub questions A and B of this thesis: what does a soldier experience when killing at close range, and what psycho-social processes play a role. In the final paragraph of chapter 2, guilt was briefly described as one of the five stages involved in the process of killing.

In this chapter literature on guilt will be explored to answer the sub question C of this thesis: ‘Which elements of guilt do soldiers experience (if any) after killing the enemy at close range? To answer that question, we start with a short general introduction on guilt and combat, on the way answering the question whether guilt is a positive or negative emotion (3.2). We will then look into guilt and killing (3.3). The purpose of this chapter is for a large part to provide questions and codes for the interviews

Chapter 3 is based on a mixture of general works on guilt: (Lewis, 1971, psycho-analyst and founder of the operationalisation of guilt, and Baumeister, 1994, social psychologist), authors specialised in veterans and guilt (Kubany, 1994, psychologist specialised in PTSD, and Rietveld, 2009, sociologist specialised in veterans and shame – guilt) and on authors specialised in combat or killing: McNair, 2002 and Grossman, 2009. Because the focus of this research is on killing in combat, this will be a more practical description of the elements of guilt that are important in the context of this research. We will not make a conceptual essay about guilt, not describe the different academic discussions about guilt in general, nor compare all the different definitions of guilt.

3.2 General perspectives on guilt

There are many theoretical perspectives on guilt. Some of the controversies are: the inter-personal versus the intra-personal conception of guilt; guilt as cognitive or as emotional phenomenon; guilt as useful in social functioning or as pathology or disorder. We have to restrict ourselves to mentioning the different aspects of and views on guilt, without having the space to make an inclusive analysis. We will mainly draw conclusions from Rietveld’s inclusive study of literature on

shame and guilt (2009), Baumeister's comparison of different authors on guilt (1994), and Kubany (1994, 1995 and 2006).

For a first general impression what guilt is, the following definition, given by Baumeister (1994), is useful:

'By guilt we refer to an individual's unpleasant emotional state associated with possible objections to his or her actions, inaction, circumstances, or intentions. Guilt is an aroused form of emotional distress that is distinct from fear and anger and based on the possibility that one may be in the wrong or that others may have such a perception.' (Baumeister, 1994, p. 245).

This is a general definition of guilt. In this paragraph, we will search for a definition of guilt more suitable for killing in close combat.

Guilt as an emotion is often confused with shame. Since Helen B. Lewis (1971) operationalised the concepts of guilt and shame however, most researchers tend to differentiate guilt and shame. Guilt, then, is a negative evaluation of something one has done or failed to do, whereas in shame the self is the focus of evaluation. Because guilt and shame are related, in analysing the interviews shame might be touched upon as well.

From an evolutionary perspective, guilt is essential in maintaining beneficial relationships. People avoid harming others because they want to avoid the unpleasant feeling of guilt. Avoiding guilt is beneficiary to both the perpetrator and the victim. A weaker victim can prevent getting hurt by provoking guilt in the stronger perpetrator. Guilt is founded on empathy. According to Hoffman (1982) people are innately prepared to feel empathic distress in response to the suffering of others, and guilt combines empathic distress with a self-attribution of causal responsibility for the other's suffering.

Guilt can be considered as interpersonal or intrapersonal in nature: about violated internal moral or violating general or social standards or both. This is an important question when talking about feelings of guilt about killing: are those feelings mainly about a soldier's own violated moral principles, or does he feel society condemns killing?

3.2.1 Guilt as 'positive' or 'negative emotion

Guilt is described in general as a negative emotion, unpleasant, distress, aversive, dysphonic, as in the following definition of Kubany (1994):

'Guilt may be viewed most parsimoniously as an unpleasant feeling accompanied by a belief that one should have thought, felt, and/or acted differently.' (Kubany, 1994, p. 3)

It is important to define the words ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ in relation to guilt. Emotions are called ‘positive’ when the subject has the tendency to approach the emotional object and ‘negative’ when there is a tendency to back away from it. (Arnold & Gasson, 1954, 206). That is another level of evaluation than calling guilt a positive emotion because guilt feelings have beneficial consequences.

There are numerous authors who stress the positive aspects of guilt (Rietveld, 2009; Bourke, 1999): guilt motivates a person to act differently, to do something for the victim, to compensate his act or change his behaviour. Guilt however might in some cases immobilise someone, when it keeps ruminating about how what happened could have been prevented instead of processing the event itself. It also gives a false sense of control, as if the person was able to prevent the harm. Chronicle guilt is often based on false assumptions or errors of logic. (Kubany, 1994).

3.2.2 Definition of guilt

To conclude, we would like to quote the following definition of guilt and shame that was the focal point for Rietveld (2009) in her PhD thesis on shame and guilt in veterans as a useful definition for guilt in our thesis on killing:

‘Shame and guilt are rich human emotions that serve important functions at both the individual and relationship levels (...) As moral emotions shame and guilt are among our most private, intimate experiences. In the face of transgression or error, the self turns toward the self-evaluating and rendering judgment. Thus, the experience of shame or guilt can guide our behavior and influence who we are in our own eyes. (...) Shame and guilt are thus both “self-conscious” and “moral” emotions: self-conscious in that they involve the self evaluating the self, and moral in that they presumably play a key role in fostering moral behaviour.’ (Rietveld, 2009, P. 80, from Tangney & Dearing, 2002, p. 2)

We have chosen for this definition of guilt to replace Baumeister’s definition (3.2), because it is applicable to combat situations, and it includes all the focus points of this thesis: the function of guilt, be it positive or negative, (sub question C), and the role of guilt on relationship levels, how do reactions from others influence processing experiences of killing? (Sub question D). In this definition guilt is an intimate and private experience. This definition rightly describes guilt as a self-conscious and moral emotion.

3.2.3 Guilt and combat

Opp and Samson (1989) formulated a taxonomy of guilt reactions in which they labelled and characterised five specific types of combat-related guilt. This taxonomy is useful to sharpen the focus of this thesis: two types of guilt are important in killing. Demonic guilt: observing or

participating in the ‘most despicable aspect of humanity, warfare’ (Lifton, 1973) and being unable to accept the monster, killer, animal or devil, that can exist in any human being. The second is moral / spiritual guilt: emanate from violation of ‘normal’ human values, such as thou shalt not kill’ and associated with feelings of being severed from society because of unforgivable conduct.

3.3 Guilt and killing.

Having analysed briefly guilt in general, and guilt in combat, it is now to look at role of guilt in killing someone. Various perspectives will be presented in this paragraph. In the next chapter, conclusions on literature will be drawn. Baumeister (2009) states guilt is not just as a backward looking emotion, but it also has an anticipatory element:

‘People often know well in advance what actions will make them feel guilty, and they try to avoid those actions.(...) You will probably be looking for excuses and rationalizations to escape the guilt before you commit the act. (...) Guilt thus shapes the reality of evil.’ (Baumeister, 2009, p. 306).

This implies that soldiers can prevent future feelings of guilt by looking for excuses and rationalisations beforehand, such as dehumanisation, group pressure, need to obey, as described in the paragraph ‘Why can a soldier kill?’ (2.3) Livingstone Smith (2007) emphasises self-deception as crucial in enabling to kill and preventing feelings of guilt.

Other authors however, stress that guilt is a normal element of killing in combat. The emotion that is most often mentioned (Baumeister, 1999; Grossman, 2009 and Kubany 2006) is guilt related to feelings of pleasure of killing: a soldier kills someone, then afterwards realises he enjoyed it, and wonders what is wrong with him, not feeling bad that he doesn’t feel bad. Grossman (2009) makes a clear statement, that there is nothing wrong with soldiers feeling this exhilaration and explains why those feelings of exhilaration are understandable.

‘But there is absolutely nothing wrong with them. (..) If the demands from authority and the threatening enemy are intense enough to overcome a soldier’s resistance, it is only understandable that he feel some sense of satisfaction. He has hit his target, he has saved his friends, and he has saved his own life. He has resolved the conflict successfully. He won. He is alive! But a good portion of the subsequent remorse and guilt appears to be a horrified response to this perfectly natural and common feeling of exhilaration. It is vital that future soldiers understand that this is a normal and very common response to the abnormal circumstances of combat, and they need to understand that their feelings of satisfaction at killing are a natural and fairly common aspect of combat. I believe this is the most important insight that can come from an understanding of the killing response stages.’ (Grossman, 2009, p. 245).

Kubany (1994) also analyses killing-pleasure guilt as an understandable emotion: killing pleasure guilt often represents a failure to understand the principle of negative reinforcement. Killing removes painful events, such as threats to survival and can therefore produce a state of relief, (reinforcement) that may be experienced as a pleasure.

Combing findings from several authors, killing pleasure is considered more common among soldiers who have mentally and emotionally prepared themselves for combat.

Guilt is usually felt stronger when it is difficult to deny the humanity, i.e. killing somebody at close range, or an enemy who is eating or smoking, acts that emphasise his humanity. Guilt is less and satisfaction stronger when killing an enemy who represents a direct threat to the soldier. According to Grossman (2009), the guilt stage in killing at close range is often very strong, stronger than long distance killing, because the soldier is faced with the undeniable evidence of what he has done. It is by its very nature an intensely vivid and personal matter, because you are shooting an individual instead of a generalised enemy. Bourke (2009) agrees that killing at close range can induce strong feelings of guilt, but states that long distance killing equally brings guilt, but a different type of guilt: feeling guilty for not feeling guilty.

An important issue is how to deal with killing on the short, middle and long term. According to Grossman, a soldier who killed never completely leaves all remorse and guilt behind, but he can usually come to accept what he did was necessary and right. This is what Grossman calls the fifth stage of killing (2.4), the rationalisation and acceptance stages, a lifelong process of gathering irrational and irrelevant evidence. Failure of this rationalisation process can result in PTSD.

4 Conclusions on literature on killing and guilt

In the previous two chapters on literature on killing and guilt, we were looking for answers to the three sub questions as raised in the thesis outline:

- a) What happens when a soldier kills an enemy in close combat?
- b) Which psychosocial and biological processes play a role in killing someone in close combat?
- c) Which elements of guilt do soldiers experience (if any) after killing the enemy at close range?

The preliminary answer to question A: *'What happens when a soldier kills an enemy in close combat?'* is that a soldier can experience a whole mixture of emotions when killing: from feeling totally numb to exhilaration, stress, repulsion, guilt and anger. He might feel as if he is playing a role in a movie or be in a game. At times it feels unreal and very different from what a soldier expected it to be, based on the pictures the media present. A soldier can sometimes kill automatically, as he was prepared for in training. A soldier often feels repulsion and vomits after he kills someone for the first time.

Something a soldier is not aware of when he kills, are the psychological and social processes that play a role in killing: sub question B: *'Which psycho-social and biological processes play a role in killing someone in close combat?'* This question has been answered by addressing two issues: why is it difficult to kill someone and what enables a soldier to kill? All authors emphasise that killing is difficult. Taken together, the answers come down to the following. Killing a human being is difficult, because it is against nature to kill somebody of one's own kind. It often provokes strong physical reactions of repulsion. The difficulty isn't so much technical in nature. It is rather a psychological/moral restraint, also based on religious and legal restrictions on killing. These influences together result in a process of internalising inhibitions.

What enables soldiers to kill is described in different ways. Each writer describes other elements as essential. Bourke (1999) is of the opinion that it is mainly obedience, reciprocity and revenge, depersonalisation and sportsmanship that enables killing for soldiers. For Baumeister (1999) loss of self-control is the central element. He holds that obedience, emotional distress, alcohol and the mental state (being absorbed in the here and now, instead of thinking ahead) are key to that. Baumeister's research is however on killing in general, not killing in combat. Grossman (2009) states that training, demands from authority (need to obey), group processes (bonding, protecting, surveillance) and emotional and physical distance to the enemy (dehumanisation) are crucial.

For this thesis all these different processes and elements are important for understanding the subjective interpretation of a soldier's killing in combat experience. It is not so important to know if killing is basically a biological, or a social, or an ideological or psychological thing. It is the combination of elements that makes a soldier kill. And all elements are important for a soldier to develop feelings of guilt afterwards.

The difficulty to kill, the processes that make a soldier kill and the feelings afterwards about being able to kill come together in the five stages involved in the process of killing, as described by Grossman (2009): concern if he is able to kill, the actual kill, exhilaration and remorse (he has killed a human being and feels happy about it). These feelings of guilt can be overcome in the final stage: rationalisation and acceptance. Those stages are essential to understand killing, and they are the key to understanding dealing with feelings of guilt.

This third sub question '*Which elements of guilt do soldiers experience (if any) after killing the enemy at close range?*' (C) was addressed by asking if guilt is interpersonal or intrapersonal and if guilt is constructive or destructive emotion. A definition of guilt that was suitable for analysing guilt and killing was given.

Guilt has an interpersonal and an intrapersonal aspect. Instead of having to choose between them, it is important to indicate which perspective one takes. Some authors on killing see guilt as an important and meaningful emotion. Others stress the capacity of soldiers to avoid feeling guilt. For them self-deception and dehumanisation are the most important factors. Others authors see guilt as a destructive emotion, as it can keep the focus on the past and give an illusionary control.

Different types of guilt are generally associated with combat. Spiritual / moral guilt and demonic guilt are the most important types of guilt for this thesis. This means feeling one has violated 'normal' human values, or their own values, such as 'thou shalt not kill' and the associated fear of being severed from society for it. That is a feeling that most ex-soldiers have to cope with. In the literature, guilt about the pleasure or the exhilaration is the most common form of guilt about killing.

Answering the question on the role of guilt in killing, we would say that guilt is a common stage a soldier goes through in reaction to his exhilaration after killing, but which should be overcome in the rationalisation and acceptance stage. Demonic and moral / spiritual guilt and guilt over pleasure in killing are the most common forms of guilt.

These conclusions about literature on killing and guilt provide a solid base for interviewing veterans on their experiences of killing at close range and coping with it. In the next chapter we will transform the data from literature, combined with the sub questions raised in the first chapter into questions and codes for conducting and analysing interviews.

5 Chapter on Methodology

As we described in the first chapter, this thesis is about subjective interpretations of the most intimate and hidden aspect of killing someone: feelings of guilt. These issues are difficult to access via quantitative questionnaires, and difficult to understand unless you know the intimate story. Qualitative research is therefore necessary. An important part of this thesis is interviewing (ex) soldiers with close combat experience. We will give a short introduction to our approach to qualitative research (5.1), describe our research design (5.2), the data collection (5.3) and the data analysis (5.4).

