

My Son's War

Susan Howard

My son has gone to war. Not the war of his father or the war of his grandfathers. It isn't even our nation's war. It's his war.

He isn't bearing arms to defend himself from the dangers he faces. His tools are his training and experience. He was a Senior EOD officer in the Army. EOD or Explosive Ordnance Disposal is military speak for destroying unexploded landmines, IEDs and bombs. He was prepared to be sent to Afghanistan but was kept stateside to clean up Army training fields. There he sometimes wore a bomb suit as a final line of defense. Now he doesn't. He is volunteering in Ukraine and there isn't that kind of equipment available for him or the other men with him.

My son is the CEO of a nonprofit he helped found, dedicated to mitigating the dangers of injury or death to civilians, especially children, from unexploded ordnance left behind from war. He is helping train Ukrainian soldiers and police to recognize the different types of armaments, how to destroy them safely, and to watch for deadly boobytraps. He goes out with them in operations to clear the numerous unexploded bombs for disposal. His only protections are for his eyes and ears, and a bullet proof vest.

Sometimes he posts videos to social media of detonations of piles of bombs, with him looking nonchalant during the explosions, at times adding musical soundtracks. It's his wicked sense of humor, necessary to help protect himself from the stress. But he's brave and he knows what he's doing. That's what I tell myself. He's well-trained and did this for five years in the Army without any mishaps to himself or the troops he commanded.

But in this war civilians are targets, and my son lives in a city that has been bombed again recently. He isn't that far from the border with Belarus. And though he says they have an exit

strategy in case Belarus or Russia invades from the north, he's over 700 miles away from the Polish border and there would be a crush of humanity trying to escape. The madman of Russia is not above a tactical nuclear battlefield strike. Or simply sabotaging the largest nuclear powerplant and letting the radiation drift across the country.

In this war, my son will not receive a medal or an overseas combat ribbon. He won't come home to a flag waving crowd. I pray when he does come home it won't be in a coffin. But he's doing what he believes in, what he feels he is intended to do. When he was a child and said he wanted to be a soldier, I told him it was an honorable profession. At the same time, I didn't let him have toy guns. Little did I know.

Recently he lost two Ukrainian EOD comrades in the line of duty. It's dangerous work even for the trained, but so necessary before homes can be inhabited again. Before cities can be rebuilt and an economy restored.

I'm afraid for him and I'm afraid for me.

This is my son's war.

But it is also my war.

Susan Howard is the daughter of a late WWII veteran and career Air Force officer and married to a Vietnam War veteran. Their son, Matthew, is a West Point graduate and former Army Captain and Senior EOD officer. She has been published in the *Kansas City Star Magazine* and is the author of a children's book. She is a member of the Kansas City Veterans Writers Team, having participated in multiple Readers' Theaters featuring veterans and family members reading their original works. She and her husband currently reside in Kansas City, Missouri.