

KNOW THE FACTS, RELY ON YOUR INTUITION

IN AFGHANISTAN ANTON VAN DEN BERG EXPERIENCED THE VALUE OF INTUITION

ALLIED FORCES

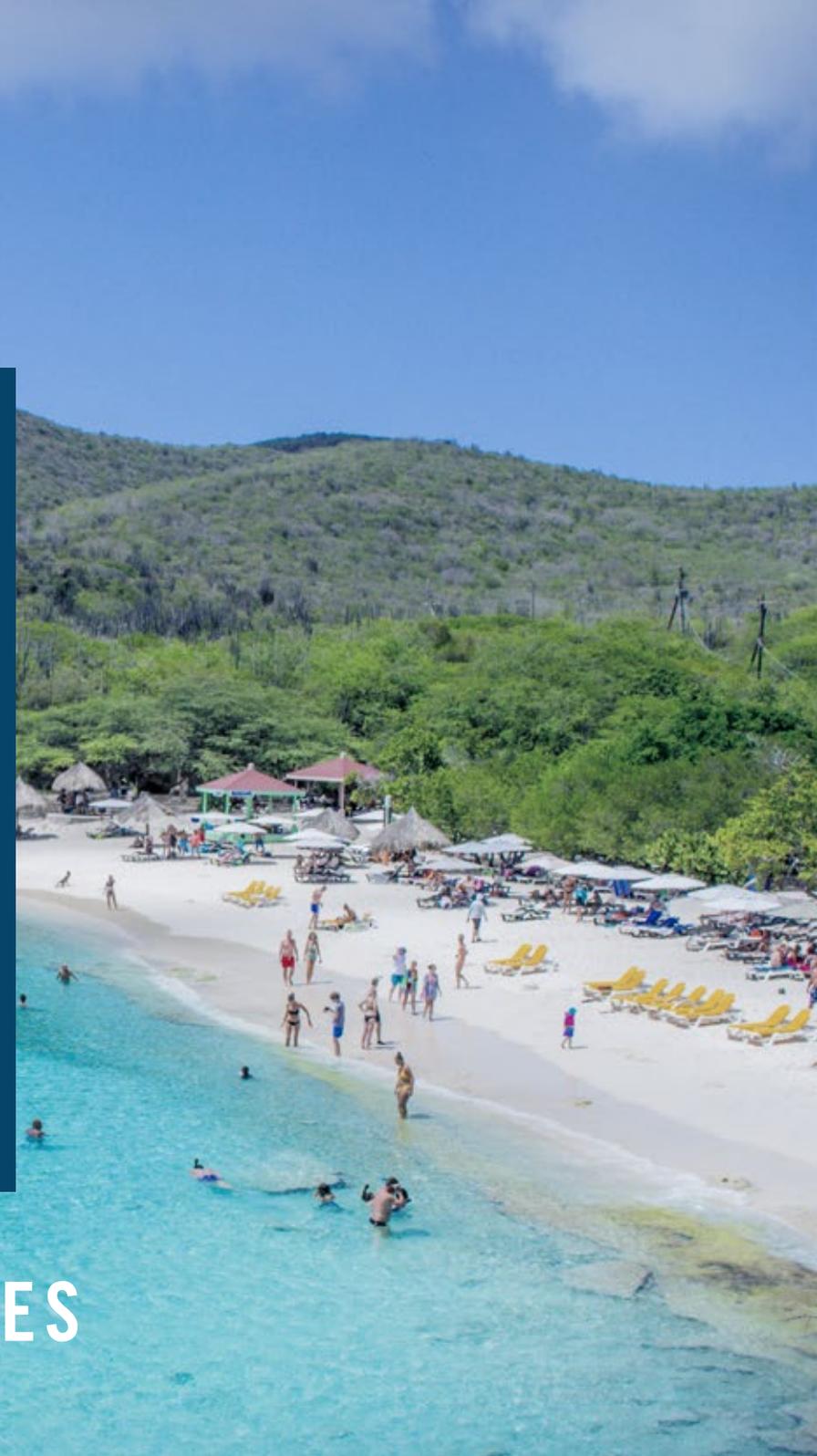
CONSULTANCY

INTUITION IS AN ABSTRACT CONCEPT, BUT ALLIED FORCES' PARTNER ANTON VAN DEN BERG EXPERIENCED HOW CONCRETE IT CAN BE. LIFE SAVING EVEN, ON A MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN. IN THIS NEW WAR STORY HE ELABORATES ON HOW HE DISCOVERED INTUITION, SUPPRESSED IT AND THEN REVIVED IT AGAIN. ALL OVER THE WORLD ANTON HAS DEVELOPED SUCCESSFUL ORGANISATIONS, MANAGERS AND TEAMS. AND HE LEARNED TO AWARD INTUITION A WORTHY PLACE.