5.1 Introduction

The approach we used for this qualitative research is based on the following elements, partly based on Mason (2002):

- Grounded in a philosophical position which is broadly ‘interpretivist’ in the sense that it is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, produced or constituted. (...) all will see at least some of these as meaningful elements in a complex – possibly multi-layered and textured- social world.
- Based on methods of analysis, explanation and argument building which involve understandings of complexity, detail and context, qualitative research aims to produce rounded and contextual understanding on the basis of rich, nuanced and detailed data. There is more emphasis on ‘holistic’ forms of analysis in this sense, than on charting surface patterns, trends and correlations.
- Aim to produce explanations or arguments rather than offering mere descriptions. Furthermore, these explanations or arguments should be *generalisable* or have demonstrable wider resonance.
- Our research was conducted as a *moral practice*.

We have focused on working according to the principles above. In reading and analysing the literature, we have tried to be more factual, though still placing statements in a broader context. In the chapter on the interview data, however, we have taken more liberty in interpreting the quotes of the respondents, in the broader context of what was told during the interview.

Remarks on interviewing ex-servicemen

When interviewing (ex) service men about their acts of killing someone, the researcher should be aware of the possible effects on the soldier of talking about their acts on their feelings. Milroy mentions the risk of interviews being ‘abused’ for therapeutic goals.

‘It became apparent that certain respondents also subtly change the interviews from storytelling to becoming therapeutic asking advice, seeking affirmation of actions and discussing future courses of action. An awareness of this problem on the part of the researcher, helped guard against deviation in the interviews and the temptations of over-involvement with interviewees, thereby retaining the subjective interviewer and interviewee relationship.’ (Milroy, 2001, p. 26).

We do see it as a responsibility of the researcher to help interviewees in coping with emotions that might be provoked by the interview. Jennifer Mason (2002) stresses the importance of asking yourself, as a researcher, ethical questions in doing interviews and to be sensitive to the rights and needs of the respondents. A week after the interviews, we have made phone calls to all respondents to see if the interviews provoked any reactions, to ensure that none of them were suffering from setbacks because of the interviews and to refer them to the proper agencies in case help was needed. Most respondents expressed relief and gratitude that they were able to talk about killing someone, sometimes for the first time in their life. None of the respondents experienced negative consequences from the interviews.

Remarks on talking about guilt

It is important not ask direct questions about guilt. Direct questions on guilt might provoke interviewees to give answers they think are ‘acceptable’. Interviewers should rather deduce feelings of guilt from words respondents might use to describe certain reactions or feeling e.g., feelings of responsibility, doubts concerning actions and feelings, the need to justify their actions during the interviews. Interviewees might not explicitly call it guilt, or they might not be aware of it. In carrying out the interviews, we have been mindful of not showing condemnation or disapproval in any form about the stories or the experiences of the soldiers, as shows in the transcript of the interviews.

5.2 Research design

Research population

The aim of this thesis is to explore subjective interpretations of guilt in killing and its aftermath: ‘normal’ killing, not atrocities, and ‘normal’ coping. The criteria were that respondents have served

in missions abroad, that they have killed at close range and that they are willing to talk about their experiences and feelings. Other criteria were that they have not been diagnosed with PTSD and that they have not killed civilians or committed atrocities. In the empirical outline, we have originally planned in-depth interviews with five (ex) soldiers.

Finding interviewees

Although we anticipated finding interviewees would be difficult, it turned out that it was mission impossible to find 5 soldiers who killed and were open to talk about it, for several reasons. Veteran organisations, like Combat Stress and the British Legion, were reluctant to expose their members to interviews about this delicate theme. The same goes for nursing homes for ex-service men: they thought their inhabitants too vulnerable to be exposed to questions about killing someone. Using our informal network of friends in the UK was also ineffective. Soldiers (friends of friends) were willing to talk, but once they heard about the theme of the thesis –killing someone- they withdrew. Interviewing soldiers without even knowing if they had been in situations where they killed would be too time-consuming.

Our solution to find respondents was to go to places in London where veterans gather, to establish contact with (ex) soldiers and find out in an informal way if at least they served in combat missions, so chances would be bigger they killed someone. We did have many interesting conversations with veterans selling poppy's for Remembrance Day. Those conversations did not lead to interviews, however, because those veterans simply had not fought in combat. Finally, at Remembrance Day 2010, we attended the veteran remembrance service, and went for a drink afterwards at the British Legion's premises, which was open to the public that day. There we met an open minded and helpful veteran, who served in Iraq and Northern Ireland. He was willing to be interviewed and introduced me to several colleagues who had been on combat missions and who had also fired at the enemy (snowball sampling). One other respondent was found through a friend working in a hospice. We have not interviewed those veterans who were willing to talk but who indicated in advance that they had no combat experience. We have finally made a selection of four suitable respondents out of 25. We conducted in-depth interviews, lasting 1,5 to 3,5 hours. Because of the difficulty to find more suitable respondents, which was also time consuming, and because the data provided in the interviews was very rich, we decided not to conduct more interviews.

Respondents

Whilst respecting the confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents, we will shortly describe their personal and professional situation. All respondents were male, British, living in London, age between forty and sixty. All have combat experience: all respondents served in Northern Ireland, one respondent served in the 70-ies in Borneo and 80-ies in Northern Ireland, three respondents served in Iraq (2002) and Northern Ireland, out of which two respondents also served in Afghanistan one or several times (after 2001). Three respondents are married, one single. One interviewee has a university degree, three have lower education. One respondent was a marine, three respondents were infantry.

Three out of four respondents belonged to support units, not typical close combat units. Because of the nature of the missions (Iraq, Afghanistan) they did have close combat experiences and three out of four shot at the enemy. This is important to keep in mind when analysing the interviews.

Although they were trained for combat, and trained to kill, fighting and killing was not every day business for them, as it could be for marines invading Iraq or Afghanistan at war time. This fact is important, because fighting and killing was an exception more than every day business. This might affect the way soldiers think and communicate about killing. Two respondents have killed on several occasions: one in Northern Ireland and Borneo, one in Iraq and Afghanistan. One respondent has shot at the enemy in Iraq at several occasions, but is not sure if the enemy died. The fourth respondent was a marine, trained to kill; he has served in Iraq and Northern Ireland, but has not been in the occasion that he had to kill. Quotes from this respondent are only included when they provide data on preparations and training to kill, or reactions from society to soldiers about killing.

Unfortunately it was impossible to find soldiers who killed frequently. However, we consider research on (ex) soldiers who are not front-line soldiers equally interesting. A lot of research has been done on snipers for example, who kill regularly. With missions against guerrilla enemy, or like in Afghanistan and Iraq, more and more soldiers find themselves in the situation where they kill the enemy, although officially it is not the main goal of their mission. It is important to know how 'Non combat' soldiers process these acts of killing someone.

5.3 Data collection

The interviews were conducted in accordance with the following pattern. The main goal was to build up the interview in such a way that the most private questions (guilt) would be addressed

towards the end of the interview. This would increase chances that the respondents feel comfortable to talk about guilt openly.

1. Introduction to the research project and the interviewer, explaining the importance of confidentiality and asking the soldier to be open about his experiences: there is no right or wrong, it is about his personal experience.
2. Respondent introduces himself: personal background (age, education) motivation to join the forces, where and when he served.
3. Talking about close combat experiences (their feelings, motivation, who was the enemy, how did they see them). To answer sub question A (killing experiences) and C (guilt) insight into the circumstances is important.
4. Talking about experiences of killing an opponent: what happened, what were the considerations the soldier made, what was the role of others, and what did he feel during and immediately after killing someone (sub question A, B, C and D).
5. Reactions from others (soldiers, family and society) to his combat experiences of killing. This is an indirect way to see if others disapproved of the soldier's actions or if the soldier was ashamed of it (sub question C – guilt- and D – reflection and communication).
6. Guilt: We avoided the word guilt unless the veteran used it. We asked if a soldier experiences feelings of regret afterwards, if he thought with hindsight that he should have done things differently etc. (Sub question C - guilt).
7. How the experiences of killing someone has changed the soldier as a person, or his outlook on life. In the initial thesis set up, a sub question about spiritual consequences of killing someone was included (E). Because the data on spiritual consequences was less valuable compared to the rich data on the psychosocial processes and guilt, it was decided to delete this sub question.
8. Concluding interview: thank respondent, inform him about the follow up, and ask how he experienced the interview.
9. We have not included question on psychological processes, since this is something that needs to be analysed, not asked.

In Appendix I a more detailed overview of the interview questions is given.

The interviews were held in a quiet environment; in the veteran's or the interviewer's house. The length of the interviews varied: from 1.15 hour, because of physical restrictions of the veteran, till 2.15 and 3.45 hours. Interviews were recorded and afterwards a full transcript was made. For privacy reasons, these transcripts are not included in the appendix. Three out of four interviews could be described as very intimate, open conversations. As one respondent expressed it, maybe time was ready for him to talk about his experiences to somebody who was really open to his story and who was not judgemental. He got things 'off his chest' and talking about the experiences of killing also made him feel better about it. The atmosphere during the interviews contributed to a great extent to the amount and quality of the data.

5.4 Data analysis

The aim of the data analysis is to discover themes and explanations in the interview data. The first step was thematic coding. We knew we were looking for answers to questions about the motivation for and experience of killing someone (sub question A and B) and all information about guilt and remorse (sub question C). For these elements we used a deductive approach (indicated in the list below with a V). Some codes we made because we hoped to find data about it, were not applicable to any quotes in the interviews: respondents did not talk about those issues or could not respond to questions about it (indicated with an X).

The next step was to add inductive codes: data we had not anticipated on, but provided important information (indicated with exclamation mark!). Other codes were applied in an inductive way to data beyond the scope of this interview, but that could be of interest for further research (we have enlisted them as Ω). After having analysed the data, we realised that the focus of our thesis was still too broad, and decided that the sub question on spiritual and psychological consequences of killing should be left aside for further research (here enlisted as sub question E, but will not be analysed).

The deductive and inductive codes were grouped according to the four sub questions of this thesis (figures 2,3,4,5 and 6).

Figure 2: Codes sub question A



Figure 3: Codes sub question B

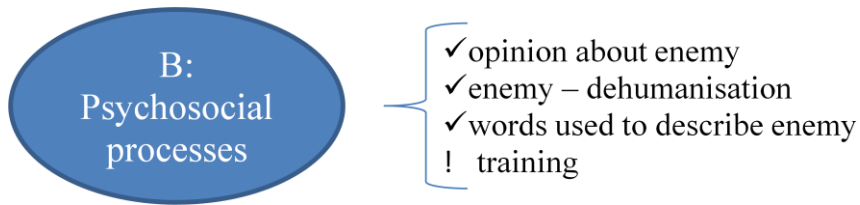


Figure 4: Codes sub question C

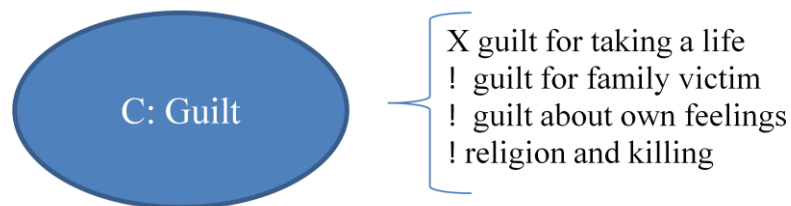


Figure 5: Codes sub question D

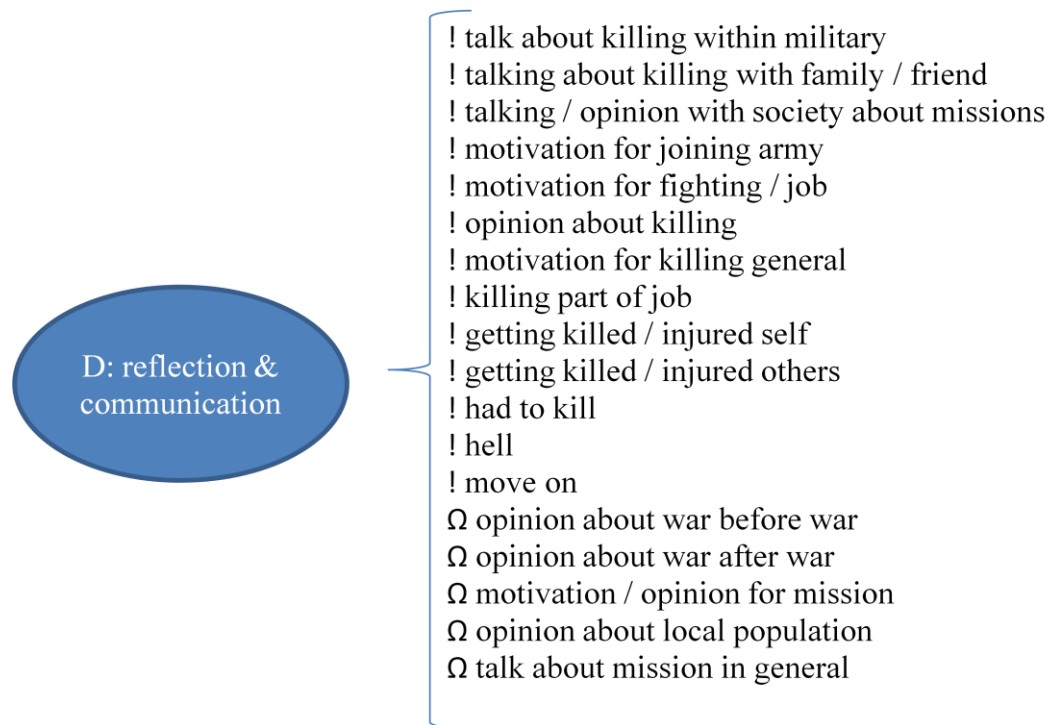
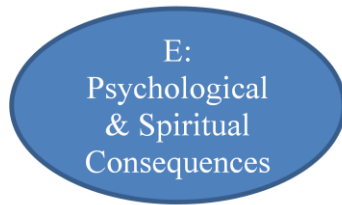


Figure 6: Codes sub question E



- x forgiving
- x remembering
- x dreams
- x counselling
- Ω way of coping with missions general
- Ω effect missions on personality
- Ω effect killing on personality
- Ω religion general
- Ω chaplaincy in military
- Ω religion during mission

Legend:

- V: deductive code
- Ω beyond scope
- ! inductive code
- x: not found

6 Outcome of Interviews

In the previous chapter we proposed a framework for the interviews, based on conclusions about killing and guilt in chapter 4. We will now analyse the interviews, based on the four sub questions:

- a) What happens when a soldier kills an enemy in close combat?
- b) Which psychosocial and biological processes play a role in killing someone in close combat?
- c) Which elements of guilt do soldiers experience (if any) after killing the enemy at close range?
- d) What is the role of communication about and reflection on killing someone?

