

## WAR, The Moral Wounds

### Liner Notes

*WAR, The Moral Wounds* is an anti-war song that I originally wrote in 1975 after the end of the Vietnam War. (My original title in 1975 was simply, “WAR”.) I was a university student at the time, long before I became a registered nurse and mental health therapist in the military. It was also at least a decade before the term “Moral Injury” started to be defined in relation to veterans who were being unsuccessfully treated for PTSD. I wrote the lyrics after I heard media reports about the experiences of some Vietnam veterans. At the time I was a private pilot who aspired to become a military pilot, so I wrote the lyrics from the perspective of a combat pilot writing home to his wife. Little did I know that years later I would be serving in the war in Afghanistan as a therapist and that I would be treating military members for Operational Stress Injuries, including moral injuries.

Early in 2026 I decided to dig out my old songs and see if I could use them to create an EP (extended play) album. I selected six songs and ‘WAR’ was not at the top of my list to be the first to record. Then, on February 28, the US and Israel launched their war on Iran. All of a sudden the song became more relevant and timely. My other songs would have to wait.

### The Music

To produce the song in a short time span I had to use what was available. I didn’t have access to a studio or musicians; but I had my laptop with music writing software and I had my phone to record the vocals. Given enough time and resources I would, of course, prefer to record live musicians in a studio. However, the synthesized instrument parts that are produced from the notes I wrote are sufficient to give the song the emotion I intended. The mixing and mastering process was then the same as when I mixed live tracks.

My arrangement of the song starts with an instrumental introduction that presents three themes. First, there is the drumbeat of war that is relentless. Second, there is **death** that is represented by the low pedal note of the organ and contrabass (upright bass) that becomes more intense as the drumbeat of war grows. Finally, I introduce a flute and piccolo in shrill discord representing a jet engine going to full throttle as the fighter aircraft takes off for the first attack. All introductory themes crescendo toward the start of the lyrics when the pilot is writing his wife.

At this point I feel compelled to insert a little history. The Vietnam War was a war of choice. President Johnson stated (according to historical accounts), “I am not going to be the president to lose Vietnam.” What followed was a partially fabricated incident in the Gulf of Tonkin that was used by Johnson to go to the US Congress. A resolution was then passed that gave Johnson a broad mandate to launch full-scale combat operations. Unfortunately, for US military members serving in that war, they were left with no clear understanding of why they were fighting half way around the world. For combatants, if there is no obvious just cause for going to war and the justification given to them is not clear, they may have less of a chance to reconcile their actions within their core values. In other words, a moral injury can be more likely to occur when a soldier follows orders and does something that his conscience is telling him not to do because he has no moral justification. However, in a *just war* as defined by the Catholic Church where you fight to defend yourself and your country, a combatant has a clear reason to

fight and there is less chance that guilt will be felt as a result of combat actions. Ukraine, for example, is fighting a *just war* for their very survival. Russia, the aggressor, is fighting a war of conquest, a type of war of choice that I consider the most evil. The world would be better off if a significant number of Russian combatants developed moral injuries from the guilt of their actions and they just stopped fighting. I'm sure some Russians ask themselves, "Why am I fighting"?; but the Russian leadership has a habit of shooting their own soldiers when they don't attack as ordered; so that puts members of the Russian military with a conscience in a difficult position. If, however, any Russian pilots hear this song and read these notes, my advice would be to point your plane in a direction where it will crash without harming anyone and eject over Ukrainian territory. It will be better for you to live in a free Ukraine with your conscience free of guilt if you stop perpetuating Putin's war. **Slava Ukraini!**

On a personal note, I was recently asked how I could join the military and volunteer to serve in a war when I had written an anti-war song that I am now releasing. I responded that I'm only anti **unjust** war. The Canadian Armed Forces that I served in is unlikely to invade another country. We have a Department of National Defence, not a Department of War. We belong to defensive alliances. I served in Afghanistan after the US was attacked, thus invoking NATO Article 5, which gave us justification to come to the defence of the US. So I'm anti war of choice; not anti war of defence.

Meanwhile, back to the liner notes, the first verse has the pilot writing his wife to try to make her feel less alone. He also tries to explain that he is doing his duty to fight an enemy but recognizes that after he completes his bombing mission it is he who is feeling "alone". The music for the first verse is simple but maintains that haunting emotion that goes with the pilots feeling of isolation.

In the second verse, the pilot finds out that the bombing done during one of his missions has caused civilian casualties including children. Even though his war-fighting is done from his aircraft and far above the casualties, as he continues to do his duty he starts to feel guilt and sadness to the point that he starts to feel personally defeated. Violin and viola are added to accentuate the pathos of his realization of his actions.

In the bridge of the song the pilot acknowledges his core values and recognizes that he is fighting without a just reason. He also recognizes his feeling of helplessness to do anything to change the war or his participation.

In the final verse hostilities have ended and the pilot states that the war is lost. For some, it's a time of healing. For our pilot, the casualty numbers inspire him to look at the unjustifiable nature of war as a concept. For war to happen, someone has to attack. If there's no attack, there is no war. But yet we, as a race, continue to repeat the same senseless act of starting wars; and it repeats over and over.

Speaking of repeats, the chorus at the end of each verse is repeated three times. There's a point to that. The third repeat helps convey the feeling of the useless repetitiveness of war; and as the final verse states, it is repeated over and over.

Here's another point about the instrumentation that accompanies the vocal part. I chose organ and strings to provide a church-like, or spiritual sound that is played counter to the relentless, repetitive drumbeat of war. The juxtaposition of the two are also there to represent the conflict between core ethical or spiritual values and the reality of a combatant's commitment to follow '*legal orders*' during war. As a result, I try to convey a pained and angry tone in my singing.

