

# American Sniper



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CHRIS KYLE

Chris Kyle was born and raised in Texas. As a young man, he signed up for the military, and trained to be a Navy SEAL—an elite branch of the military whose members are skilled at fighting in the sea, land, and air. Kyle married shortly before deploying to Iraq in 2003. During his subsequent tours of the Middle East with the SEALs, Kyle became the deadliest sniper in American history, shooting well over one hundred alleged insurgents. After many years of arguing about it with his wife, Kyle decided to retire from the SEALs in 2009. Afterwards, he penned the memoir *American Sniper*, wrote a history of guns in America, *American Gun* (2013), founded a sniping training school, and became an active participant in programs aimed at helping veterans with serious PTSD. Kyle was murdered by a mentally disturbed veteran in 2013.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The one overarching historical event in *American Sniper* is the War on Terror, the term often applied to America's involvement in fighting terrorism around the world, especially in the Middle East, in the 2000s. On September 11, 2001, terrorists flew airplanes into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon; afterwards, an anti-U.S. terrorist group called al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for the attack. In response, the American government, at the time presided over by President George W. Bush, sent troops to the Middle East. However, the Bush administration faced wide criticism for sending troops primarily to Iraq and Afghanistan, countries whose connection to the 9/11 attacks was, to say the least, vague. In Iraq, U.S. forces overthrew the dictator Saddam Hussein, and installed a democratic government. The War on Terror remains a highly controversial topic: some have argued that it was partly a “smokescreen” for the Bush administration's true priority: gaining access to Iraq's lucrative oil reserves. Others have argued that the War on Terror created more terrorists than it killed, since U.S. military action in the Middle East polarized the region and pushed moderate people to join anti-U.S. and terrorist causes.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Kyle's memoir doesn't allude to many other books, but it's worthwhile to compare it with several other memoirs about the U.S. military. In 2007, Kyle's close friend Marcus Luttrell wrote a book called [Lone Survivor](#) about his own experiences in the Middle East in the 2000s; it's likely that Kyle read Luttrell's book and modeled his own memoir after it in some ways. Kyle's

memoir also bears comparison with *Dispatches* by Michael Herr, a memoir about Herr's time as a war correspondent in Vietnam in the early 1970s. However, Kyle's memoir glamorizes war and the act of killing, while Kerr's memoir is highly critical of America's involvement in the Vietnam War, and gives a fuller account of the trauma and mental problems that soldiers experienced after fighting in Vietnam.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** American Sniper: The Autobiography of the Most Lethal Sniper in U.S. Military History
- **When Written:** 2011-2012
- **Where Written:** Texas
- **When Published:** January 2, 2012
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Autobiography
- **Setting:** Texas, California, various cities in Iraq during the War on Terror
- **Climax:** Kyle's decision not to reenlist in the military
- **Antagonist:** The “savage” terrorist insurgency in the Middle East
- **Point of View:** First-person (Kyle)

### EXTRA CREDIT

**A controversial man.** Chris Kyle remains a hero to many people; however, many regard him as a brutal, bloodthirsty, racist killer who enjoyed murdering Iraqis, whether they were insurgents or not. After Kyle's death in 2013, there were several independent reports that Kyle had boasted of shooting at black looters during the Hurricane Katrina disaster of 2005. Kyle claimed that the U.S. government had sent him down to New Orleans to preserve order, and that he'd enjoyed shooting thieves. While there's absolutely no evidence that Kyle was ever in New Orleans at the time of Hurricane Katrina, the fact that Kyle would brag about shooting (mostly black) looters suggests a disturbing propensity for lying and exaggerating, and an even more disturbing racist worldview.

**Would you pick a fight with a professional wrestler?.** One of the more bizarre aspects of *American Sniper*'s publication was the lawsuit launched against Kyle by Jesse “The Body” Ventura, a former professional wrestler and governor of Minnesota. In the initial copies of Kyle's memoir, there was a passage suggesting that Kyle had gotten into a fistfight with Ventura at a Navy SEAL's funeral. Kyle claimed to have punched Ventura after Ventura suggested that the SEALs deserved to “lose a few.” Ventura successfully sued Kyle for nearly 2 million dollars,

and subsequent copies of the memoir omitted the passage in question.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Chris Kyle, the deadliest sniper in U.S. military history, is born and raised in Texas. He grows up hunting with his father, and develops a strong sense of duty to his country. In 1996 he signs up for the U.S. military, and is recommended for the Navy SEALs, at the time a relatively unknown branch trained to fight on land, in the sea, and in the air. Kyle makes it through intense physical training, during which he's water-boarded, forced to exercise for hours at a time without rest, and deprived of sleep.