In this chapter we will let the respondents talk. In the next integrative chapter, these findings from the interviews are combined with the data from the literature.

6.1 What happens when a soldier kills an enemy in close combat?

The main point in analysing the combat experiences is to know what a soldier goes through and feels at the very moment of killing someone, and immediately afterwards.

R: And that is where I killed my first man. (...) He was running across the road, he was shooting from the hip. He was right there; he was just like, so close. Wow, what is going on, after we were being shot at, we were shooting at the target, shooting at people, shooting at the wall. (...) He was right across the road, I thought that is really bizarre, and then I shot him. And his friend, I suppose, I didn't know who he was, coming running back to try to pull him, and I shot him as well. Lots of people were shooting, but you know, I just knew, I'd hit him.

This is just an example of a description given by one of the respondents of the first time he killed an enemy soldier. In general, what respondents describe are adrenaline, self-defence, the chaos of the situation, very strange focus (everything else becomes blur; time seems to be different).

Respondents also report feelings of excitement immediately after killing, as shows from the following quotes from two different respondents:

R I felt excited I suppose. Yeah (*silence*) You was really aware of what was happening around you, your mates, what you were shooting at.

R (...) Thrilled about it, happy. (*Laughing*) for some reason. (...) I was happy that I got one of the enemy, and also stop one of my colleagues from probably being killed.

The respondents in this research who saw the bodies of the men they killed reported no feelings about it, nor were there physical reactions of repulsions, like throwing up.

R Didn't bother me. (*Silence*) Bothered me when me friends, it didn't bother me if it was the enemy it was, regardless of what site it was. Hand blew off, big hole in the head, big hole in the back. I didn't really bother me; I could look at that, and think of nothing.

6.2 Which psychosocial and biological factors play a role in killing in close combat?

In the literature chapter we saw that killing is difficult, that soldiers need to pass a threshold before they can kill, and that certain psychological processes help them to pass that threshold. The three essential perspectives on psycho-social processes in the acts of killing found in the interviews are: motivation for killing, how do soldiers see the enemy they kill and training as crucial in enabling a soldier to kill. This paragraph covers the psychosocial processes prior to and during killing.

Motivation to kill

We analysed the interviews on codes about the motivation for concrete situations in which the respondents killed somebody, and the attitude towards killing someone in general.

In the interviews the reasons given for killing in a concrete situation were self-preservation, to kill or to be killed and protection of colleagues (quotes from three different respondents):

R I was happy that I got one of the enemy, and also stop one of my colleagues from probably being killed.

R Self preservation, definitely. (..)And you know, protecting, at that time it was definitely self-preservation, I just thought it is me, it could be me on the other end of that line.

R Rather him (*stress*) than me. And I had to protect this doctor and me self, and everybody else who was on guard, we'd all been cut down.

In general, all respondents said that they did not kill if they could avoid it, for example this respondent when working in Asia on taking away supplies from the enemy:

R Depends on the guards, because if there wasn't so many guards, we'd try to do something without firing. (..) Without firing upon them. We'd rather let them go. All we were after was the supplies. But if there was a lot guards, we used to fire. We had no choice.

The same deliberation was made by the other respondents. Asked about his feelings when he was about to shoot a man from within a few meters, a respondent said:

Respondent: Oh, shit (*laughing again, but in the shit sounds something like, fear, problems*). (..) I am gonna have to gonna have to, put one in him, I'm gonna have to put him down.

Interviewer: yeah, but that is expressing, almost, as if you would prefer not to?

Respondent Well, I'd rather not, but rather him (*stress*) than me.

These quotations do not refer to inability to kill in general, but it is about always asking yourself whether this is a situation that requires the soldier to kill. If the answer is yes, they can without hesitation, as was shown above.

The following quote shows that this respondent considers killing, the only when they have to, as a totally different from how the enemy kills.

R You know, I wasn't going out there just to kill people, I was going out there to do a job. Um, the terrorists, they are just out to kill people. They are not worried about who they kill, they just want to be the people that get the control, so they are no longer the people that are at the pole, they are the people in control. (...) I was there to carry out a job, so that our people would like live in some sort of peace.

This soldier felt he was there to do a job. That job might include killing, which is in his eyes very different from the enemy 'terrorists', who seem to kill just for killing. Quotes from all other respondents confirm this view.

Analysing the interviews, we conclude that the respondents felt that they were doing a professional job, were acting according to professional standards, and killing was definitely a part of their job. In their perception, what they did was not just any killing, but 'professional' killing. Professional killing means killing 'only if we have to', when the situation required them to do so. 'Having to' did not refer to the need to obey, being told to kill, but killing when the situation required them to do so. It implies necessity, more than unavoidability: with a clear goal; an enemy posing a threat or an enemy that needed to be fought and, when necessary, killed. All respondents stress that they were there to do a good job, to fight against an enemy that needed to be fought and that they kill because the situation and professionalism requires them to kill.

The question arises: how does this outlook on killing impact on the ability to cope with killing. We will address this in the Conclusion.

Whom do they kill: the enemy and dehumanisation

As we have seen in the previous paragraphs, killing is considered part of the job. In chapters on literature (2, 3 and 4) we saw dehumanisation of the enemy mentioned as an important element of facilitating soldiers to kill. In the interviews we only found some quotes that hint at moderate forms of dehumanisation. Some respondents were clearly feeling hatred and disdain for the Northern

Ireland enemy. Looking at the words they use to describe the enemy, dehumanisation words, like ‘the animal, the beast, disease etc’ however were rare. This is an example of such type of dehumanisation.

R: The minute you have the animal there, you, the adrenaline kicks in, and it takes over. And when you first fire your first round in anger, you just, the adrenaline takes turn of you, you just fired, without thinking or anything really, because this is what I am trained for and it is my turn to do it. Training kicks in.

Another way of describing and dehumanising the enemy is calling him a target. This would enlarge the psychological distance to the man you kill.

R: After we were being shot at, we were shooting at the target, shooting at people, shooting at the wall.

These two quotes hint at dehumanisation, but show that the motivation to kill at that moment was not dehumanisation, but automatic response.

An interesting finding of the interviews is that there seems to be a clear difference between shooting an enemy who is considered a combatant or a terrorist. All respondents voiced their revulsion in general for their enemy in Northern Ireland, the IRA, whom they called terrorists. A respondent said about seeing dead bodies of the people he shot, comparing the bodies in Northern Ireland to the ones in Borneo.

R It felt different, because they weren't terrorists. Combatants. They were combatants. And, you'd give them a bit more respect if they weren't terrorists, if the terrorist were dirty fighters. (...) Yes, they'd still do dirty things, the combatants, you'd read about, but it is war, war is war.

This second quote shows that doing ‘dirty things’ in war is part of the parcel, he wouldn’t hate the enemy more for it, but is still much better than what ‘terrorists’ do to civilians.

Although it is difficult to compare because not all respondents have killed enemies in Northern Ireland and Asia or Middle East, it is obvious that they have more respect for combatants, even Asian combatants, than for terrorists, although the Northern-Ireland terrorist are psychically much closer to the British soldiers.

It is not so much because of their way of fighting, but the hatred for the Irish enemy was most of all based on how they treat civilians, including their own people. IRA was described as ‘bastards’, ‘terrorists’. However, although the respondents had more respect for enemy combatants than a ‘terrorist enemy’, it would be wrong to conclude that it is therefore more difficult to kill a combatant enemy. Interviews show that killing combatants is alright, because they have chosen to

fight. All respondents accept that when their time has come, they might be killed in combat, so they also feel that it is all right to kill the enemy combatant. He has chosen to fight, and the possibility of being killed is part of the deal.

This is a very interesting and surprising conclusion. These are two different cognitive sets, both are types of dehumanisation. The first one, considering terrorist as a lower human being, is putting the enemy at more distance by disqualifying him (terrorists). The second form of dehumanising is by emphasising the professionalism of the enemy: he is a soldier, so he chose to be in the forces and knew he could be killed. This is enlarging the professional distance by objectifying the enemy.

Training kicks in; what enables soldiers to kill?

Training is the third point of interest concerning psycho-social processes and killing. Come to the front is the importance of training to prepare the soldiers for killing. Because of the training, there is a reflex to shoot when in real combat. When necessary, they start fighting and killing, without having to ask themselves if they *want* to kill. All respondents mentioned this.

R: Exactly what you are trained for, it's the same as being on a range, shooting at a target, except for that these targets was shooting back. (*Grinning*) (..) When we go on exercise, where you fire blind rounds, and where you have a life enemy, it is the same.

Another soldier said that shooting at people is like training.

R: It actually felt like training, it didn't feel like shooting at somebody that was trying to kill me, not me personally, he could have killed me or the man next to me.

R: It is a reaction, my first reaction was just to shoot back, react to enemy fire lots of training, that's it. That is what training is, react to enemy fire.

Also the quotes from another respondent show that he felt he was ready for killing, because of the training, because he feels it is his turn to do it.

R: And when you first fire your first round in anger, you just, the adrenaline takes turn of you, you just fired, without thinking or anything really, because this is what I am trained for and it is my turn to do it.

And one respondent said he was prepared to kill:

R: You're just thinking of what you're doing, which is patrolling through there, the target comes up, you shoot it. And in the same respect, if you are patrolling in Northern Ireland, and the target comes up, you shoot him.

Training means conditioning a soldier to do something automatically. By automatically, we refer to the soldier reacting instantly, quickly and 'professionally': is this a situation that requires killing (enemy not a civilian or a child)? The drill is there: he knows he is supposed to kill in certain situations, all he does is assess if the situation is one to kill.

Apart from the drills, react to fire, soldiers are also being morally prepared in training to killing the enemy. As one soldier said, everybody is brought up with the idea that you are not supposed to kill people. What happens in military training that takes this impediment away? One respondent recalls:

R: You know it is, one thing you do in training in the royal marines, is a survival weekend, where you are out for a week. So at the end of the week, you kill the rabbit and you eat it.

To many soldiers, it is difficult to kill that rabbit.

Looking at the moral preparations the soldiers have for killing someone, religion could also play a role.

R: Yeah part of your training in the marines is that you go for visits to the sky-pilot, the padre, and, he tells you why it is no longer against the bible to kill people, basically.

Three out of four respondents say however that the blessing of the padre does not make a difference to them, although they are religious. One respondent said is religious, but he wants to feel responsibility for his own deeds, including killing. Some say the padres are there in the battlefield to back you up, but they are already on your side, you don't need their blessing.

6.2.4 In summary

Concluding on psychological processes, the following three insights are the most important outcomes of the interviews.

The soldiers could kill someone, because they felt they had the right motivation. They feel they have a right to kill because what they do is professional killing. Secondly, 'training kicks in': a soldier is conditioned to kill; they have done so much training. In real battle training takes over; they just react to the enemy and kill. A third conclusion is the difference in opinion about the enemy the respondents considered as terrorists, or 'normal' enemy combatants. This difference had no effect however on the difficulty or motivation to kill them.

Two of these conclusions appear contradictory: motivation is crucial to enable killing; but soldiers are trained to kill automatically, seemingly without reference to reason or motivation. In the conclusion this issue will be explained.

6.3 Guilt

Guilt is a feeling that is not always easy to talk about, as we have seen in chapter 3. Guilt manifests itself in different forms, including implicit and explicit ways or denial. Analysing the quotes from the interviews, the following types of guilt should be described: No guilt (6.3.1), explicit but indirect guilt (6.3.2), religion and guilt (6.3.3) and guilt about almost having killed someone (6.3.4).

6.3.1 No guilt

One respondent is very straightforward about his acts of killing: it was part of the job, so move on. In the interview, he does not mention anything indicating remorse, guilt, or maybe should not have done it. Actually, none of the respondents said explicitly that he felt guilty for killing somebody in combat. On the contrary: in the beginning of the interview all respondents who killed said they did the right thing and did not feel guilty about it. This absence of feelings of guilt can be seen in the following quotes, expressed by two respondents without hesitation.

R I had no remorse at all, and even now, I don't, it was him or me, it was definitely him or me. (...)

No, every time I come back to, is that I have done the right thing, every single time.

The two respondents who did see their dead victims stated they did not feel guilty.

6.3.2 Explicit but indirect guilt

In the next paragraphs, we will analyse feelings of guilt that were not directly related to the act of killing itself, but were directed more towards the soldier's own experience and feelings, feelings for the family of the victim and implicit guilt (when talking about religious values and external judgements of the act of killing).

An indirect way to explore feelings of guilt is to ask respondents if they now think they should have done things differently. Sometimes a respondent gives two conflicting statements. On the one hand he asked himself if he should have shot the enemy in the leg, or should have given him a warning, and on the other hand he said he is sure he did the right thing.

Guilt for family of the victim

One respondent was quite able to reflect on his personality and his combat experience. Interestingly, it seems there are different layers to his way of view. In the very beginning of the interview, his take on it is quite straightforward:

R: I had no remorse at all, and even now, I don't, it was him or me, it was definitely him or me.

(4.39)

Immediately afterwards, however, he says:

R: And then I took some photos, but deleted them later, I didn't want, it did play on my mind, I started thinking, maybe he has got a family, I didn't think about him (stress).

Interviewer: so no remorse for him, but?

R: for his family

So he kills an Iraqi soldier, takes a picture, and says he does not have any feelings for the man he shot, but then thinks about his family.

This is explicit guilt, because the respondent describes the feelings for the family as remorse. This is explicit guilt, but the object has changed. It is not about the killing or towards the victim, but towards the family. This can be interpreted as shift in emotions. This way, a soldier avoids feelings that it was *not* ok to kill, because the object of his remorse has shifted from the killing to surrounding issues. He feels remorse for a family that has to move on without their loved one. These emotions might be easier to cope with than facing the killing.

Guilty about emotional reactions

Another phenomenon in guilt about killing is how the respondents look back on their feelings during and immediately after the killing. Some think they should feel remorse, or that it should have been more difficult to shoot somebody:

R: Uhm, I thought it would feel more difficult, I thought I would feel more badly about it.

However, in the same interview he gave the following answer to a question about whether he ever thought about how he would feel about killing *before* killing someone:

R: I always thought, I thought I could do it, no remorse. (...) I thought, I believed, that I could, if it happened, I could do with it.

Again, there is this ambivalence about killing: they think and know they can, they expect it to be easy, and no remorse. But then they are surprised that it is so 'easy', that they are surprised or feel guilty that they don't feel more remorse.

Soldiers feel pressure from society to have certain feelings about killings, as could be read into this quote:

R: I don't know, I don't think I want to be looked on in the light as a murderer (*stress*). Not that I feel a murderer, but I don't want to be looked on as a geezer that can kill people without remorse, you know.

