Collateral Damage

National Public Radio (NPR) ran a story this week about a Marine Corps veteran of the Iraq war, now law student Lu Lobello and journalist Dexter Filkins. Through a story written by Filkins, Lobello was able to track down a family that Lobello’s unit had fired on in 2003 in Iraq, thinking they were enemy combatants, while in the heat of a firefight. Three of the civilians were killed and two survived. [http://www.npr.org/2012/10/23/163472609/iraq-vet-seeks-atonement-for-early-war-tragedy](http://www.npr.org/2012/10/23/163472609/iraq-vet-seeks-atonement-for-early-war-tragedy)

This story raises all sorts of questions about civilian casualties and the perils of innocent bystanders getting caught in the crossfire during warfare and how/why this happens. The story also demonstrates the challenge of trying to find out what happened and addresses how Lobello (and Filkins) sorted through the aftermath. Lobello along with the journalist is actually able to visit the civilian survivors of the firefight (the survivors were able to come to the U.S. to live), and he begins to develop a relationship with them.

At the end of the story, Lobello says the following:

"A lot of the times, these stories don’t get told. What gets told is the other side and the heroism. And what you miss out on is that this is a part of any war. No matter the training, no matter the terrain, you will always have innocent civilians killed. And if more stories are told about these innocent civilians, maybe we will start to think twice the next time we decide to go somewhere and have these battles, or maybe at least we’ll come up with some programs to take better care of these people that are caught in the crossfire."

Think back to a moment in your military service that involved civilians being caught in the crossfire or being mistaken for the enemy. Or, if that is not relevant to your experience, write about civilians being in the wrong place at the wrong time in a military operation or perhaps a training exercise. What happened? How did their presence change (or not) the mode of operation? What thoughts do you want to convey about what has come to be called “collateral damage”?  

collateral damage

*Unintended damage, injuries, or deaths caused by an action, especially unintended civilian casualties caused by a military operation. (from the Free Online Dictionary)*
Religion and Spirituality

How did religion and/or spirituality enter into your experience of the military? Were there certain religious rituals that you practiced or traditions you observed while in the military, and if so, how did this impact your military experience or your relationship to your own spirituality? Did you grow up with religion, and are you a religious person today? When it comes to theology, what do you believe/not believe? Try to recall any specific moments in your service when these issues might have come up for you.

Favor

What was the biggest favor you ever did for someone else in the military? Tell the story of how this came about, and how the person responded.