Shortly after completing his SEAL training, Kyle is stationed in Long Beach, California, with Team 3 of the Navy SEALs. There, he meets his future wife, Taya. Taya is attracted to Kyle in part because he's unusually humble for a SEAL; at one point, he tells her, "I'd lay down my life for my country."

Kyle is stationed in California during September 11, 2001; he's horrified by al-Qaeda's terrorist atrocities, and wants to deploy to the Middle East as soon as possible. In the end, it takes almost two years for Kyle to deploy. During this time, Kyle continues to train rigorously for combat. He also marries Taya. Shortly after their honeymoon, Kyle ships out to the Middle East for his first tour.

In the Persian Gulf, Kyle works with Team 3 to raid Iraqi oil tankers suspecting of sneaking oil out of the country. He finds that he enjoys firing a **gun**, and feels "badass" in active combat. In spring 2003, Kyle and the rest of Team 3 arrive in Iraq as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the operation designed to liberate the Iraqi people from the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. In Iraq, Kyle's duties include raiding houses, securing oil fields, and fighting small groups of insurgents. He develops a deep hatred for the insurgents, many of whom are fundamentalist Muslims, who are trying to kill him and his friends.

Kyle returns from his first deployment and reunites with Taya Kyle. Taya immediately notices that her husband has changed: war has made him moodier and angrier. While back in the U.S., Kyle attends sniper school and learns how to shoot accurately from incredibly long distances. Kyle is only an average sniper, he admits, but while stationed in Iraq, he has ample opportunity to shoot insurgents. Before shipping back to Iraq, Taya gives birth to their first child, a baby boy. Taya begins to hate Kyle for leaving her to take care of their child.

Back in Iraq, Kyle collaborates with the Polish GROM fighters (the counterparts to the SEALs). He raids apartment complexes suspected of harboring insurgents, and provides sniper backup for his friends. Kyle finds that he feels little guilt or hesitation about shooting insurgents—he knows he's doing the right thing. On his second deployment, Kyle earns a Bronze Medal for valor.

Kyle returns from his second deployment, and Taya finds it even more difficult to talk to him than usual. Kyle struggles with the pace of civilian life, and sometimes wakes up screaming in the middle of the night; however, he begins to bond with his child. Taya senses that Kyle is guilty about some of his actions in Iraq, but doesn't want to ask him about what he did. She admires her husband greatly for his service to their country.

Kyle returns to Iraq, which has been liberated from Saddam Hussein. The country is full of dangerous insurgents, and Kyle and the SEALs work hard to make the city of Fallujah safe. Kyle also spends a short time near the Euphrates River, where he provides sniper backup for U.S. Marines. Kyle and his platoon are next transferred to the city of Baghdad, where they're tasked with protecting democratic officials as the country prepares for its first elections. Privately, Kyle believes that democracy will never catch on in Iraq. He endures a few minor injuries during his time in Baghdad, but refuses to seek medical attention—he knows that seeing a doctor is a recipe for being sent home. On his third tour, Kyle amasses a huge number of insurgent kills, and begins to acquire a reputation as a superb soldier.

Back in the U.S. again, Kyle begins to bond with his son. However, he and Taya continue to have marital problems, especially after Taya learns that Chris is planning on reenlisting in the military. Taya warns Chris that if he does so, she'll know that he values the SEALs more highly than he values his wife and child. Nevertheless, Kyle reenlists. A few days before Kyle leaves for Iraq, Taya has an emergency C-section, and gives birth to their second child, a baby girl.

In 2006, back in Iraq, Kyle bonds with some new recruits, including a young, funny SEAL named Ryan Job, and an older, charismatic SEAL named Marc Lee. Kyle hazes the new SEALs, along with his friends, but comes to consider both Lee and Job good friends. Kyle and his fellow SEALs are deployed to the region of Ramadi to fight insurgents. The SEALs are also tasked with training Iraqi soldiers and police officers; however, Kyle finds this work to be useless, since most Iraqi soldiers and police officers are lazy and undisciplined. Kyle and the SEALs also fight in the Battle of Ramadi, when American troops take over the city.