At an early age I knew I was different. I could sense people's emotions very clearly: sadness, happiness, thoughts, mutual atmosphere. And that went even further, up to a level of psychic abilities. I remember looking out of my bedroom window as a small child. We were living in Curaçao then. I slept at the front of the house, so I could see who came to visit my parents in the evenings. Once I looked through the curtains and saw our Curaçao neighbour in the drive approaching the house. Right behind her a European looking woman with long, dark brown hair.

My mother let the guests in, they started talking and after a while I noticed that I could only hear two voices. My intuition told me to go and size up the situation. I was 14 years old, had already reached puberty and was always curious. In the living room I only saw my mother and the neighbour. "Where is your friend, who I just saw," I asked the neighbour. She answered: "You mean my guardian angel, a blonde, white woman who is always with me? I sensed you could see her." I felt warm shivers all over my body for quite some time.

ALLIED FORCES
CONSULTANCY



TERRIFYING EXPERIENCE

Around the same time I had another terrifying experience. Every evening, when I went to bed, I could hear somebody breathe. As if someone was lying right next to me. I had talked about it during dinner, but in our Christian family there was no room for such things. My father is a marine and would repeat regularly “that is an emotion which you can switch off boy”. Switching off emotions was instilled on me from an early age. I decided to start the fight with myself. If “that what is keeping me awake each night” wants to hurt me, “then bring it on”. The result was that I would still get cold chills sometimes, but by focussing I got more peace and I learned to live with it.

It did mean that I was suppressing my strong intuition and high sensitivity. Even though I realised I wasn't 'normal', I didn't want anyone to know about it. So they wouldn't think I was weird or crazy. I switched off my emotions as much as I could, but my emotions didn't leave me.

After secondary school, back in the Netherlands, I had to choose what study I wanted to do. I was interested in Human Movement Sciences, a combination of sport and science. But that was mainly theory and little sport. I ran into an acquaintance in the church, Frits. He told me that he was attending a 'university' where they were doing a lot of sports: the Officer Candidate School of the Dutch Marine Corps. My grandfather was a marine, my father was a marine, so impulsively I said: never!

But blood is thicker than water, so I did go and check it out. And indeed: I fell for it. The practical training to officer of the Dutch Marines (POTOM) was an intensive 9 months programme. I am quite small, but I had a very strong urge to prove myself, especially to

ALLIED FORCES
CONSULTANCY



myself. The POTOM is not only physically challenging with sometimes only a couple of hours sleep per week, but especially mentally draining. Doing the POTOM was a very important period in my life. This is where my leadership's DNA was reinforced. There were so many moments when I wanted to quit but managed to push myself over a new limit. An enormous pitbull had been lurking inside me.

THE ROADSIDE BOMB

After several executive positions my unit (composed of different military branches) got the assignment to go to Afghanistan. At that time a dangerous weapon was introduced there, a threat we hadn't encountered before: the roadside bomb (Improvised Explosive Devices, IEDs). Just before that, we had been cruelly confronted with it by the death of our colleague Dennis, with whom I had trained.

So nobody needed to tell us how serious the threat was. Each step can be your last. And indeed: My unit got the primary task of locating IEDs. If you miss one, your buddy will get blown up. Or you of course.

Our unit was completely new, with only a couple of months of preparation together. We trained intensively on drills (hard skills) and soft skills. Out of respect, openness, honesty and an enormous loyalty we got to know each other better as people and we improved each other with constructive criticism. Sometimes I would drive the men and the women crazy. "We did so well, why do we have to do the exercise again?" My answer was always the same: "Because we will need to do everything we can to get everyone back alive."

We discussed everything openly and respectfully. We created a High Performing Culture where everyone could say what was bothering him or her, so we, as a team, could perform our task even better. We were conscious of the fact that the mission would be dangerous, with no guarantee for a positive outcome.