Feeling remorse for not feeling remorse can be seen as explicit guilt. Again, the object of guilt has shifted away from the act of killing to emotions about killing. This can be compared to shifting away to feelings towards the family of the victim.

6.3.3 Guilt and religion

The most difficult element in analysing guilt is that it is sometimes a hidden emotion. It might also be that some soldiers simply don't feel any guilt. Different types of guilt show themselves in different ways. Strong denial might point towards guilt. One of the respondents was very straightforward in his answers on how he felt about killing; part of the job, motivation ok, no feelings for the enemy etc. However, when we started talking about religion, he is Church of England; he was less firm in his answers. For the first time in the interview there was room for doubt. After talking about religion in general, I asked him if he ever thought of dying in combat and going to heaven, but he interrupts me and says.

R: or hell. (...) (*laughing*) There might be some of that. Maybe just thoughts. (...) For killing people. (...) You know, you are not supposed to kill each other. And you do, you just kill people, terrorists or whatever.

Although he does not say it literally, the way he talks about religion and Jesus, and sins, indicates he thinks he (might have) committed sins.

R Jesus gives his live, to preserve our lives. It is a big thing he did. He gave his life, so that we could, to take our sins away.

This quote and sentences about heaven hint at a notion that he might have done the wrong thing. Probably guilt for killing, or shame for being a person who performs the act of killing. It is not something this respondent talks about easily. He said that killing is against what God wants, and that he said he might go to hell.

He was laughing when he said that. In counselling, that is often a sign that there is uneasiness, that you hit a topic they don't talk about easily. I tried to further explore his feelings, but he did not give much space to elaborate on it. The question arises if two value systems collide here. The respondent was trying to play it down, said he was not thinking about it much, whereas I had the feeling that he was, but that he just didn't want to talk about it.

R: Oh, just a fleeting thing, it wasn't in depth, just a fleeting thing. (...) yeah, a fleeting, thing, it wasn't in depth, you just thought about it for a second and move on.

The other striking element is that throughout the interview this respondent is very straightforward, right or wrong, black or white, no room for hesitation. Cope with it; move on, job is a job. Talking about hell and what God would think about killing brought about hesitation in the way this respondent speaks, 'maybe just thoughts' he is less outspoken, less straightforward.

The conclusion based on these quotes about religion and killing brings two important insights: religion can uncover feelings of guilt; layers in conversations / thoughts that were repressed, denied, or no-go areas.

6.3.4 Guilt about a near kill

So far the quotes about no guilt or explicit guilt were related to having killed someone. In this paragraph, we will go into guilt in incidents although no-one actually been killed. This topic gives a better insight in the psychological aspects of killing, guilt about wrong assessments of chaotic situations, and guilt about egotism.

Guilt about a wrong assessment of a chaotic situation

One respondent described a shooting incident in Afghanistan, after one of the vehicles was hit by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED). First he says he doesn't feel bad about it, although it was an illegal killing.

R: I was involved in a shooting again, I shot at the bloke, I didn't hit him, a young man he was, we found out afterwards. I don't feel bad at it, but I could see why Afghans, it was an illegal killing, it was.

When he explains in more detail what happens though, he does say he feels a bit guilty.

R: I see a bloke with a push bike, pushing the push bike, along the track, and, he was walking towards us. And you don't want that. He was far enough away to not see what was going on, but close enough to be a threat. So I fired into his direction, just, I didn't particularly aim at him, you know, it is a big gun, piss off, and he just waved, and kept coming, and then somebody else shot him dead. And then it turns out he is the local idiot, 15 years old, mental age of a 5 years old. (...) I, you know, I felt, I felt a bit guilty.

The feeling of guilt in this case was based on that the enemy they shot at turned out to be a mentally retarded person. Nobody knew that at the time of shooting.

This fragment shows the chaos of battle and the difficulties of understanding *in that moment* whether an enemy was a direct threat or not. The respondent calls it an illegal killing: they shot a

mentally ill Afghan, whereas in other quotes he understands that they thought the Afghan posed a threat, that he was the enemy, and that for the safety of the British troops, they had to put him down.

R: He could have, say, go forward, and tell how many soldiers are fallen over, they would retaliate.

Interviewer: it seems like, you understand it was dangerous, but still you say you feel like a bit guilty?

R: Yeah, felt a bit guilty, you know, he died, maybe if someone had gone over there, just to rescue him, but you don't want to leave the safety of your own comfort zone.

The quotes show the chaos of battle: on the one hand the respondent knows that *at that time*, he was unaware that the man he tried to kill was innocent. In hindsight however, he thinks he should have known, or should have tried something else. The quotes also express a mixture of feelings of guilt about and understanding of his action. Thirdly, guilt here is not related to the result of an action, having taken a life, but to the intention: feeling guilty for having tried to kill somebody in those circumstances.

Complex guilt feeling: guilt about egocentrism

The following experience is an example of feelings of guilt about egocentrism about a near kill, almost pulling the trigger to shoot an Iraqi enemy from within a few meters.

R: I wouldn't have hesitated to do it, and I wouldn't have felt any guilt afterwards. (*Silence*). I would feel bad for me self, maybe, because, actually, being physically that (*stress*) close to somebody, and putting him down.

As shows from this quote, the essential elements for feeling remorse were the very close physical distance to the enemy and the feeling sorry for himself.

He explains that the guilt would not be for shooting somebody, because the killing would be justified (taking away a direct threat to own and other soldier's security). Again, the object of the guilt is not the act of killing, but the respondent's feelings about it. Eventually, the enemy pulled back just in time. The respondents felt relieve that he didn't kill him. However, he also felt very selfish about his feelings.

R: Yeah, lot of relieve, yeah, (*silence*), yeah. Not relieve that I didn't kill him, relieve that I didn't have to. Very selfish, the only thing I was thinking about was me. (...) I couldn't have any thought or feeling for that person at all. (*stress*) In the sense that the only person I had thoughts and feelings for was me. It is selfish of me (*stress*) looking back at it, looking back on it, to think relief for myself, when I was about, he would have died (*stress*). That is what I should have felt sorrow for. Relief, that he didn't die, for him (*stress*). But no, I felt it for me.

His self-esteem seems to be damaged here, because he does not like to be a person that would kill somebody and only feel sorry about himself. This is better described as shame than guilt.

In summary

Explicit feelings of guilt about killing itself were not mentioned by the respondents. On the contrary 'no remorse at all' was what respondents thought about their acts of killing. It was, 'I did what I had to do, it was my job' or 'it was him or me'.

Surprisingly, the respondents did not feel sorry for the victim, but they did feel remorse for the family of the victim and about their own emotions: that it was so easy to kill.

The third finding is that religion can be a way to get to feelings of guilt or implicit guilt about killing. One respondent expressed fear that he might go to hell because 'he is not supposed to kill people', whereas earlier in the interview he was very insistent that what he did, killing the enemy, was right.

One discovery that we had not anticipated, is that feelings of guilt were even more mentioned in the context of nearly having killed someone. One example was a classical example of feeling guilty, 'I should have known better': despite the chaos of the battle and that at the moment of the battle the soldier thought he did the right thing, the soldier does feel guilty afterwards about trying to kill an innocent man afterwards.

6.4 Reflection on and communication about killing

Soldiers kill in combat and somehow they have to learn to cope with that. Previously, the feelings and thoughts about killing (6.1), the psycho-social processes that enable or prevent a soldier from killing (6.2) and guilt (6.3) have been analysed. In this paragraph the last sub question will be addressed:

D: What is the reflection on and communication about killing?

The first focus will be on how soldiers reflect on killing. Then we will address communication about killing: talking about killing within the military, how do fellow soldiers react when one kills the enemy and what are the opinions and views within the military about killing. Linked to that question, is communication with non-military about killing. For this last question, quotes from one respondent that hasn't killed are also included. Although he hasn't killed, society seems to think that having served in Northern Ireland and Iraq, he probably has.

6.4.1 Reflecting on killing

A difficult question to answer is how soldiers cope with killing: do they think about it, do they try to forget, are thoughts about killing intrusive? In general the respondents say that they didn't reflect much *during* the mission, as the quotes below show.

R: When you are going there, you have a job to do. You focus on what you got to do. Uhm, it is only afterwards that you think about it. That you think about what you've just done.

One other respondent said that during the missions he didn't think about the killing, but that after the missions he did think of it.

R: I didn't really think of it when I was out there. I was more interested in getting home, or trying to get home, some way or the other, and I was more interested in going on with the job we had to do.

In all the interviews, it was difficult to find out how and how often the respondents thought about their acts of killing.

One respondent said he didn't know:

R: I don't know. I'm generally thinking about some of those experiences, whole of it. I don't try to blank it out. But I am not trying to put it forward too.

In the same way he says

R: I mean, I, uh, I just block things out and they're gone. It has happened, it's gone, you can't change it.

6.4.2 Talking about killing

Some respondents played down their own role in killing with his fellow soldiers, and presented it as a group effort. Coming back to base after the fighting, one respondent had to report for the group on the combat, and said that the group killed. Also in talking to others about it, he spoke in the 'we' form.

R: I just said we was attacked, I didn't really mention shooting anybody (laughing), it was only later on, that came out, people knew I had, they were next to me, they said, why don't you say nothing. I said, well, people were killed, we (stress) were shooting.

Asked why he played it down, he gives several reasons: from not feeling heroic about it, to seeing it as a group effort and not wanting to be seen as different from the rest.

R There was people patting me on the back, I didn't feel the hero type, I didn't feel heroic about it. I felt like playing it down, you know, it wasn't particularly me (stress). Because on the one hand, it is

an exciting and erotic experience, but the other hand, it was not something you wanted to spread around. (..) No, no, I didn't want a lot of people to know, really, I didn't wanna, you know

It is really difficult to see in this example whether the soldier wanted to play it down out of modesty, or that he simply didn't want to be the one responsible for the killing.

He didn't feel heroic about it, because it was mainly self-protection:

R: no, I just felt like, without my (*stress*) actions, (...) didn't feel it was, I just felt that without me (stress), doing what I have done, somebody else would have done it. (...) And you know, protecting, at that time it was definitely self-preservation, I just thought it is me; it could be me on the other end of that line.

Another reason for not telling others is that this respondent didn't want to be seen as different from the others:

R: I didn't feel different from people, I didn't want to feel different either. (...) That was one of the biggest things, I wanted us to get on, I didn't want them to look at me with a different light.

Whatever the reasons are, the quotations from the respondents show that even amongst soldiers who did kill, they didn't talk about the killing.

R: No, I think, we just shrug it off, like, yeah, come on man. (*With a grin*)

Reactions from fellow soldiers

One soldier described how his fellow soldiers reacted after his first kill:

R: There was people patting me on the back, I didn't feel the hero type, I didn't feel heroic about it. (...) Oh, I was God. Yeah, God like.

The respondent seems to be especially pleased with the reactions from the female soldiers:

R (I) There was quite a few girls over there; it was quite nice to get a bit of attention from them. Because they were, like, where was it, good, I would have done the same.

It is striking to see how the soldier describes the reactions of his mates, the patting the shoulders and the compliments;

R: (*Silence*), I suppose I think it was a bit childish, really, or maybe they felt jealous.

View on killing in military

When looking at the general view on killing within the military, all respondents stressed killing is part of a normal soldier's job. One soldier gets very enthusiastic when I asked him how he felt about going to a war zone, because that is what being a soldier is about, killing.

R: In my mind, I was all guns blazing; I wanted a piece of it. (*Very enthusiastic, laughing*) (...) That is what soldiers do. (Laughing) that is what you are there for. (...) Unless you, well, I can only speak for myself, unless you actually get some, you ain't got the job. You haven't proven yourself, as a soldier.

So we see that killing is considered a central part of the job. However, the answer to ‘do you talk about killing within the military?’ is no.

R: That is what you are trained to do. You know, you actually talk (*stress*) about it, you know you actually talk about it. It sounds stupid, when you talk about a weapon. (...) You are talking about the basic work you kill somebody with. But you don't talk actually, talk about killing somebody. That one will take much further, where I prefer the other stobich, (*laughing, not clear, probably means a type of weapon*). Cause got massive amount of fire power. I did fire it from a long range, but the other one could put less fire power down, but more accurately.

The following quote confirms killing is not spoken of, more the general circumstances.

R: (*Silence*) You know, silence, we've all spoken little (*stress*) about our experiences out there. It was more about how bad the toilets were. How good the Yanks got it, with all their ice-cream. It was more about that than rather you would have done any fighting or that.

This indicates that, at least according to these respondents, killing is central in their job. But they don't talk about it at all! They talk about trivialities, how bad the circumstances were, or talk about killing in a technical way. Not about killing *people*, they only talk about it in technical terms. We will explain this in the conclusion.

Questions / remarks from non-military and talking to non-military

As we have seen, soldiers don't talk much about killing to their fellow soldiers. The same goes for talking to friends or family: none of the respondents talked about their acts of killing. They only spoke about the mission in general, not about their own particular role in killing.

R: You just say that you'd been there, that you did your duty, and that is it, got involved in... You didn't say you (*stressed*) did it, you just said, been involved.

One respondent answers ‘no’ to that questions about killing, because:

R: I don't know, I don't think I want to be looked on in the light as a murderer (*stress*). Not that I feel a murderer, but I don't want to be looked on as a geezer that can kill people without remorse, you know.

R Yeah, they are not really, don't really want to know exactly what I feel; they wanna know what I have done. (..) Not what I feel. That is why I kind of agreed to come here. Because I, you are interested in how I feel, as against what I have done, you know. (*Laughing*)

This respondent said that the reason for not talking to others about it was that he didn't want to show off about his killing, not the fear that others might disapprove of it.

R: being big headed. (*Silence*). It means shooting your own trumpet.

Interviewer: It was not that you were afraid they might disapprove of it?

R : No, no, it just wasn't a done thing, because we are British, you know.

Another respondent gives several reasons why he does not want to tell people he killed. One reason is he does not want to be seen as a person that can kill others without remorse. However, immediately following these words he says he denies having killed because others are jealous of him (quote 1). They would have wanted to join the army, and kill, but didn't. However, it seems when I ask him again, and confront him with some discrepancy between different things he says, he says he does not really know (2). Then, after some thinking, he says it is because people are just interested in the experience, not how *he* feels about it, how he experienced it. (3)

R: they are jealous, you know a lot of people: I wish I had gone. I was gonna join the army. (1)

Interviewer: So the way they ask it, it seems like admiration, and jealousy, but in your answer you say, I say no, because they wouldn't like me to be a killer, you even used the word 'murderer', that is different from killer, isn't it?

R: Yeah. I don't know. I don't, I don't know what it is. (2) It is easier just to say 'no'. (*Laughing*). So I just say, no, I drove trucks, took prisoners. I took prisoners in the POW camp.