On this tour, Kyle learns that he's acquired the nickname "The Devil of Ramadi"—insurgents know that he's a deadly sniper, and have put a huge bounty on his life. Nevertheless, Kyle continues with his work, providing backup for the troops and raiding Iraqi houses, which the military quickly converts into bases.

One day, Kyle leads a group of SEALs through Ramadi, and tells Ryan Job to stand to one side of the street. Because of where he stands, Job is shot in the head by an insurgent, and ends up losing both eyes. Shortly afterwards, insurgents kill Marc Lee. Kyle is devastated by both tragedies, and feels particularly guilty for Job's accident. Then, in September 2006, Kyle learns

that his daughter might be dying of leukemia. He decides to go back to the U.S., though he feels guilty for leaving his soldiers behind.

Back in the U.S., Kyle learns that his daughter is going to live. He begins drinking heavily, and finds that he's suffering from knee injuries he sustained over the course of his last few tours in Iraq. He spends five months in physical therapy to ensure that he'll be able to fight in Iraq again. Before leaving for his deployment, Kyle promises Taya that he won't reenlist after this tour.

Kyle is deployed to Sadr City, where he and his fellow SEALs raid houses and fight a group of insurgents called the Mahdi Army. While fighting in Sadr City, Kyle has several brushes with death—one day, he's shot in the back, and the force of a bomb throws him to the ground. Violence is escalating in Sadr City, and Kyle tells his superiors that the military needs to fight harder, rather than trying to win the "hearts and minds" of moderate civilians. Much to Kyle's annoyance, his superiors ignore his suggestions.

Kyle finally ships out of Iraq in 2008. He's tempted to reenlist, but ultimately decides not to because of his promise to Taya. Back in the U.S., he reunites with Ryan Job, with whom he remains good friends until Job's tragic death from surgical complications. Kyle also founds a shooting school with an old friend. He cuts back on drinking, goes to counseling with Taya, and decides that he wants to remain married to her. Looking back, he decides that his time in the SEALs has made him a stronger, better man.

of the War on Terror and the wounds, both physical and psychological, that soldiers endure after combat.

**Marcus Luttrell** – A SEAL who serves in the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, and one of Chris Kyle's closest friends. Marcus Luttrell was involved in one of the most famous operations of the War on Terror, Operation Red Wings. During this military action, Taliban soldiers ambushed Luttrell and his fellow SEALs, and Luttrell was the lone survivor of the attack. Luttrell went on to pen a book about his experiences in the war, [Lone Survivor](#).

**Taya Kyle** – Chris Kyle's wife, Taya Kyle is the co-narrator of *American Sniper*. Taya meets Kyle while Kyle is still training to become a SEAL, and they get married shortly before Kyle deploys to Iraq for the first time. Taya loves Kyle intensely, and she struggles with her feelings about Kyle's military service. On one hand, she admires her husband for his loyalty to his country; on the other, she's furious with him for refusing to give up the SEALs and spend more time with her, even after they become parents. In all, Taya's voice is a vital part of *American Sniper*. She adds a civilian's perspective to the story of Kyle's experiences in the Middle East, and her suffering as Kyle's wife underscores the basic tension of the book: between loyalty to one's country and loyalty to one's family.

**Ryan Job** – A SEAL who serves alongside Chris Kyle in Iraq, Ryan Job is an extremely likeable, funny man, and one of Kyle's closest friends. In the middle of an operation, Kyle tells Job to stand in the street and provide backup—an order that, tragically, leads to Job being shot in the head. Miraculously, Job survives his attack, though he eventually loses his vision in both eyes. Kyle is overcome with grief and guilt for his friend's ordeal. Nevertheless, Kyle and Job continue to be good friends, and Job provides Kyle with a model of how to adjust to civilian life. Sadly, Job dies during a subsequent surgery.

**Osama Bin Laden** – Saudi Arabian terrorist and leader of the terrorist group al-Qaeda, Bin Laden was critical in the planning and execution of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Bin Laden went into hiding shortly after 9/11, though he continued to control al-Qaeda for much of the 2000s. U.S. soldiers shot and killed him in 2011.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Matthew** – Polish sniper whom Chris Kyle befriends during his first tour of Iraq.

