**Dehumanization and the Ultimate Combat Photo**

**By** [**Kerry Patton**](http://www.americanthinker.com/kerry_patton/)

As an avid bow hunter, I can't think of anything quite like watching that twelve-point buck aimlessly walk into the kill zone.  I take that one deep breath, calming myself, before I release the arrow.

Never would I think of that buck sleeping with its doe, snuggling nearby babies in the pasture during the late hours.  No, I am a hunter.  Those thoughts must be totally cleared from my head in order to make the kill as quick and painless as possible.

I cannot think about that buck's love life because if I did, it would simply be too difficult to execute my mission.  I am the predator.  As a predator, I often take photographs of my kill, for it is my prized possession.

Some anti-hunting critics would say I am crazy for my passion for the hunt.  Others can easily relate to my passion for getting that annual prized kill.  Only those who actually hunt could ever understand.

Hunting an animal has similarities to hunting America's enemies.  The prey may be different, but the critical psychological demands are quite similar.  As I immediately leave the comforts of my dwelling, I turn on a switch and psychologically begin to alter my state of consciousness.  I'm on the hunt.

Our troops, like our enemies, go through a very similar psychological process.  This is known as demonization and dehumanization.  Demonization is the psychological state of understanding your enemy as pure evil.  Dehumanization is the psychological state conducted by an individual willing to kill another.  Interestingly, the killer does not view his prey as a human, but rather as anything *but* human.

These psychological alterations are critical during combat.  If a person cannot alter his mental state when engaging the enemy, he can very likely turn into the prey. It's all part of survivability.

During World War II, America's survivability was secured as we fought our enemies.  It was secured because every American embraced our warrior's dehumanization capabilities.  In fact, even Franklin D. Roosevelt partook in the dehumanization process as he accepted a unique gift from Congressman Francis Walter -- a letter opener made from a deceased Japanese soldier's arm bone.  Congressman Walter is noted as apologizing to FDR, saying, "I'm sorry it's so small a part of the Japanese anatomy."

On May 22nd, 1944, *Life Magazine*'s picture of the week was that of a woman, a U.S. person, holding the head of a deceased Japanese soldier.  Her boyfriend, a lieutenant serving in the Pacific, sent it to her as a gift.  She held it with pride, knowing that her lover killed one of America's enemies.

This was a time when the United States Marine Corps used dehumanizing recruitment tools.  During World War II, the Corp handed out official-looking hunting licenses which said, "Open Season, No Limit...Japanese Hunting License...Free Ammo and Free Equipment with Pay...Join the Marine Corp."

World War II was the last war, without any question, the United States and our allies actually won.  Dehumanization worked, but with time, specific guidelines were created for our troops to protect and preserve the dignity of the deceased.

Approximately seventy years later, our troops have engaged in America's longest war.  Many media outlets have criticized some of our troops' derogatory actions, like Koran-burnings and urinating on Taliban.  Now the *LA Times* has released two-year-old photographs of U.S. soldiers from the prestigious 82ndAirborne Division posing with killed Taliban terrorists.  Of the critics, how many have actually pulled the trigger, taking the life of another human being?

I am not advocating any derogatory acts conducted by our troops like the aforementioned, but it is critical to understand the psychological alterations our troops go through for survivability.  Striking that pose with my prized buck makes sense to the avid hunter.  Avid hunters understand.  While we may not like it, many combat vets understand the glory of taking a photo of your dead enemy as well.  It is wrong because socially and culturally, we say it is wrong, but psychologically, it makes perfect sense.  History proves this.

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