Interviewer: Have you thought about it yourself, why do you answer 'no' to when they ask you?

R: (*Silence*) I think, really, they are not really interested in my (stress) personal experience. They are interested in the experience (3).

Another reason for not talking is that they don't want to protect their families, they don't want to put the burden on others, or that time was simply not ready for it.

R: Nah, it is mine. It is my own shit. I choose to join the army, it belongs to me.

R: I suppose, like most people, when they need to talk about it, when time is right, they will. When a situation arises they will.

The respondents avoid talking to friends and family about killing, for various reasons: not showing off, not being looked at as a killer, feeling the ones asking the questions are not sincere in their

interest for the feelings of the soldiers but just want excitement, and not wanting to put the burden on others.

Not talking to others, friends, family or colleagues, also depends on circumstances at the time of a mission. One explanation from an elderly respondent was that talking in the 70-ies or 80-ies was not something one did.

R: Basically them days, you were just left on your own. Not like now, none of that, these shrinks, or you know, them days, it wasn't even talked about. You just had to get on with it.

However, the respondents that participated recent missions, like Afghanistan and Iraq, also say they don't really talk about it.

R: This is the first time ever that I really talk about anything I've done there. We don't talk about it, I have a job to do there, I have done my job, I have come, job is done, finished. Get on with it. (...) Get on with it, get on with life.

R: People always say, did you ever kill anyone. I always say no. (...) They ask, if you don't mind me asking, did you actually ever kill anybody? (*Half whispering voice, imitating, way people ask*) (...) They wanna know, cause the next question if I would say yes, the next question coming from their mouth would be, what did it feel like, because they don't know. People wanna know, but they are embarrassed to tell you.

People are embarrassed to ask, but society seems to be curious about killing. Several respondents report that 'society', asks them if they have killed.

People seem to think that every soldier that has been in a conflict area has killed.

R: I haven't talked about it in the pub situation. In my pub, everyone knows I have gone there. But it does not really matter what part of the cake you are, if you have been out there, everyone just thinks that you have been in combat, no matter what.

Only one respondent reported negative comments from society about being a soldier / a killer. A woman that did humanitarian work in countries like Iraq, whom he hardly knew, blamed him for being a baby killer:

R: I Uhm, I have only ever met one person, who, she didn't like (*stress*) the fact that soldiers went around killing people. She was one of those people, helping all these foreign country, doing aid work and all that sort of thing. (...) She was very anti-soldier, she thought soldiers are nasty people; wanna go around killing all the people. I said, you you are painting us all as nasty, murderous people, when, (*pause*), we are not (*stress*). We risk our lives so that you (*stress*) can go out there and feel happy about yourself giving them food. And the only reason you can do that is because we

have been out there to kill the ones that would kill you. (...) Basically, you put it down with the fact that they live in a dream and they are idiots.

In general the way the respondents talk to non-combatants appears to be one of denying they have killed or they just say very generally what ‘the troops’ did there, not stressing their own role in killing.

R: closer friend, family (...) You just say that you'd been there, that you did your duty, and that is it, got involved in... You didn't say you (*stressed*) did it, you just said, been involved.

We have seen the same quote from a different person, denying one’s role in the killing, but then within the military.

In summary

From summarising and comparing the quotes above on reflection and communication about killing conclusions become apparent. Talking about acts of killing is rare, all respondents say they deny to friends and family that they have killed, and even among soldiers killing is not talked about. Within the military, killing the enemy is not something that is spoken about. There is ambivalence there; killing is considered a central part of the job, and as such soldiers talk about killing in a technical way, which weapons to use to kill. However, killing as in killing the enemy, killing someone, is not a subject of conversation.

Both to fellow soldiers and to non-military, respondents seem to play down their role in killing. Not admitting to non-military that one has killed seems to be motivated by not wanting to be looked upon as a killer, and by a lack of interest in his own feelings about killing. Concern about family also seems to be a motivation: a soldier chooses to go to war; he should cope with it, and not bother his family or friends with it. It also depends on your outlook on life: one respondent is of the opinion that what happened happened, get on with it, and move on. In this view, not talking to civilians about killing is part of this military attitude.

Society does want to know about killing; non-military seem to presume that every soldier that was sent abroad has killed.

Having analysed the interviews, in the next chapter we will integrate these data from the interviews and the conclusions on literature, as described in chapter four.

7 Integrating findings

7.1 Introduction

In this integrative chapter results of the empirical study, i.e., the analysed interviews, are combined with findings from the literature and some new literature.

We will use the four sub questions of this thesis to structure our results:

- a) What happens when a soldier kills an enemy in close combat?
- b) Which psychosocial and biological processes play a role in killing someone in close combat?
- c) Which elements of guilt do soldiers experience (if any) after killing the enemy at close range?
- d) What is the role of communication about and reflection on killing someone?

7.2 What happens when a soldier kills an enemy in close combat?

According to the selected literature a soldier can experience a whole mixture of emotions when killing: from feeling totally numb to excitement, fear, repulsion, guilt. He might feel as if he is playing a role in a movie or is playing a game. At times, it feels unreal and very different from what a soldier expected it to be, based on the pictures the media present. Sometimes the soldier almost ‘automatically’ kills, as he was prepared for in training.

Most of these feelings were confirmed by the data from the interviews: all respondents expressed the excitement they felt during combat; one even called it an erotic experience. Surprisingly, all respondents said that combat or killing in real time did not differ so much from training! In general, the feelings respondents describe are excitement, adrenaline, self-defence and the chaos of the situation. They also mention very strange focus (everything else becomes blur, time seems to be different).

In spite of findings in some literature, none of the respondents had any feeling when seeing the body of the enemy they shot. Neither were there any reports on physical reactions of repulsion, like throwing up. This will be explained in the next paragraph. The answer to the sub question A: ‘*What happens when a soldier kills an enemy in close combat?*’ can therefore be short and clear in this context: a soldier can experience a whole mixture of emotions when killing, motivations described by the respondents to kill are: self-preservation, to kill or to be killed, protecting others, and fighting and enemy that needed to be fought.

7.3 Psychosocial and biological processes

Sub question B ‘Which psychosocial and biological processes play a role in killing someone in close combat?’ will be addressed in the same way as in the literature chapter, looking at it from three different questions: (1) what are the five stages a soldier goes through, (2) what makes it so difficult to kill, and (3) what enables a soldier to kill.

7.3.1 Five stages of killing

Chapter 2 described that a soldier in general passes through five stages of killing: concern if he is able to kill, the actual kill, exhilaration, remorse and repulsion and finally rationalisation and acceptance. The data from the interviews confirm the exhilaration, remorse and rationalisation and acceptance stages. Concern for being able to kill, however, was not expressed by any of the respondents. Neither was repulsion, throwing up. The rationalisation and acceptance process was the stage of most interest for this research, since it is about coping with acts of killing an opponent. All respondents seemed to have gone through the rationalisation stage and have finally accepted their killing.

7.3.2 Difficulty to kill

The second question, ‘why is it difficult to kill?’ does not refer to technical difficulties in killing, nor to the ability of the enemy to avoid bullets, but to the psycho-sociological difficulty involved. It led to surprising conclusions. In the conclusions on literature on guilt and killing (4), we stated that it is difficult for a soldier to kill someone. Society has taught that one is not supposed to kill. Besides, killing somebody at close range is especially hard because one sees the enemy. It might provoke a physical reaction. In the interviews, however, we have not come across any statement confirming that it was difficult to kill! There was some hesitation at the very moment of the battle: ‘Am I sure it is not a child?’ or ‘Shall I kill him or first give a warning shot?’ None of the respondents however said it was hard to kill. Au contraire, respondents were surprised how easy it was. The conclusion that killing is not difficult, at least not for soldiers in combat missions, is closely linked to the question ‘what enables a soldier to kill?’, and therefore needs to be answered in combination with it.

7.3.3 What enables a soldier to kill?

The third question to psycho-social processes in the literature chapter was ‘what enables a soldier to kill?’ The answer comes down to a combination of elements that makes a soldier kill. Obedience to orders, reciprocity and revenge, depersonalisation and game playing are brought up by Bourke (1999). Baumeister (1999) mentions the same, but emphasises that loosing self-control is the

essential element. Self-control is lost because of obedience, emotional distress, alcohol and the mental state of being in the here and now. Grossman (2009) concludes that training, demands from authority (need to obey), group process (bonding, protecting and surveillance) and dehumanisation of the enemy are crucial.

In the following three subparagraphs, we will link conclusions from the interviews to these elements mentioned above as essential to killing, focusing on three elements: training, doing a professional job and dehumanisation.

Training

Bringing together some literature and the data from the interviews, we can conclude that training is the main factor that prepares and even conditions soldiers for killing someone without too much difficulty. As one respondent said: ‘When you are in combat, training kicks in, you have done it so often, and you just do what you are trained for’.

So it seems that Grossman (2009) hit the nail when he concluded that for a proper conditioned soldier, killing in the heat of a battle is often completed reflexively. This need not surprise us: Grossman has extensive experience in the field of combat, is a psychology professor and his books are recent. His conclusion differs from the one of Bourke (1999) and Baumeister (1999). This might be partly due to the research method. Bourke based her qualitative research mostly on diaries and letters from soldiers. Diaries, however, and to a greater extent letters to the family, have a social function. They don’t necessarily present the true feelings of a soldier, because he might want to protect his family from the horror, fear or pain. Baumeister’s (1999, 2004) contribution, as a psychologist, is important because of his accurate descriptions of psychological processes. However, his book is about killing in general, and includes criminal killing; he is not specialised in killing in combat.

As always in research, one has to be mindful to temporal contexts of the research, to see if conclusions are still plausible and applicable. Bourke’s (1999) focus was on the twentieth century, where killing was indeed still much more difficult. In WWII, 15 to 20% of combat infantry were willing to fire their rifles, in Korea it was about 50% and in Vietnam it was more than 90%. (Grossman, 2009). The US army changed its training methods to alter this reluctance to shooting at the enemy. Changing from bull’s-eye targets to realistic combat simulations, shooting at human-looking targets that moved, has decreased tremendously the threshold for soldiers to kill. The importance of the consequences of this change in training, building a conditioned response, is that subsequently killing an opponent in normal military combat is not so difficult anymore. This is

overlooked in the bulk of literature on this subject. All our respondents were trained in this new way, and consequently did not report difficulty to kill.

Part of the moral training to kill someone is taking away the moral inhibition not to kill. As a child, we are all taught, and respondents confirmed this, that one is not supposed to kill. Part of the military training is a visit to the padres, who say that it is not against religion to kill. Another form of training is taking care of a rabbit for a week, getting attached to it, and then kill and eat it at the end of the week. Killing this rabbit is to some soldiers a difficult threshold to pass. There is literature available on religious support for war and killing.

Motivation: doing a professional job

The conclusion training is the key in enabling a soldier to kill does not mean other elements are not important. Motivation is crucial here.

Data from the interviews suggests that what makes a soldier kill someone differs considerably from how it is often described in literature (Baumeister, 1999; Bourke, 1999). Respondents did not confirm any loss of self-control, blind obedience, dehumanisation of the enemy or loss of senses, which were described by Baumeister et al. as central elements of killing. We invalidate Baumeister's conclusions and offer alternative explanations. Bourke and Baumeister seem to describe correctly the situation of wars in the 20th century. Nowadays, however, it seems that since then training has improved to the extent that soldiers feel morally as well as technically prepared for killing.

Several books, for example Baumeister (1999), report that soldiers who killed had the feeling that it was not them who were doing it, that it was not real, or that they were out of control. None of the respondents in our research mentioned this. Nor did any of the respondents mention that he killed because he was told to kill; the need to obey.

We have found professionalism is the second key to understanding how a soldier can kill. All our respondents thought that they were abroad to do a good job: to fight against an enemy that needed to be fought! Being motivated to fight and kill implies that a soldier doesn't need loss of self control to kill. The way the respondents see their job, implies that they don't need to be convinced to kill, so it is neither the 'need to obey' that makes them kill. When a soldier is on top of a situation and himself, he makes the decision to kill. *He* wants to and has to kill: the situation and his conscience require him to do so. In all the cases in my interviews, it was the respondent who took the decision to kill, to decide to react to enemy fire, never the commander who told him to shoot.

This also explains why none of the respondents mentioned physical responses to killing, like throwing up. When people feel they lost self-control, are powerless and witness murder or suffering, they express that physical responses. Nausea might be more applicable in situations of atrocities, or killing civilians. This differs substantially from the situations in which our respondents killed: legitimate killing of a military opponent posing a threat.

Again, we think it is important to put things into context and explain why Baumeister (1999) and others report on soldiers as being a pawn, and why we think they are in the wrong.

The key to understanding this is the difference between conscripts and professional soldiers. All soldiers we have spoken to were professional soldiers, they chose to be in the forces. Some of them had been attracted to pictures of fighting, guns since they were very young. Others felt a need to protect their country or fight evil. This implies a stronger tendency to be able to kill than that of conscripts, who might be forced to join the army. Another important element is that all the respondents in my interviews wanted to be sent abroad on missions: some of them were volunteers; others were appointed, but all happy to go. They all wanted their piece of war. As one respondent said: 'I was excited, I thought this will be my Falklands'.

An important element is that they were not killing just to kill. They only killed 'when they had to', when the situation required them to kill. The respondent thought it justified to kill the enemy they were fighting.

R You know, I wasn't going out there just to kill people, I was going out there to do a job. Um, the terrorists, they are just out to kill people. They are not worried about who they kill, they just want to be the people that get the control, so they are no longer the people that are at the pole, they are the people in control. (..) I was there to carry out a job, so that our people would like live in some sort of peace.

The importance of this is not just that the respondents see their acts of killing as professional killing, justified killing. More important is that they 'stick to it', complete the job professionally. Their professionalism enables them to create a distance between themselves and the killing. Glover (2001) described the importance of feelings of working according to the rules, of professionalism, as the key element that enabled the Germans to kill so many civilians. The importance of 'doing a job' is also that it helps soldiers to look at it from a technical point of view.

A way of evading moral questions was to concentrate single-mindedly on the job. (Glover, 2001, p. 102)

This professionalism serves also to psychologically distance yourself from the enemy:

Combat becomes business, a job that has to be done, part of your duty and killing- a necessary result. It's a team job that needs to be done quickly, efficiently, unemotionally and at the least cost of lives in your units, to innocents... (Grossman and Christensen, 2008, p. 341)

Soldiers are trained and motivated to do their duty. By focussing on efficiency and professionalism i.e. not kill innocents, the aim is to educate soldiers to do it unemotionally.