**Mustafa** – Iraqi sniper and former Olympic marksman who becomes a deadly insurgent in the city of Fallujah.

**Runaway** – A cowardly American soldier who nearly costs Chris Kyle his life by failing to provide backup.

**Marc Lee** – Charismatic, intensely religious SEAL who serves alongside Chris Kyle in Iraq, but later becomes the first member of Kyle's platoon to die.

**Tony** – An experienced sniper who serves as Chris Kyle's chief



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Chris Kyle** – The protagonist, narrator, and author of *American Sniper*, Chris Kyle was the deadliest sniper in American history. Stationed in Iraq as a Navy SEAL for several years in the mid-2000s, Kyle shot over a hundred "insurgents," winning medals and commendations for his actions. In the book, we learn about Kyle's military service, his long, difficult relationship with his wife, Taya Kyle, and his struggle to overcome the traumas of combat and adjust to civilian life. Kyle's life came to a tragic ending after the publication of *American Sniper*: a mentally disturbed veteran named Eddie Ray Routh shot and murdered Kyle, for reasons that remain unclear. For many, the greatest challenge of reading *American Sniper* will be deciding what to think of Chris Kyle. On one hand, Kyle was clearly a brave man who risked his life to defend his country and keep his family safe from harm. On the other hand, there's a convincing case to be made that Kyle was a racist, a bully, and a sadist, who bragged about shooting Iraqi "savages," and wished that he could have shot even more people than he did. Whatever one comes to think of Kyle, his life and career paints a vivid portrait

(commander and supervisor) during Kyle's time in Ramadi.

**Mike Monsoor** – Navy SEAL who heroically saves the lives of his fellow SEALs by absorbing the force of a grenade, sacrificing his own life in the process.

**Dick Couch** – Former Navy SEAL and successful author who becomes an important advocate for the “hearts and minds” model of warfare; in other words, the theory that American troops should be trying to befriend the civilians of Iraq, instead of simply killing them—a theory that Chris Kyle finds absurd.

**Mark Spicer** – British sniper and friend of Chris Kyle, with whom Kyle founds Craft International, a sniper training program.

**Saddam Hussein** – Brutal dictator of Iraq in the 1990s and early 2000s.

**Debbie Lee** – The mother of Marc Lee, and an important figure in veterans' affairs in the 2000s.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### THE WAR ON TERROR

It's impossible to understand Navy SEAL Chris Kyle's memoir *American Sniper* fully without understanding the history of the so-called War on

Terror—the era following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, when the United States stepped up its efforts to fight terrorism around the world, especially in the Middle East.

Under the leadership of President George W. Bush, the military deployed troops to Afghanistan, followed by Iraq. At first, the military's stated goal in these countries was to make America safe by fighting terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda (which had claimed credit for 9/11) and the Taliban (who were believed to support al-Qaeda). However, there was (and continues to be) a significant controversy about the decision to invade Afghanistan and Iraq. Some have argued that neither country played a significant role in the 9/11 attacks, while others have suggested that the Bush administration sent troops there because both countries were perceived as easy targets, because Bush wanted to honor the legacy of his father, the former president George H. W. Bush, or because the administration wanted to gain control over Iraq's valuable oil reserves. Although Kyle doesn't spend much time talking about the politics of the War on Terror, his memoir, focusing on his service in Iraq from 2003 to 2008, paints a vivid picture of the era at the “ground level.”

The central point Kyle's memoir makes about the War on Terror is that it was chaotic. American politicians at the highest levels gave conflicting reasons for sending troops to Iraq and Afghanistan, or gradually changed their stated reason for sending troops. (As Kyle notes, he spent most of his service stationed in Iraq fighting Saddam Hussein, a man who had nothing to do with 9/11.) This confusion about why Americans are fighting in the Middle East, and who their enemies are, “trickles down” to Navy SEALs like Kyle. Kyle recognizes the confused reasons for the War on Terror, but insists that his job is to fight wars, not decide where or why to wage them. Nevertheless, the Navy SEALs struggle to identify which people in Iraq are dangerous terrorists (or “insurgents”) and which are civilians, reflecting the overall vagueness of America's mission in Iraq. The confusion about which Iraqis are allies and which are enemies puts Kyle and his fellow SEALs in a life-or-death situation. The insurgents in Iraq have no trouble identifying American soldiers, but American soldiers have difficulty identifying insurgents. Furthermore, they can't shoot insurgents until the insurgents show visible evidence of hostility—in other words, at the last possible minute. Thus, while insurgents are trying their hardest to kill Americans, Kyle and his peers have to expend extra time and effort deciding who to shoot and who to spare.