The ending of the song is meant to be a powerful statement. As the spiritual sound of the organ dissipates and the drumbeat of war dies down, *death* has the final say as it converts the drumbeat of war into a dying heartbeat. Who, or what dies is left up to the listener.

### The Video

The introduction of the music video depicts war through the ages from Roman Legion through to modern aerial warfare. The purpose is to introduce the premise that no empire created through a war of conquest is lasting; and that the only progress we have made so far is that we humans have made our weapons more efficient at killing. We certainly haven't figured out how to avoid wars yet. For each scene in the intro I used either actual historical images or videos, or AI generated video based on historical art. Throughout the video my blend of new and old technology in the storytelling is used as a means of symbolizing that regardless of the technology in war, the end result is the same.

In the first verse I introduce my two, AI generated actors: the pilot writing home and his wife reading his letters. I then present the parallel of my AI pilot to a Vietnam War era pilot flying his missions and writing home. It finishes with the AI wife showing concern after reading a letter.

In the second verse I use bombing video from Vietnam combined with AI images depicting destruction and symbolism of children dying before our AI pilot displays anguish and his wife again reads the letter with concern.

As I enter the bridge of the song I turn the AI generated pilot (who was generic, but came out looking like he was in the USAF), into a Russian pilot. I wasn't about to create an anti war song and let Putin off the hook. The unprovoked invasion of Ukraine by Russia has included multiple cases of obvious war crimes committed by Russians. One of the worst was the bombing of the theatre in Mariupol that killed hundreds of civilians and included many children, despite the word "Children" written clearly in Russian next to the building so pilots could see from the air that the building should not be bombed. It's hard to imagine anyone with a moral compass making the decision to drop bombs on a building known to shelter children; but if the pilot did have a conscience, he must have (we hope) had problems processing that mission. Regardless, if there was ever a leader who epitomized the use of war as "an ugly game" as stated in the lyrics, it is Putin. The image of him laughing during his greeting with Trump at what was supposed to be a summit to find a path to peace is a prime example of what Putin thinks of peace talks. He is trying to win his *game* of conquest and his meeting with Trump was just another move and part of his game.

The final verse goes back to Vietnam. The image of people clambering to get a spot on the last helicopter out of Saigon is perfect to go with the line, "The war is lost". Our AI pilot then shows relief at knowing that the war is over while continuing to show anguish from his participation in the war. An AI generated cemetery is an obvious image for counting the cost, followed by fellow pilots paying respect to their fellow warriors who were lost.

For the line, "No reasons justify so senseless a trend" I used the actual video of Putin, February 24, 2022 (full length but sped up) of him trying to justify his invasion of Ukraine. That clip is followed immediately by Hitler giving a speech on why he thought he was justified to invade another country. What's the difference between Putin's justification and Hitler's you might ask... one is in colour and the

other is in black and white. The repetitiveness of war to peace to war to peace to war to peace is then shown with scenes of WW2, Korea, and Vietnam. I finish with my only appearance in the video in flight suit to finish the song. I place my flight helmet on the altar to face the front of the church with the organ playing. As the drum beat changes to a dying heartbeat the viewer is left to form their own conclusion. Is the pilot the one who dies or is it the death of the moral wounds that have been resolved through the pilot's morality aided through his spirituality?

### **Moral Injury Example with Successful Treatment**

*The following is from an article I published in Canadian Nurse, November, 2009. It's an example of one of the cases I had in Afghanistan and a perfect example of a moral injury that can be experienced during combat operations and of a potential treatment plan that worked for this patient. Anyone, whether you are a military member or a first responder, if you think you might be dealing with a moral injury or any other operational stress injury, there are effective treatments if you seek help.*

*The name of the patient and some details were changed in the following article to protect the privacy of the patient.*

Martin was referred to me for depressed mood and sleep disturbance by his unit medical officer. He was a weapons specialist who operated a shoulder-fired weapon. During my assessment, Martin related intrusive thoughts and nightmares about a specific incident. The mission he described involved a truck that had been identified as a Taliban transport. Martin described how great care was taken by each unit member to ensure that the blast that would result from attacking the truck would not harm civilians. The truck was sighted a number of times, but the attack was aborted each previous time due to the proximity of noncombatants. Finally, Martin was ordered to aim and fire the weapon. Through his scope, he could see that his target was isolated, with no civilians visible. He fired, and there was a direct hit. The blast was enormous. By the size of the explosion it is likely that the truck was full of explosives. To Martin's shock, he observed the engine block fly through the air. It landed about a hundred metres away striking two civilian Afghans walking on the road. They were killed instantly.

Martin blamed himself for these deaths. I began his treatment by asking him to consider what his job entailed and if he had done what he was supposed to do. The evidence showed that he followed legal orders and his rules of engagement. He believed that his superiors followed the rules of engagement and that all reasonable precautions were taken before the weapon was fired. In therapy I helped Martin create a balanced thought about his actions. Even though he had performed the final act that led to the deaths of two innocent people, at the time that he pulled the trigger he was acting professionally and legally. No reasonable person could have predicted the outcome. I also pointed out that by preventing the enemy from using a truck laden with explosives, he may have saved many lives. Martin's guilt diminished considerably.

The next session involved reverse role play, where Martin had to tell me why I would not to blame for the Afghans' deaths if I had been him. This exercise increased his conviction in his cognitive restructuring. Psycho-education I provided focused on how common his symptoms were, considering the event, and on the expectancy that they would decrease further over time. Medication, diet, relaxation and exercise were included in the treatment plan. After four sessions, Martin returned to full duties with his unit.