The question arises about idealism and motivation to fight and kill someone. During WWI and WWII there were strong personal feelings that the Germans were our direct enemy and threat to our way of life. In modern warfare this direct personal relationship / threat might not exist so immediately; so one has to be motivated instead by a personal professionalism?

Dehumanisation

Dehumanisation is the third key element in enabling a soldier to kill. According to the Cambridge dictionary dehumanisation is to remove from a person the special human qualities of independent thought, feeling for other people. Bourke links dehumanisation to loss of self-control and atrocities.

'On the one hand, the combatant was no longer a "civilized" person and, on the other, the enemy was not human either. It was essential that the combatant should be described as having lost control. (...) All laws of civilization were suspended. (...) Thus a vicious circle was established: atrocity fed atrocity and could therefore be justified. A soldier's murderous attack might be forgiven on the grounds that he "lost his head completely"'. (Bourke, 1999)

Dehumanisation and the way soldiers see the enemy is an intriguing subject. The interviews brought some new insights in the mechanism of dehumanisation and killing. Respondents did not dehumanise the enemy to a great extent. They did show respect for combatant enemies, and enmity for the terrorist enemies (IRA). However, the level of respect for an enemy (terrorist or combatant) does not change the feeling a soldier has about his kill. These are two different cognitive sets. The first one, considering a terrorist as a lower human being, puts the enemy at a distance by disqualifying him (terrorists). We have not seen much of that in the interviews. Based on the interview and literature, we conclude that for modern soldiers, whether killing a military opponent or terrorist, dehumanisation of the enemy or oneself, as described by Bourke for atrocities, is not necessary anymore! A soldier has no need to see the enemy as a disease; he finds his motivation for killing the opponent in professionalism: just killing. This is a *different form* of dehumanisation of the enemy, with an emphasis of the professionalism of the enemy: he is a soldier, so he chose to be in the forces and knew he could be killed. This is a way of increasing the professional distance by objectifying the enemy as himself being another professional.

In summary on training, motivation and dehumanisation

The answer to sub question B *‘Which psychosocial and biological processes play a role in killing someone in close combat?’* is that training, motivation and dehumanisation are the three key elements in enabling a soldier to kill. Our conclusion based on the interviews, and supported by Grossman (2009), is that killing is not difficult anymore, because a modern soldier is properly trained and morally prepared for it. The key to this moral preparation is the motivation of a soldier for his job: professionalism. The conclusion is that there is a link between the feelings about the kill and the motivation for it. All respondents believed in the cause they were fighting for; they thought it justified to kill the enemy they were fighting: ‘I did what I had to do, it was my job’. Modern soldiers don’t need to lose self-control, or follow blindly orders from superiors, or dehumanise the enemy to the extent of having strong feelings of hatred against them and despise them.

By focussing on efficiency and professionally, i.e. not kill innocents, the aim is to educate soldiers to kill the enemy unemotionally. Professionalism gives the responsibility to the soldier to assess in each situation if that is a situation that requires him to kill: automatic response based on having been professionally and morally trained to kill only in certain situations.

7.4 Guilt

Now that we have a better understanding of what a soldier experiences when he kills the enemy at close range, and what psycho-social processes enable him to do so, the next step is to draw conclusions on guilt about killing, sub question C of this thesis: *‘Which elements of guilt do soldiers experience (if any) after killing the enemy at close range?’*

7.4.1 Three types of guilt

In the chapter on literature on guilt (3) we mentioned that different types of guilt are generally associated with combat, out of which spiritual or moral guilt was the most important. The feeling one has violated ‘normal’ human values, or their own values, such as ‘thou shalt not kill’ is a feeling that most ex-soldiers have to cope with. It is the associated fear of being severed from society. This was found in literature and confirmed by data from the interviews. We came across the following types of guilt in the interviews.

Remorse for the family of the victim

Remorse for the family of the victim is not something we have come across in literature. It is an exciting new insight in how motivation for and coping with killing someone interact. The situation is as follows: a soldier kills an enemy soldier, he feels fine, but then when he sees the dead body, he feels sorry for the family of the victim, and he feels guilty. Baumeister (1999) did mention that a

soldier can feel guilty when he finds pictures of a wife or children in a wallet of an enemy he killed. According to him, what makes the soldier feel guilty is that he is no longer able to dehumanise the enemy. In the situations in which the respondents killed, however, they did not dehumanise the enemy they killed. There was no need to dehumanise the enemy, because the respondents feel that it is ok for any soldier, a terrorist, an enemy combatant, or themselves, to die for his cause (7.3). What can happen to a soldier after he kills an enemy, however, is that he feels sorry for the family of his victim. The family is innocent: they did not choose to be in a war, but they lose their husband / father. Essential here is the difference between passive or active. A soldier chooses to fight, so dying is a consequence of his decision. The family, however, is just a passive victim; they can't influence the situation. Another possible explanation is identification: the reason the soldier feels guilty is that he identifies himself with the enemy. When seeing the pictures of the family he imagines how his family would feel when he would be killed.

Guilt about feelings

A well-known form of guilt from literature is guilt about exhilaration / pleasure of killing. We found quotes confirming pleasure of killing: the adrenaline kicks in, the excitement, an erotic experience etc. However, we found a subtle difference. Somehow the respondents seemed to understand this feeling of excitement about killing and did not feel guilty about it. They had trained for it so long, and now it was their turn and they understand that they might feel happy to kill:

R: And when you first fire your first round in anger, you just, the adrenaline takes turn of you, you just fired, without thinking or anything really, because this is what I am trained for and it is my turn to do it.

R: I was happy that I got one of the enemy, and also stop one of my colleagues from probably being killed

Respondents did not so much feel guilty about the pleasure of killing, or the happiness about having killed an enemy, but more remorse about not having any emotions of remorse about killing at all. Some respondents somehow expected to feel more remorse, but they didn't. This feeling is, like all feelings about killing, however somewhat ambivalent. They expect to be able to kill, expect that they won't feel remorse, but when they do, they are surprised that they don't feel remorse.

R: I always thought, I thought I could do it, no remorse. (...) I thought, I believed, that I could, if it happened, I could do with it.

The third form of guilt was guilt about their own feelings about killing the enemy. Respondents expressed feelings of surprise, hinting at shame and guilt that it was so easy to kill. Again, there is

ambivalence about killing. They think and know in advance that they can kill; they expect it to be easy, not to feel remorse, but then again there is surprise that it is so 'easy'. They feel surprised or guilty that it was not more difficult to kill someone and that they do not feel more remorse. They somehow feel that there is something wrong with them, that they are a bad person without a conscience, if they can kill so easily, or if they have no feelings of remorse at all.

Killing against the will of God

A feeling that killing is against the will of God, is not expressed as guilt or remorse, but admitted as a fleeting thought. One respondent said that he is sure that God does not approve of killing, and he is somehow afraid he will go to hell for killing others.

In summary

Concluding all the forms of guilt described above, we come to a surprising conclusion: none of the forms of guilt mentioned above was guilt about the act of killing someone. Explicit feelings of guilt about killing itself were not mentioned by the respondents! On the contrary 'no remorse at all' was what respondents thought about their acts of killing. It was 'I did what I had to do, it was my job' or 'it was him or me'. This may sound as a surprising conclusion after having described the different types of guilt in the previous paragraph.

The difference is subtle but important. By feeling remorse for the family of the victim, remorse that killing was so easy or feelings of egocentrism when killing others, the focus of the emotions shifts from the act of killing, to objects related to the killing. Feelings of guilt about killing would imply that killing is wrong. By allowing feelings of guilt for secondary issues, related to killing but not about killing itself, a soldier avoids having to cope with 'maybe' being in the wrong about killing. More important even is that a soldier feels he is a responsible and conscientious person! This is also a form of coping, but a different one. This conclusion perfectly matches the two main conclusions so far: professionalism as a way to legitimate killing or create a distance to the killing, creating psychological distance by mechanising the kill, and the importance of training.

7.5 Communication about and reflection on killing

In this chapter, we will draw conclusions from the interviews and add some new literature about how soldiers reflect on their acts of killing and communicate about it in relation to others; do they talk to military or non-military about it and secondly, do opinions from others influence the soldier's view on killing?

From summarising and comparing the quotes on reflection and communication about killing conclusions become apparent. Talking about acts of killing is rare: all respondents say they deny to friends and family that they killed. Even among soldiers killing is not talked about. Not much literature is available on this subject. Some authors do mention that in Vietnam, soldiers were bragging about how many they killed, it was part of a kind of sport, who could kill the most. This was not confirmed by our interviews. A possible explanation for this is that some soldiers don't feel heroic about it. Feelings of guilt or shame might be involved, and that this prevents the soldier from talking about it. For others soldiers, however the reason for not talking about it is part of their outlook on life: it happened, now move on, forget about it. Or they don't want to show off about killing someone.

When it comes to talking to society about acts of killing, finally, soldiers completely deny that they have killed. This is partly motivated by the reasons mentioned above, as well as by some slightly different reasons: not wanting to be looked upon as a killer or that somehow a soldier feels that non-military are not really interested in his feelings about killing, they just want sensation. Concern about family is also a motivation.

Within the military, killing the enemy is not something that is spoken about. This is a surprising conclusion, since killing is central in the military. All soldiers say their profession includes possibly killing. There is ambivalence there; killing is considered a central part of the job, and as such soldiers talk about killing in a technical way, which weapons to use to kill. However, killing as in killing the enemy, is not a subject of conversation! This can be understood when we look at new literature on killing. Glover (2001) describes that for Nazi Germany, carrying out orders in a technical professional way was essential for enabling the Nazi's to kill the Jews. *A way of evading moral questions was to concentrate single-mindedly on the job. (Glover, 2001, p. 102)*

Linked to this professionalism or technical approach is the dehumanisation of the enemy: don't think of that you actually kill people, but pretend you are stopping spreading diseases. (Livingstone Smith, 2007; Baumeister, 2009). Although it is different from killing in combat (it is more about atrocities), the principles are the same: focus on the technical aspects, the bureaucracy, not on what you actually do: kill people. This conclusion is closely linked to the conclusion on motivation (6.2): creating distance to the act of killing by seeing killing as acts of professionalism (motivation) also goes for talking about killing: the only way you talk about it is in a technical way.

Something we found but have not come across in literature nor in interviews, is that soldiers feel or fear that by talking (to non-military) about killing, they would be challenged in their justification of

their 'professional killers'. Again, the importance for soldiers of the carefully created rules of war is clear: in the chaos of battle, they had their own rules (Kubany, 2004). Obeying those rules gave them a feeling they did what was right, which helped them to cope with it afterwards. Civilians don't think along those lines, and they might shoot holes in the carefully constructed construction of justification of the soldier. The power of self-deception and the need for man in general to protect his logic of self-deception is important here (Livingstone Smith, 2007). Self-deception is mostly unconscious: it works best if you deceive yourself. However, a soldier might feel, consciously or sub consciously, that avoiding talking about killing to civilians, protects them against arguments that could attack their self-deception.

We conclude that not talking about killing, either to civilians or to soldiers, helps soldiers to cope with killing in a specific way (intrapsychic coping). Although they say and think it was *ok* to kill, and although some have some remorse about issues related to the kill, they don't want to be confronted with their deeds too much. However, when talking to the interviewer (a counsellor), most respondents expressed gratitude and relief. They spoke about their acts of killing an enemy. In reconstructing it all again, they showed some feelings of remorse without having to defend themselves, against themselves or the interviewer, for their acts of killing. Their logic was accepted: they feel responsible, but not guilty.

8 Conclusions & recommendations

In this chapter, we will highlight the main conclusions drawn in chapter 7, evaluate the methodology used in this research (8.2), make recommendations for further research (8.3) and suggestions for mental health workers (8.4).

8.1 Summary of conclusions

The central question was:

What is the role of guilt in killing a military opponent at close range?

The answer to this central question was found by addressing the following sub questions:

Sub question A: What happens when a soldier kills an enemy in close combat?

- When a soldier kills an enemy in close combat, he experiences a whole range of emotions: fear, numb, chaos, exhilaration. Repulsion and throwing up is something not found in our interviews.

Sub question B: Which psychosocial and biological processes play a role in killing someone in close combat?

- For a modern soldier the threshold to kill is low, because of training and conditioning. It is basically pure reflectivity in the heat of the battle.
- Psychosocial and biological processes make it easier for soldiers to kill someone: obedience to orders, group pressure, self-defence, revenge, depersonalisation, and dehumanisation. An important new conclusion based on our interviews and confirmed by few authors, is that loss of self-control and obedience are no longer essential in enabling soldiers to kill.
- Survival and professionalism are nowadays the most important motivators for killing someone in close combat. Professionalism implies that a soldier feels he is doing the right thing, he is fighting a right cause, and therefore he doesn't need to be forced or ordered to kill.

Sub question C: Which elements of guilt do soldiers experience (if any) after killing the enemy at close range?

- Soldiers can alleviate feelings of guilt on killing by justifications or rationalisations: obedience to orders, reciprocity and revenge, depersonalisation and self-deception and loss of self-control.

However, a modern soldier *wants* to feel responsible for killing someone: they feel they do a professional job. Killing is part of that job.

- This professionalism enables soldiers to cross the threshold to kill, and also alleviates possible feelings of guilt afterwards: he was there to do a professional, good job, but only ‘justified’ killing.
- Direct guilt about killing someone was not reported in the interviews, only indirect feelings of guilt (remorse for the family of the victim, for not feeling guilty, for how easy it was to kill and religion).
- By allowing feelings of guilt for secondary issues, related to killing but not about killing itself, a soldier avoids having to cope with ‘maybe’ being in the wrong about killing. More important even is that a soldier feels he is a responsible and conscientious person.
- Religion can uncover feelings of guilt; layers in conversations / thoughts that were repressed, denied, or no-go areas.