This leads to Kyle's other important point about the War on Terror: the futility of the counterinsurgency strategies that the U.S. military used in Iraq. During the 2000s, many journalists and politicians argued that the American military's brutal, intimidating conduct in Iraq was counterproductive because it encouraged civilian Iraqis to join radical terrorist groups; instead, it was suggested, the military should dial back on force and try to win the “hearts and minds” of moderate Iraqis. At several points in *American Sniper*, Kyle insists that the “hearts and minds” strategy is ludicrous. Strangely, he argues that the military's behavior in the Middle East wasn't *too* brutal—it wasn't brutal enough. (See Racism Theme.) While discussing his experiences as a sniper, Kyle constantly bemoans the bureaucracy and “red tape” that he had to deal with in Iraq. He had to write lengthy reports after every kill he made, and worry about the possibility of being court-martialed for shooting an innocent person. Kyle strongly suggests that excessive bureaucracy and commitment to the human rights of the Iraqi people weakened his service, and the overall American war effort. In the end, Kyle offers a controversial interpretation of the War on Terror. In many ways, he seems to regard the War on Terror as a failure; however, he insists that it would have been more successful had the U.S. used a *more* aggressive, less bureaucratic strategy.



### COUNTRY VS. FAMILY

Chris Kyle ships out to the Middle East in 2003, only a few months after marrying his wife, Taya

Kyle. Throughout *American Sniper*, he writes about his conflicting loyalties: he loves Taya and his children, but he also wants to serve his country in Iraq. In a different sense, *American Sniper* shows Kyle negotiating the tension between country and family—the war front and the home front.

For most of the book, Kyle ranks his duty to his country above his duty to his wife and children—he defines himself as a soldier first and a husband/father second. Again and again, when Kyle has the opportunity to retire from the SEALs or reenlist, he chooses to reenlist, even when Taya begs him to stay with her and help raise their children. There are many reasons why Kyle chooses the SEALs over his family: In part, he reenlists because he's been raised to feel a strong sense of duty to his country and his fellow Americans. At the same time, however, Kyle genuinely enjoys the thrills of fighting in Iraq—over and over he brings up how “fun” and “exciting” SEAL life can be. Another reason why Kyle prioritizes military service over family life is that the rules of machismo tell him that reenlisting is the right, manly thing to do. A final, particularly sobering reason that Kyle reenlists is that he can seemingly no longer connect with civilians, even his wife and children—danger and combat have become such an important part of his identity that he struggles to have a normal relationship with anyone who hasn't had the same kinds of experiences.

Toward the end of the book, Kyle begins to reevaluate his life. Gradually, he comes to define himself as a husband and a father first, and a SEAL second. On one hand, the trauma of war begins to leave a mark on Kyle (see Trauma Theme). At the same time, Taya's need for Kyle becomes more immediate: their daughter is seriously ill and needs to spend time with her father. As a result, Kyle agrees to leave Iraq a few weeks early and not reenlist in the SEALs in the future. Ultimately, it's very unclear what to think about the tension between country and family in *American Sniper*. There's never really a moment when Kyle manages to balance his love for his country with his love for Taya—realizing one means sacrificing the other. Kyle seems not to regret his decision to leave Taya so soon after she gives birth, or his decision to reenlist rather than help her raise their children. But at the same time, Kyle never outright says that country is more important than family. Another sign of the book's ambiguity on this issue is that Taya writes that she and Kyle still disagree about whether they want their own children to serve in the military, suggesting that she and Kyle haven't reached any real compromise in the conflict between country and family. In the end, people like Kyle must simply make up their own minds about whether to prioritize their families or their service to their country.



## MACHISMO

One of the key themes of *American Sniper* is the strong culture of machismo—the masculine-oriented aggressiveness, competitiveness, and

glamorization of danger—found in the U.S. military. As Chris Kyle explains, the Navy SEALs have a firm set of beliefs about how men should behave; during the course of his time in the SEALs, he learns these beliefs and later passes them on to new soldiers. Machismo is more than just a cornerstone of military culture: it's an important survival mechanism for Kyle and his fellow SEALs, which preserves morale, creates a bond of trust, and maintains soldiers' sanity in the darkest hours of the war in Iraq.