ALLIED FORCES
CONSULTANCY



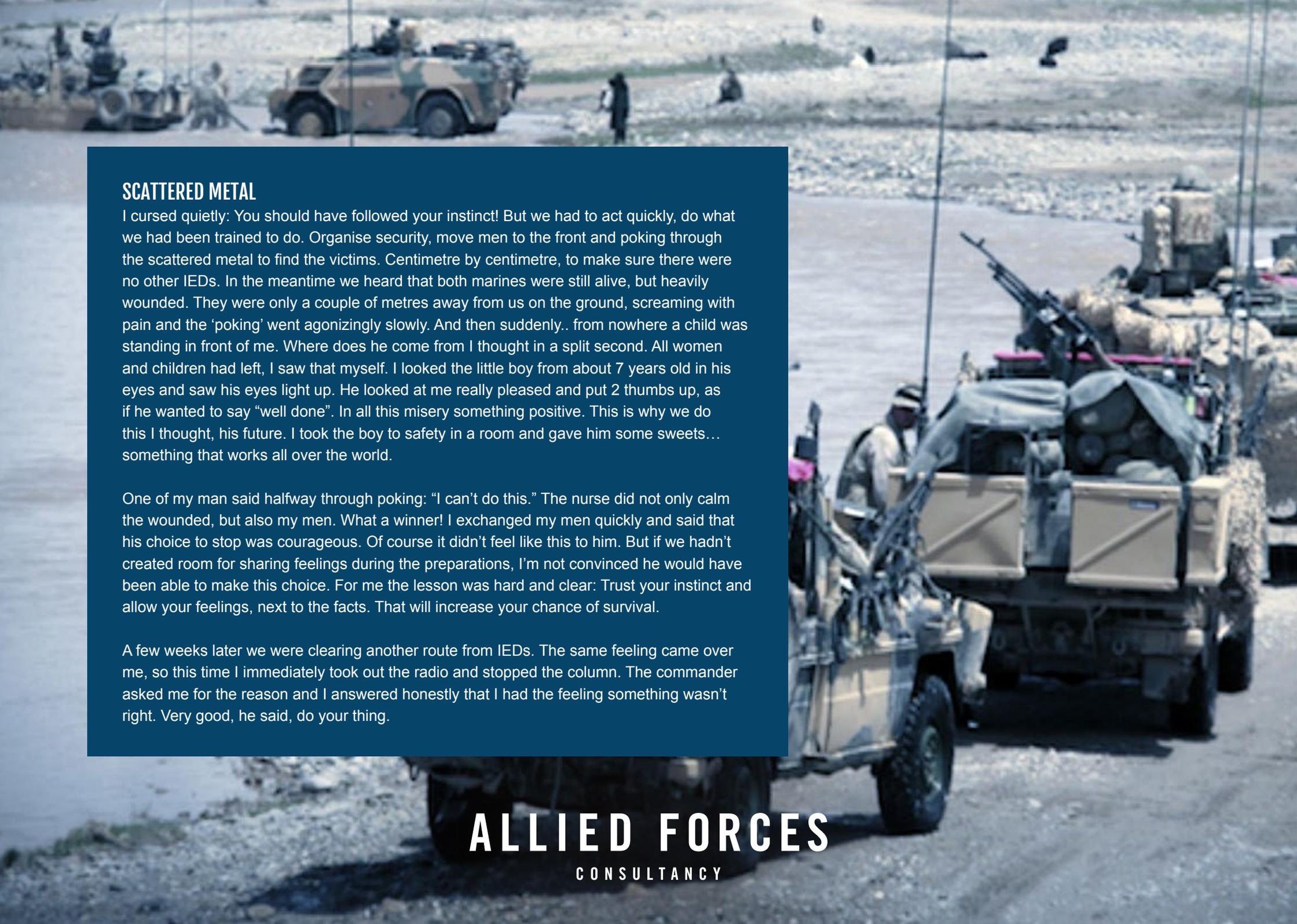
I instinctively felt that my unit was possibly about to perform the most stressful job and that we could only be successful out of full trust, resilience and positivity. I trained them to the extreme, but with a good balance in calm and trust. Anything to be able to look each other in the eye and say: “Despite the possibility that this could be my death, I will take on the challenge with this team.”

ANYTHING TO RETURN IN ONE PIECE

Because of months of intensive training I had little awareness of the course of my wife’s pregnancy, who had given birth to our second child in the meantime. Mike was a couple of months old and I was over the moon, but had to keep my focus on the team and the mission. This might sound hard, but I justified it with the reasoning that I had to do everything possible to return in one piece, for my wife and children. I had taught myself to switch of my emotions to perform optimally. How diametrically different I would be thinking about this after the mission in Afghanistan.