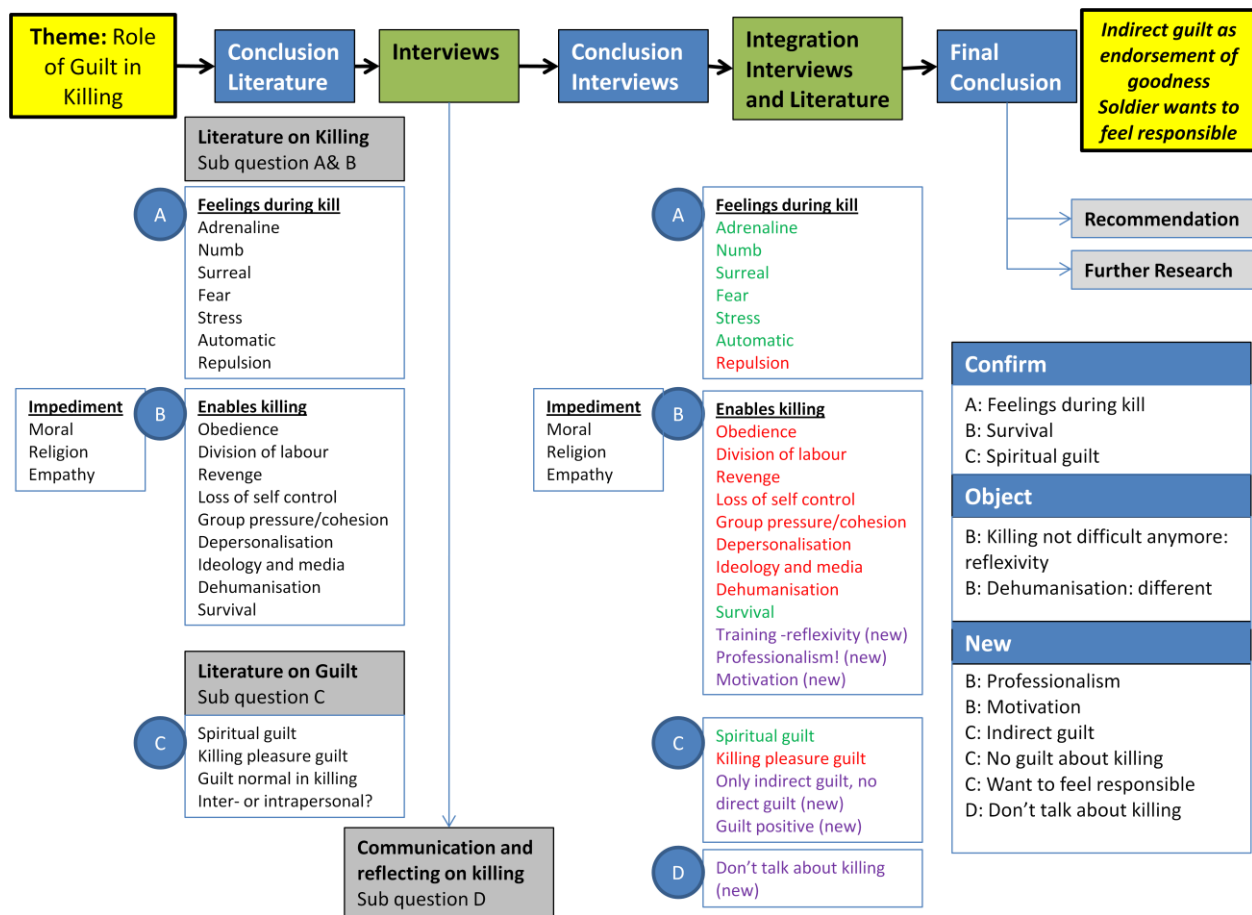
Sub question D: What is the role of communication about and reflection on killing someone?

- In the military, killing the enemy is considered part of the job, but is hardly ever spoken about!
- Killing is only spoken about in a technical way. This helps creating a psychological distance to the act of killing.
- Soldiers play down their role in killing to fellow soldiers.
- Soldiers don’t speak to civilians about killing, because they don’t want to be looked at as murderers. They also don’t want to bother their family with war stories.
- Some soldiers want to try to move on and forget about it.

The answer to the central question ‘*What is the role of guilt in coping with killing a military opponent at close range?*’ is that guilt is one of the five stages a soldier goes through when killing. This phase will normally be overcome by rationalisation and acceptance. There are ways a soldier can alleviate feelings of guilt on killing by several justifications or rationalisations: obedience to orders, revenge, and loss of self-control. We have shown a different way of coping with killing, more suitable for the modern soldier who acts out of professionalism. By allowing feelings of guilt for secondary issues, related to killing but not about killing itself, a soldier avoids having to cope with ‘maybe’ being in the wrong about killing. More important even is that a soldier feels he is a responsible and conscientious person!

To describe the research outline and the connection between sub conclusions, Figure 7 shows the flow of the research thesis. Starting with the central question: ‘What is the role of guilt in killing a military opponent at close range?’ (yellow), demonstrates the preliminary answers to sub questions A,B, and C based on literature and the outcomes of interviews (sub questions A, B, C and D). We highlighted elements where data from our interview confirmed our findings from literature (green), contradicted it (red) and added data we had not come across in literature (purple). Integrating the data from literature and interviews, we finally provide the conclusion, the answer to the central theme (second yellow block) and recommendations for further research and recommendations for mental health workers.

Figure 7: Conclusions



Legend:

Green: confirm previous data

Red: object previous data

Purple: new data

8.2 Evaluation of methodology

Research design

Because of insufficient research on killing and guilt, and the intimate and hidden character of guilt, qualitative research is necessary. In Figure 1 we presented an overview of the research design we used. The research population we aimed for consisted of (ex)-soldiers who killed someone in close combat: ‘normal’ coping of ‘normal’ killing. Soldiers who were diagnosed with PTSD or committed atrocities we excluded. Finding respondents was extremely difficult: veteran organisations and service-men nursing homes protected their members.

Despite the sensitivity of the theme, and the reluctance amongst (ex) soldiers in general to talk to outsiders about their experiences, especially killing, respondents were found through snowball sampling. We were able to conduct in-depth interviews with four British respondents in London.

This is the first weak point of our research: four is a relatively small number to make substantial conclusions on guilt on killing, or to generalise some findings. However, the group represented different types of veterans. Three respondents had obviously reflected extensively on their experiences and were open to full exploration of those feelings. One respondent was ‘black-white’, it is as it is, don’t think about it too much, move on, accept it.

An important note is that three of the four respondents did not belong to front line units. They killed because they ended up in situations where they were attacked by the enemy and therefore fired back. They were the exception, more than the rule: not everybody in their regiment killed, most didn’t. This has consequences for the findings: is it possible to generalise our findings to soldiers who kill frequently?

Data collection

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structural way, in accordance with ethical guide lines. The interviews were based on extensive literature on killing and guilt. Interviews were recorded and full transcripts were made. Three out of four interviews could be described as very intimate, open conversations. In our opinion, the atmosphere during the interviews contributed to a great extent to the amount and quality of the data: a sense of non-judgemental trust was established, which enabled respondents to speak.

Data analysis

The aim of the data analysis was to discover themes and explanations in the interview data. Our first step was thematic coding, in accordance with the five sub questions, using a deductive approach.

We then added the inductive codes: data we had not anticipated on, but provided important information for answering the central question.

Concluding on methodology, we are of the opinion that despite the difficulty of the research subject, and within the limits of a Master's thesis, the results are beyond expectations. Key to this result was the openness of most respondents in the interviews. This compensated for the small amount of interviews we were able to conduct. Using extensive literature, and the qualitative research analysis program atlas.ti, enabled us to analysis the interview data thoroughly.

8.3 Recommendations for further research

First of all our conclusions need to be confirmed by other research, quantitative research and qualitative research with a bigger research population (triangulation). Secondly, other research is needed to see if our conclusions can be generalised to other groups:

- Do frontline soldiers confirm our conclusions on guilt and killing, and professionalism? Our research population consisted of soldiers who have killed on few occasion: they were part of support units, not front line battle groups.
- How do younger soldiers experience guilt and killing in close combat? Our respondents were in their forties and fifties.

Finally, we have come across some data that was beyond the scope of this thesis and needs further exploration:

- Moral preparation for combat.
- The role of religion in coping with combat, guilt and killing.

8.4 Recommendation for mental health workers

Our recommendations are mainly aimed at spiritual counsellors (humanist counsellors, also known as moral counsellors / spiritual counsellors) but are also of interest to psychologists and psychotherapist working with (ex) soldiers. The role of spiritual counsellors in the British forces in general is described as: *To provide spiritual leadership, moral guidance and pastoral support to all soldiers and their families, irrespective of religion or belief. (www.army.mod.uk/chaplains/chaplains.aspx)*. Essential in the work of padres and moral counsellors, is helping soldiers to give meaning to life and the promotion of essential human values. As Dutch moral counsellor Hetebrij (2002) describes:

Helping to give meaning to life and the promotion of essential human values (...) Integrity, self-determination, self-direction, self-realisation and self-expression. Values like these come about when people are given the opportunity, freedom and motivation to evaluate their doings in terms of values, experience grip on life, self-value and interpret

present behaviour in terms of the future. One has the possibility of attaching coherence and ordering experiences in their own story of life. (Hetebrj, 2002, p. 9).

Feelings of guilt, evaluation of the self for being a person that kills in combat, are closely linked to the mission of spiritual and moral counsellors as described above. The new direction for counsellors arising from our findings is that we have pinpointed a need to offer soldiers and veterans the possibility to reflect on their acts of killing in a safe, non-judgemental environment with a particular focus on feelings of guilt. Killing and guilt by their very nature include intimate and sometimes hidden feelings. Counsellors should be aware of this taboo and the difficulty to be allowed access to these private emotions. The gratitude expressed by the respondents for being offered a chance to talk about their feelings and experiences about killing and combat indicates there is a need for soldiers to talk about killing, to speak openly without being judged and the 'get things off their chest'.

Counsellors should be focussed on expressions of indirect guilt and moral questions in (ex) soldier's narratives. Their aim should be to help (ex) soldiers to gain a full and balanced understanding of each situation in which they killed someone, as it was at that moment. This would help the veteran to understand, and thereafter cope with his acts, including tolerating some form of guilt. Guilt has also an important function: internal and external attribution, explain events and behaviour, and most important: it shows the (ex) soldier is a conscientious person! Methods are available, for example the cognitive therapy of Kubany (1994). He suggests successful management or alleviation of guilt rests with the (ex) soldier's ability to change a possible maladaptive interpretation of the act of killing where his feelings of guilt relate to, or to find new meaning and coherence in the (ex) soldier's behaviour in combat.

Integrated into these observations of guilt feelings, there would of necessity be a proper assessment to determine whether or not feelings of guilt were present in a soldier. If he were free of guilt a different approach to this aftercare is implied. We suggest a spiritual counsellor or psychologist is there to help a soldier with feelings he finds difficult to cope with, not to inflict any extra guilt on him by trying to find feelings that are not there. Not feeling guilty for killing someone can be a genuine feeling. Lack of a counsellor's understanding of the situation, or the introduction of prescribed motivations for feeling guilty, could lead to inflicting new guilt on a soldier.

Epilogue

Last but not least, this thesis is a moral appeal to all mental health workers, politicians and ordinary citizens alike to think about how we look at soldiers who go and fight wars that our politicians -on our behalf- chose to start or to participate in. For the sake of (ex) soldiers, we want people to stop and think before they judge soldiers as “geezers that kill without remorse”. I want them to think twice before asking soldiers how it is to kill someone. Killing is an intimate subject, and should not be taken lightly. As this thesis showed, killing might not be difficult to do in the present climate, but it is something a soldier has to live with afterwards. We –politicians and civilians- want soldiers to respect human rights, and only kill enemies that deserve to be killed. As we could see in the interviews, war and battle means chaos, and sometimes a right decision at that time turns out to be wrong decision later (as was the case in the quotes on guilt for almost having killed an innocent, mentally retarded Afghan).

I don't have the answers. I am against atrocities. Educating soldiers to try to make right assessments, and not kill civilians or innocents, as seems to be the case for a modern soldier, is crucial. What remains is the question how we think soldiers should cope with their acts of 'legitimate' killing. Do we think they should feel guilty? Do we think it is wrong that they can kill? This is the question that made me decide to write this thesis about killing and guilt:

In this paragraph I will look at the function of guilt as an emotion: is it endangering military missions or is guilt an endorsement of one's essential goodness? It was an important question when analysing the interviews: do the respondents talk about guilt as an emotion they would prefer not to have (negative, moving away from) or as positive. Since talking about guilt in the interviews was a delicate subject, and most respondents denied explicit guilt about killing, although they did mention implicit guilt, the question remains difficult to answer. It is important to look at the different levels: what is best for the soldier, what is in the interest of the Ministry of Defence and what does 'society' think about the guilt a soldier should feel.

Kubany (1994) looks at guilt and veterans from the perspective of therapy, and is clearly of the opinion that there is no need for a therapist to inflict guilt in a client (combat):

It has been suggested that it may be “appropriate” to feel guilty over actions judged clearly immoral, and that the therapeutic decision to try to eliminate such guilt raises moral issues: They should feel guilty, because what they did was “wrong”. (...) One does not have to feel guilty to have learned from the past and to make enlightened future choices. (...) In addition, it may be all too easy for outsiders to self-righteously pass judgment without fully appreciating the totality of historical and circumstantial forces acting on individuals caught up in a maelstrom of traumatic events such as occurred in Vietnam. (...) It has been my experience working with combat veterans that alleviation of guilt has never been associated with an unleashing or disinhibition of antisocial attitudes or inclination. (Kubany, 1994, p. 14).

This is important to bring up: guilt has the function of guiding moral behaviour, and as such feeling guilty about killing would undermine the drive to kill someone on a next occasion. An important question in the debate about feelings of guilt in combat is that the exercise of personal consciences could seriously threaten the entire military enterprise by weakening automatic obedience to orders, promote pity for the enemy, and provoke sleepless nights. Looking at it from that angle, one could conclude that feelings of guilt in a soldier are not in the interest of all those who want soldiers to fight and kill. According to Joanna Bourke (1999) historians have been reluctant to mention issues of individual responsibility in war and military spokesmen have been clear on the responsibility and guilt of soldiers:

Except in the case of atrocities, individual grunts, they declared, shared no responsibility for killing if they were obeying legitimate orders (...) Guilt should not be attached to appropriate killing. Many even went so far as to refuse to believe that combatants ever did feel remorse. (Bourke, 1999, p. 207).

However, it is not just as guilt in a soldier is something that should always be avoided. Soldiers need to be helped to recognize, contain, and tolerate their guilt. Bourke (1999) rightly points out that there were different opinions also within the military about feelings of guilt. She quotes from ‘Psychology for the Fighting Man’ (1944), which emphasised the need for soldiers to admit guilt:

Unless combatants face it squarely, they may head into trouble, because killing is the main job of a soldier. (Bourke, 1999, p. 212).

In my opinion this provides a solid argument for addressing guilt; if guilt about killing is a fact, and killing is part of the job, than guilt needs to be looked at. Bourke brings in another valid motivation for addressing guilt: combatants themselves constantly raised issues of personal responsibility and that guilt is not necessarily a burden:

‘Guilt reactions in combat are not usually severe, as long as the soldier follows the rules of warfare. Rules of war are accepted by the soldier, and group approval helps to prevent the feeling of guilt’. (Bourke, 1999, p. 211).