The essence of military machismo is the ability to withstand the pain and bullying of one's peers, and to celebrate pain and danger in general. During his earliest days in military training camps, Kyle is hazed by the other soldiers; later, when he joins a SEAL platoon, the older, more experienced SEALs haze him constantly. Kyle is ridiculed, beaten, deprived of sleep, forced to drink until he vomits, and subjected to dozens of other forms of abuse. However, as he withstands his various forms of hazing, Kyle gains the respect of his peers. In the eyes of his fellow soldiers, the only way for him to become a real man, and a real SEAL, is to survive the pain. After his hazing, Kyle not only becomes close friends with his fellow SEALs; he goes on to haze other new SEALs and become close friends with them, too. Strangely, in the strong culture of machismo, inflicting pain on one another is a sign of friendship and even love, not hostility.

Later on, Kyle's experiences in Iraq demonstrate why machismo culture is seen as such an important component of military life. During their time in Iraq, Kyle and his friends perpetuate the culture of machismo by taking on risky assignments, volunteering for extra service, and generally welcoming pain and danger. By volunteering for danger (rather than just trying to avoid the next insurgent attack), the SEALs stave off their own fear, stress, and trauma—or at least *seem* to. In effect, machismo encourages the SEALs to meet their problems head-on, instead of becoming passive, traumatized victims. One might say that the culture of machismo is like a vaccination for the Navy SEALs: they introduce pain and danger into their lives voluntarily, and project an overall image of toughness, in order to strengthen themselves against real pain and real danger.

Machismo, the culture that glamorizes pain, danger, and toughness, is an important part of surviving the war in Iraq. However, it can also be an obstacle to the overall success of the war effort. While Kyle maintains that the toughness and brutality of the U.S. military played a decisive role in bringing peace, the history of Iraq since 9/11 disproves his theory: the machismo of American soldiers didn't intimidate the Iraqi people into submission; it just provoked a strong backlash in the region, the effects of which continue to endanger American lives to this day. Military machismo could also be considered an obstacle to adjusting to civilian life. (See Trauma theme.) In the Middle East, Kyle seeks out danger as a psychological coping mechanism; back in the U.S., however, he continues to

aggressively look for danger even after the war is over. In one revealing scene, Kyle goes to a medical research facility and learns that his blood pressure and heart rate *drop* when he enters a stressful situation (i.e., exactly the opposite of how most people would respond to stress). Thus, machismo teaches Kyle how to relax and even enjoy himself in the face of terror, but ultimately, it hurts him (and others) and alienates him from his loved ones by encouraging him to make pain and violence a regular part of his life.



## RACISM

One of the most troubling aspects of *American Sniper* is Chris Kyle's view of Middle Easterners—a view that a great many people have interpreted as outright racism. Again and again, Kyle refers to the people he encounters in Iraq as “savages.” At times, it seems that he's strictly referring to insurgents and terrorists; however, there are many points in the book in which he suggests *all* Iraqis are savage, brutal, and inhuman. Shortly after the publication of *American Sniper*, it was also revealed that Kyle had made racially inflammatory comments about shooting black looters in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, further suggesting his racist worldview.

People who defend *American Sniper* from charges of racism often argue that Chris Kyle hated terrorist insurgents, not all Iraqis. Kyle writes frequently about killing Iraqi insurgents, and even brags about some of his kills. Furthermore, he describes himself as being surrounded by “savages” in Iraq. However, Kyle's defenders insist that the “savages” are radical terrorists—people who are violent, cruel, and contemptible. Kyle's defenders also point to a passage in which he suggests that many of the insurgents in Iraq weren't really Muslims at all; they twisted the Muslim religion to justify their own lust for power and violence. This passage might suggest that Kyle regards Islam as a religion of peace, and does not—like many Islamophobes—regard all Muslims or Islam itself as wicked.