I thought Afghanistan was of outstanding beauty, which was kind of surrealistic with weapons, munition, water and a bullet proof vest to protect my body. Sweaty because of the heat, the weight and the constant alertness we were walking through the beautiful landscape. On one of our first patrols my intuition suddenly took over from my brain. I will never forget how we noticed the wind drop and the birds stop whistling... suddenly it was dead quiet. Do you notice it too, I asked a marine next to me. As if evil was descending around us. I stood still completely focused and felt something was really wrong. But when I got out my radio, I had my doubts: “What are you going to say, Anton, that you have a bad feeling, without concrete facts? That will come across as weird. And then: BOOM! White smoke went up from the forest, a couple of hundred of metres away. Immediately we hear: “IED, IED! Two own forces wounded or dead!” over the radio.

ALLIED FORCES
CONSULTANCY



SCATTERED METAL

I cursed quietly: You should have followed your instinct! But we had to act quickly, do what we had been trained to do. Organise security, move men to the front and poking through the scattered metal to find the victims. Centimetre by centimetre, to make sure there were no other IEDs. In the meantime we heard that both marines were still alive, but heavily wounded. They were only a couple of metres away from us on the ground, screaming with pain and the 'poking' went agonizingly slowly. And then suddenly.. from nowhere a child was standing in front of me. Where does he come from I thought in a split second. All women and children had left, I saw that myself. I looked the little boy from about 7 years old in his eyes and saw his eyes light up. He looked at me really pleased and put 2 thumbs up, as if he wanted to say "well done". In all this misery something positive. This is why we do this I thought, his future. I took the boy to safety in a room and gave him some sweets... something that works all over the world.

One of my man said halfway through poking: "I can't do this." The nurse did not only calm the wounded, but also my men. What a winner! I exchanged my men quickly and said that his choice to stop was courageous. Of course it didn't feel like this to him. But if we hadn't created room for sharing feelings during the preparations, I'm not convinced he would have been able to make this choice. For me the lesson was hard and clear: Trust your instinct and allow your feelings, next to the facts. That will increase your chance of survival.

A few weeks later we were clearing another route from IEDs. The same feeling came over me, so this time I immediately took out the radio and stopped the column. The commander asked me for the reason and I answered honestly that I had the feeling something wasn't right. Very good, he said, do your thing.