The citation above is key to understanding the way soldiers deal with guilt, and their general outlook on being a soldier, war and killing. Firstly, she says that feelings of guilt are usually not severe. I would like to say that feelings of guilt are not severe, *as long as* a soldier goes through the fourth and fifth stage (

rationalisation and acceptance stage), as described by Grossman (2009) in a satisfying way.

Essential for understanding and accepting that in the moment he killed, is to see that the soldier acted in accordance with the rules of war *at that moment*. Acting in accordance with the rules of war, *their* rules of war, is essential for a soldier in dealing with feelings of guilt. Rules for combat as seen by the combatants however are often different from those set by society or Ministry of Defence.

'Simple adherence to the legal laws of warfare was insufficient. Indeed, these rules were so contradictory, nebulous and subtle that they were often of little help to the servicemen in the heat of the combat. Combatants responded by developing their own "rules of thumb" to differentiate legitimate killing in wartime from guilt-ridden murder'. (Bourke, 1999, p. 213).

Guilt can be allayed through recourse of different types of justifications. Baumeister (1999) et al. mention rationalisations: obedience to orders, reciprocity and revenge, depersonalization and sportiveness. Livingstone Smith (1997) stresses the importance of self-deception. Bourke also sees these justifications in her qualitative research, but her conclusion is that the most important justification is personal responsibility! They want to feel some responsibility, because it keeps them humane.

Rietveld came to the same conclusion in her research on shame and guilt in Dutch veterans who participated in peace missions.

'Our research shows, in any case, that Dutch veterans of peace missions are conscientious individuals and that they display a morally committed professional attitude and a great capacity to moral evaluation of their decisions and actions in the mission area, as well as for self-reflection'. (Rietveld, 2009, p. 421 – 422).

Her conclusion on veterans and morality is important to this study on combat and summarises what I consider how the issue of soldiers and moral questions and guilt should be addressed: (ex) soldiers should be allowed to make their own moral self-reflection. They should be assisted in doing so by moral counsellors. The importance for the soldier of getting things 'off his chest' should not be underestimated, and moral counsellors should do that: no judgement, no condemnation, just the remarkable power of understanding.

References

- Arnold, M. & J.A. Gasson (1954). *The human person: an approach to an integral theory of personality*. New York: Ronald.
- Ardant du Picq, C. (1946). *Battle studies*. Harrisburg: Telegraph Press.
- Bandura, A. (1973). *Aggression: A Social Learning Analysis*. Prentice-Hall: Englewood Cliffs.
- Arendt, H. (1963). *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York: Viking Press.
- Boeije, H. (2010). *Analysis in Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Baumeister, R. F. (1999). *Evil. Inside Human Violence and Cruelty*. New York: W.H. Freeman.
- Baumeister, F. et al. (1994). Guilt: An Interpersonal Approach. *Psychological Bulletin*, 115 (2), p. 243-267.
- Bourke, J. (1999). *An Intimate History of Killing: Face to Face Killing in 20th Century Warfare*. London: Granta.
- Decker, L. R. (2007). Combat Trauma: Treatment from a Mystical / Spiritual Perspective, *Journal of Humanistic Psychology January*, 47 (1), p. 30-53.
- Dennen, J.M.G. van der (2008). Ambivalent War-Lovers? Book review 'Evolutionary Psychology', 6 (1), p. 3-12.
- Fraher, A.L. (2007). Collective Guilt as a Force for Change: A Concept Paper. *Socio-analysis* 9, p. 1-18.
- Glover, J. (2001). *Humanity, A moral history of the twentieth century*. London: Pimlico.
- Grossman, D. & L. W Christensen (2008). *On Combat: The Psychology and Physiology of Deadly Conflict in War and in Peace* (3rd edition), S.I.: Warrior Science Publication.
- Grossman, D.A. (2009). *On Killing: the Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (revised ed.). New York: Hachette Book Group.
- Folkman, S. (2008). The case for positive emotions in the stress process, *Anxiety, Stress & Coping*, 21 (1), p. 3 – 14.
- Hrvatín, S. B. and M. Trampuz (2000). 'Enjoy your enemy or how the Kosovo (media) war broke out', *The public*, 7 (3), p. 77 -86.

- Hoffman, M.L. (1982). Development of prosocial motivation: Empathy and guilt. In *N. Eisenberg (red.), The development of prosocial behaviour*, p. 281-313. San Diego, Academic Press.
- Kubany, E.S. & S. B. Watson (2003). Guilt: Elaboration of a Multidimensional Model, *The Psychological Record*, 53, p. 51 – 90.
- Kubany, E.S. (1994). A Cognitive Model of Guilt Typology in Combat-Related PTSD. *Journal of traumatic stress*, 7 (1), p. 3-17.
- Kubany, E.S. and T.C. Ralston (2006). Cognitive Therapy for Trauma-related Guilt and Shame. *Cognitive -Behavioral Therapies for Trauma*, p. 258 – 289.
- Kubany, E.S. et al. (1995). Initial Examination of a Multidimensional Model of Trauma-Related Guilt: Applications to Combat Veterans and Battered Women. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment*, 17 (4), p. 353-376.
- Kleber, R.J.& D. Brom (2003). *Coping With Trauma. Theory, Prevention and Treatment*. Amsterdam: Swets en Zeitlinger.
- Lewis, H.B. (1971). *Shame and guilt in neurosis*. New York: International Universities Press.
- Livingstone Smith, D. (2007). *The most dangerous animal. Human nature and the origins of war*. New York: St Martins Griffin.
- Marshall, S.L.A. (1978). *Men against fire*. Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith
- Mooren, J.H.M. and van Krochten, I.H.M.A. (1991). Contributions to the history of psychology: CXII. Magda B. Arnold revisited, *Psychological report* 72, p. 67 – 84.
- Maguen, S. et.al. (2010). The impact of reported direct and indirect killing on mental health symptoms in Iraq war veterans. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 23 (1), p. 86 – 90.
- Mason, J. (2005). *Qualitative Researching* (2nd edition), London: Sage.
- Mc Nair, R.M. (2002). *Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress: The Psychological Consequences of Killing*. Lincoln: Authors Choice Press.
- Milroy, W. H. (2001) *Pathways to the streets for ex service personnel. An examination of various routes to homelessness for ex-service personnel*. Sine loco: University of East Anglia
- Opp, R.E. & A. Y. Samsson (1989). Taxonomy of Guilt for Combat Veterans. *Professional psychology: Research and Practice*, 20 (3), 259-165

Protevi, J. & R. Pippin (2008). Affect, Agency and Responsibility: The Act of Killing in the Age of Cyborgs. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 7 (3).

Rietveld, N. (2009). *De gewetensvolle veteraan. Schuld- en schaamtebeleving bij veteranen van vredesmissies*. Oisterwijk: Boxpress.

Shalit, B. (1988). *The psychology of conflict and combat*. New York: Praeger Publishers.

Schok, M.L. (2009). *Meaning as a mission. Making sense of war and peacekeeping*. Delft: Eburon.

Schwarzer, R. & S. Taubert (2002). Tenacious Goal Pursuits and Striving Toward Personal Growth: Proactive Coping. In E. Frydenberg (Ed.), *Beyond coping: Meeting goals, visions and challenges*. p. 19-35. London: Oxford University Press.

Swanwick, H.M.L. (1935). *I have been young*. London.

Watson, L. (1995). *Dark Nature*. London: Sceptre.

Internet:

Hetebrij, B (2002) *Moral Counselling during a mission. A report of an attempt to give shape and content to moral counselling during a mission in former Yugoslavia [Full text]*. Found 9th March 2011 at www.humanistprofessionals.org (section information / archive)

Carpentier, N. (sine anno). *The ideological model of war. Discursive mediations of the Self and the Enemy. [Full text]*. Found 7th of July 2010.

www.interdisciplinary.net/ptb/hhv/vcce/vcce1/carpentier%20paper.pdf

(2008) *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (3rd edition), Cambridge: University Press, found at <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/dehumanize>

Royal Army Chaplains' Department. (n.d.). Found 6th of March 2011 at www.army.mod.uk/chaplains/chaplains.aspx.

Appendix I: Framework Interviews

This chapter describes the framework we designed for the interviews.

The general question was:

What is the role of guilt in killing a military opponent at close range?
--

In the interviews, we want to find data for answering the following sub questions: What happens when a soldier kills an enemy in close combat?

- A) What happens when a soldier kills an enemy in close combat?
- B) Which psychosocial and biological processes play a role in killing someone in close combat?
- C) Which elements of guilt do soldiers experience (if any) after killing the enemy at close range?
- D) What is the role of communication about and reflection on killing someone?
- E) What are the spiritual and psychological consequences of killing in close combat? (Later we decided not to further include this sub question in this thesis, as is motivated in 5.4).

For the interviews:

- Sub question B will not be asked, because literature has answered that question and because psycho-social processes can't be asked, it is something that will show.
- We changed the order: question E (reactions others, talking about it) will be asked prior to question C (guilt and shame) and D (spiritual consequences).

Translated to the interviews, the outline could be as follows. The number (1, 2, 3 etc) indicates a subject to be addressed, the bullets indicate elements the interviewer should keep in mind. The remarks in *italic* are the motivations why we want to know or ask something, this will not be shared to the respondent.

1. Introduction about the interviewer, the research the purpose, anonymity, and stressing that it is about combat experiences, and the consequences for a soldier: how has it affected him as a person. Interviewer will stress that this interview is important because we want to learn from experiences of veterans: every person and every situation is different.
 - Very important that the interviewer is open to their experiences; we want to learn from it, whatever it is. What counts is that they tell how it is to them, that the interviewer will listen, it is about understanding them, however ugly or beautiful they might think their thoughts or experiences are. Too many soldiers have feelings or experiences that they think others might not understand, or not approve of, but it

helps other so much to know that what they did or felt was a very normal reaction to an abnormal situation, as war, combat and missions are abnormal, chaotic situation. They are not crazy! Interviewer will tell them that she served in Bosnia after the war, and that she feels deep admiration for people who have served during conflicts.

- Interviewer will also stress that this research is mainly about combat experiences, *in order to prevent wasting too much time on issues that are not directly related to the subject, unless interviewer feels it is important to build on the relationship between interviewer and respondent, or to give respondent a 'break' in talking about difficult subjects.*
2. Ask for a short introduction about respondent.
 - How did you come to decide to join the army / marines? *Important questions, because in that we want also to incorporate how they feel about war, killing, combat prior to having participated in it. It is also good to start with, because it is probably an easy topic to talk about for them.*
 - In which countries / conflicts did you serve? Could you tell me about your role / position in those countries? What was for you the most difficult situation?
 3. Talking about the close combat experiences
 - *We will try to ask a very general question, like how it was to be in combat the first time, will not interrupt them, to let them tell the way that is easiest for them.*
 - *We will ask them to talk about the close combat as it felt for them at that moment. We think it is important to first see the experience as it was then, instead of having them analysed it from their present perspective. We will use "sentimental" words in my questions, instead of rational questions.*
 - Interviewer will then try to ask them to tell about the other combat experiences, see if second or third experiences where different.
 - If respondents mention aspects of combat experiences like fear of life, losing comrades etc, we will make a shift to how they felt about the enemy, how did they see them? *This could be an indirect opening to maybe feelings of revenge, or hatred or whatever for the enemy, and maybe make them tell about what they actually did themselves to harm (interviewer should be mindful to use proper words for killing.*
 4. Reactions from others: *(either after the first experience of killing they described, or maybe after a set of examples. Instinctually, when they are talking about their acts of killing, interviewer should not change the subject to reactions others etc, because we think the killing is the most difficult part to talk about)*
 - How does it feel for you to talk about these difficult experiences with me? *After they have spoken about their acts of killing, interviewer will probably ask first how it feels for them to talk about it. We think it is important to check how they are doing, and also to give them the feeling that interviewer cares about them, if they feel ok, instead of just sucking all information from them. Interviewer also wants to make sure that there is no misunderstanding that interviewer somehow would disapprove of their actions, Interviewer will probably say that she is thankful for their openness about it, that she appreciates his bravery, and either say that what he did is not something evil, or that it is understandable in that situation etc. Difficult issue,*

because interviewer should not want to show too much approval, that they might feel that their feelings of guilt or shame are not appropriate.

- *It is also maybe a good bridge to the next questions, how reactions from others about their experiences affected them.*
 - Have you spoken about these experiences with your mates, others who have been in the same situation?
 - Did your friends / family ask you about what you did during the war / conflicts? Did you tell them about it etc?
5. Guilt (and shame) *Interviewer will avoid the use of the word guilt, unless the veteran / serviceman uses it.*
- Looking back at that combat experience did you or do you have feelings of regret, or that you wished things would have been different? *(instead of starting with responsibility, maybe by asking them what they regret, it would be a softer and less direct / judging way of asking about responsibility)*
 - If in question 4, about reactions from others, the soldier has spoken somehow of feelings of judgement by others, interviewer will ask him about what he answered to those comments. Then interviewer might ask if what he answered is also how he really felt about it?
 - A good starting point could be that if he has spoken with others about killing, how did he feel about them? How did you see their acts?
 - It would be good to talk about responsibility *in general* first: how does the respondent see war, the responsibility of politicians, of commanders, the soldiers. *Interviewer will be careful to leave all doors open; the soldier should by no means feel that the interviewer 'blames' politicians or commanders, so he will feel ashamed of telling he feels responsible.*
 - Interviewer will ask about dreams, also as a way to make him talk in a less direct way about his possible feelings of guilt or shame.
 - Interviewer might refer to the five types of guilt (survivor, betrayal, superman, spiritual and demonic guilt) *difficult one, if the soldier already refers to guilt himself, and then follow it up. If not, the interviewer will describe these types of guilt without using the word guilt.*
6. Spiritual consequences:
- During the war / missions, did you reflect on what happened, did you dream about it, talk about it with others?
 - After the war / mission was over and you came home, what then? *We think that is an important general question, what happened with them after they came back, did they take or have the time to think about it, reflect on it. Did they try to avoid thinking about it, did they succeed?*
 - How have your experiences of close combat affected you as a person (personal growth or not, trusting others, being in control etc,
 - How have your experiences affected or the way you see the world?
 - *Maybe refer to the four elements of Baumeister, World view / religion, meaning in life*

- How did you reflect on the experiences: *avoidance, talking with others, priests etc*
 - Washing or cleaning?
7. Conclude interview
- Thank respondent for openness, really show appreciation for sharing intimate experiences and feelings
 - Ask respondent how it felt for him
 - Tell how we will follow this up: how we will use the information, stress once more confidentiality.
 - The week following the interview interviewer will call the respondent to see how he feels, if the interview provoked any new issues / feelings etc, show openness if he wants to talk again.