Nevertheless, there is an overwhelming case that Kyle was a racist, and regarded all Iraqis as savage and inhuman. To begin with, the word “savage” (which Kyle repeats again and again) connotes not just evil, but a basic, systematic lack of civilization and morality. Put another way, the word “savage” is always an implicit indictment of an entire group of people, never just one person. This suggests Kyle's belief that Iraq itself is an uncivilized, barbaric country, and that all the people of Iraq are thus barbaric. For example, even though he's been sent to Iraq to install democratic leadership, Kyle expresses his doubts that democracy will ever catch on in the country, again suggesting his broad, general distaste for the Iraqi people, not just a few insurgents. Furthermore, Kyle makes statements suggesting that he sees the lives of Iraqi people as cheap. In one chapter, he begs his commanding officer for the freedom to shoot at all Iraqis riding on mopeds, since he's noticed several insurgents

carrying bombs on such vehicles—the strong possibility that he might end up murdering an innocent human being seems not to concern him in the slightest. In another even more disturbing scene, he brags about refusing to shoot at a child who picks up a gun, noting, “I wasn't going to kill a kid, innocent or not”—clearly suggesting that he thinks it's possible for a small Iraqi child to be *guilty*.

For many of the soldiers who served in Iraq in the 2000s, the greatest challenge of their active duty was telling the difference between dangerous insurgents and ordinary Iraqi people. But unlike many other American soldiers, Kyle seems not to worry about accidentally killing innocent Iraqis; on the contrary, he curses his commanding officers for making him be so cautious with his shots, and for preventing him from shooting *more* people. It's hard not to think that Kyle behaves this way because he doesn't regard the life of an innocent Iraqi as being very valuable to begin with. Kyle remains a hero and a martyr to many, but it's crucial that readers understand not just his bravery and daring, but also his cruelty and flippancy about Iraqi lives—both of which strongly suggest that he was a racist.



## TRAUMA

It is very difficult to discuss trauma in *American Sniper*, because the author, Chris Kyle, barely mentions it; in fact, he never once uses the word.

While many soldiers who served in Iraq suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of their experiences (including guilt for killing other human beings), Kyle claims that he always relished killing Iraqi insurgents, and knows that one day, God will forgive him for his kills. However, Kyle also shows many of the classic symptoms of PTSD, as reported by his wife, Taya Kyle: he screams in his sleep, can't relax as a civilian, drinks heavily, gets into fights, and hungers for more military service. It's entirely possible that Kyle's strong code of machismo leads him to deny his own trauma. Furthermore, it's possible—even if Kyle himself denies it—that Kyle's initial kills in Iraq traumatize him and allow him to make further kills without guilt: PTSD gives him a sense of detachment from his actions in Iraq. Even if it's unclear if the act of killing itself causes trauma in Kyle, it's still important for us to read between the lines and study some of the other wartime experiences that traumatized Kyle.

One of the major causes of trauma in Kyle is his guilt at allowing fellow soldiers to die or come into harm's way. Kyle is given an incredible amount of responsibility in Iraq: not only does he have to defend himself and attack insurgents, but he must also provide backup for his friends as they raid buildings, fight insurgent groups, and build military bases. Even more than the average Navy SEAL, then, Kyle feels a profound sense of responsibility to his peers. Kyle's sense of responsibility turns into guilt after he accidentally puts his close friend Ryan Job in danger. Kyle orders Job, a younger, less experienced officer, to

stand at a street corner; as a result, Job steps into harm's way. An insurgent fires upon Job, hitting him in the head and eventually causing him to go blind. Although Job eventually forgives Kyle, and remains good friends with him, Kyle can't entirely forgive himself for Job's accident. Even when he's back in the U.S. with his wife and children, Kyle continues to feel guilty; it's strongly suggested that he takes his guilt out on himself by drinking heavily and getting into fights. Another major cause of trauma for Kyle is his own sense of mortality. Kyle's military service requires him to endanger his life on an almost daily basis, and the culture of machismo encourages him to savor the thrills of danger. Nevertheless, Kyle's brushes with death take a heavy toll on him. By his final tour of Iraq, he's unable to enjoy fighting, as he claimed he could during his first tours. He feels a constant sense of stress, knowing that he could be shot.