ALLIED FORCES
CONSULTANCY

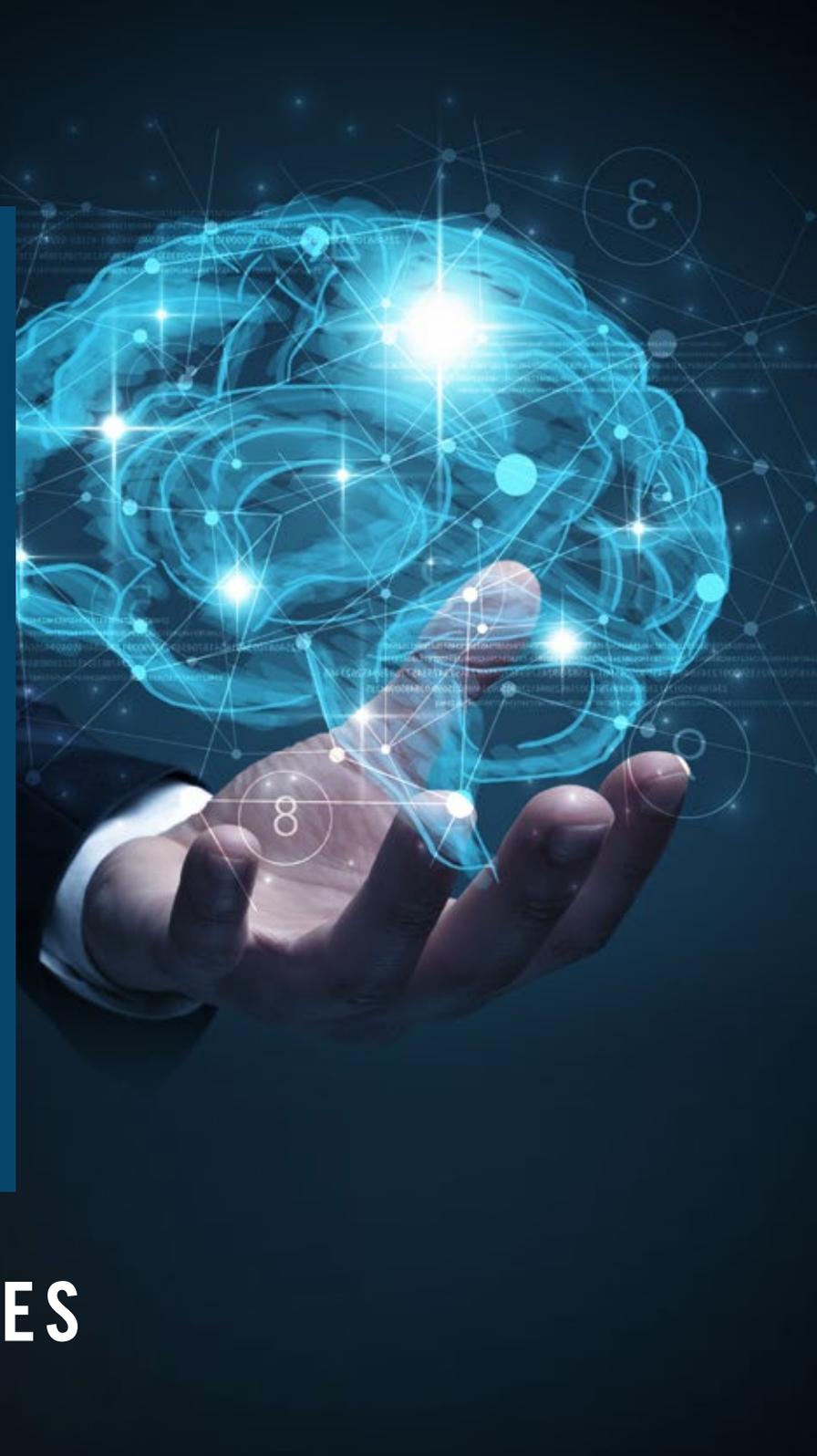
We got out of our vehicles and everyone took up their tasks. Halfway one of the men came back and told me: "Don't ask me how I know, but within now and 50 meters I will find an IED. I can just sense it." He said he could no longer use his equipment and had to follow his instincts. That is really not done, you always do all your drills with your equipment. So I told him to take his equipment, but also to follow his instincts."

He continued walking, to an apparent random spot that drew his attention. He poked in the ground carefully and unbelievably: He found a roadside bomb, which we would never have found with our equipment. If we had followed the standard procedures, one of the vehicles would certainly have been blown up. With all its terrible consequences. I held him firmly and said: "Good job, boss, well done!"

SOFT STUFF OR HARD EVIDENCE

There is more and more scientific evidence concerning the functioning of the brain and the balance between the emotional and cognitive brain. Information reaches the emotional brain to up to 30 times faster than the cognitive brain. Emotions therefore determine a lot of our choices. You know everything from the inside, the body has all the information. This ensures better decisions and makes you more resilient. The limbic system (emotional brain) is a command post which constantly receives information from different parts of the body and will respond to it, and preserves the physiological balance. Just like how I physically froze unexplainably, because I felt something was unsafe.

In the ideal situation the emotional and cognitive brain complement each other. But from creation our brain is programmed to survive. This triggers an alarm signal when our brain observes danger, which stops all activity in our cognitive brain within seconds. The emotional brain signals danger and will completely focus on it until the danger has gone.





By learning to switch of my emotional brain, insensitivity could have developed, which causes your intuition to stop working. To let go of this acquired system, took courage, because it meant that more emotions would surface. Just like those nights someone would be lying next to me, without being physically there. But I got confirmation that it is valuable to use my intuition. And it is an incentive to keep developing it.

COURSE MAKER

These are only a couple of examples from the many moments where intuition saved us in Afghanistan. During this mission I learned to rely on it. As a human and as a leader I have developed my intuition further in the following years. Today it is a very important course maker, at work and privately. When issues become vague, uncontrollable or when my sensitivity surfaces, I will follow my instinct.

Now we can measure the brain better, perception become truth. Even in my youth in Curaçao I felt there was more, in Afghanistan I really experienced it. I can't phrase it more clearly: Intuition saves lives.

P.S.: This is Anton's personal story, not necessarily the point of view of the Dutch Marine Corps.

ALLIED FORCES
CONSULTANCY