Even if Kyle is too proud to admit it, it seems clear enough that he suffers from trauma as a result of his experiences in wartime. While there is no definite cure for post-traumatic stress disorder, *American Sniper* suggests that it's possible to overcome some of one's trauma, albeit slowly. After returning from the service, Kyle struggles to adjust to the pace and low stakes of civilian life; however, he finds tremendous joy and peace in spending time with his wife and taking care of his two young children. Kyle also finds that he can fend off his own trauma by helping other military veterans deal with their PTSD. Kyle's admirable work with PTSD-suffering veterans has a poignant ending: in 2013, Kyle was murdered by a mentally disturbed veteran—a tragic reminder that trauma sustained in combat can haunt soldiers for the rest of their lives and cause suffering for other people, too. Kyle seems to have been lucky enough to find a measure of relief for his own guilt and trauma, but not everyone is.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



### GUNS

Chris Kyle uses many different kinds of guns over the course of *American Sniper*, and his role and subsequent fame as a sniper (a highly skilled soldier and marksman who shoots enemies from a concealed position) is essentially defined by guns. In general, guns symbolize maturity, machismo, and masculinity in the book. Kyle would even go on to write another book called *American Gun: A History of the U.S. in Ten Firearms*.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the HarperCollins edition of *American Sniper* published in 2013.

### Prologue Quotes

☹☹ It was my duty to shoot, and I don't regret it. The woman was already dead. I was just making sure she didn't take any Marines with her.

It was clear that not only did she want to kill them, but she didn't care about anybody else nearby who would have been blown up by the grenade or killed in the firefight. Children on the street, people in the houses, maybe *her* child. She was too blinded by evil to consider them. She just wanted Americans dead, no matter what.

**Related Characters:** Chris Kyle (speaker)

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 4

### Explanation and Analysis

In the opening section of *American Sniper*, Chris Kyle prepares to take his first shot as a sniper in Iraq. He sees a woman walking down the streets, toward a group of American soldiers—suddenly, he notices that the woman is carrying a brightly colored grenade. Kyle hesitates to shoot the woman; he's naturally reluctant to kill her. But with the encouragement of his commander, Kyle takes his shot, kills the woman, and saves the lives of his fellow soldiers.

The passage is important because it marks the first and last time in the book that Kyle shows any hesitation to kill an enemy. Kyle insists that he has no regrets for his actions—even though he doesn't like killing a woman, he maintains that he did so for the greater good, protecting his friends.

The subtext of this passage—apparent in the way Kyle attacks the woman and accuses her of being utterly evil—is that snipers have to replace all sympathy with hatred in order to do their jobs. In other words, Kyle sincerely believes that the insurgents he shoots are utterly, irredeemably evil—they're trying to kill Americans, and don't care who else dies in the process. As a result, he feels no compunction about ending their lives.

## Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ Getting through BUD/S and being a SEAL is more about mental toughness than anything else. Being stubborn and refusing to give in is the key to success. Somehow I'd stumbled onto the winning formula.

**Related Characters:** Chris Kyle (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 32-33

### Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter Two, Kyle describes his time in boot camp for the Navy SEALs, at the time a relatively obscure branch of the military. Kyle was subjected to a torturous regimen of exercise, assault drills, and psychological abuse. Over the course of his time in training, Kyle not only got in the best physical condition of his life; he also built up strong psychological defenses in response to his drill sergeants' and peers' bullying and verbal abuse. As he suggests here, the purpose of boot camp isn't just to get in good shape; it's to toughen up one's mind and become a more determined person.

The passage is particularly important because it makes a distinction between physical and mental wounds. In many ways, the psychological wounds that Kyle endures during his time in Iraq are more harmful than any of his physical wounds. Kyle's stubbornness and refusal to give in serve him exceptionally well in Iraq—he doesn't hesitate to kill insurgents, and when his service is complete he even reenlists, so determined is he to fight “evil” in the Middle East. However, as we learn over the course of the book, not even Kyle's stubbornness can protect him from guilt and stress.

☞ "I would lay down my life for my country," he answered.  
"How is that self-centered? That's the opposite."  
He was so idealistic and romantic about things like patriotism and serving the country that I couldn't help but believe him.

**Related Characters:** Taya Kyle, Chris Kyle (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 49

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Taya meets her future husband, Chris Kyle, for the first time. Chris immediately charms her, both

because he's handsome and athletic and because he's unusually humble for a Navy SEAL. Taya thinks of most Navy SEALs as being exceptionally arrogant and hot-headed. Kyle, on the other hand, is calmer and humbler: he insists that he would sacrifice his life for his country, what he claims is the most selfless gesture imaginable.

Taya is one of the most important characters in the memoir, and in this passage, it's easy to see why. Kyle sometimes comes across as excessively proud, hot-headed, and even cruel; however, through Taya's eyes, readers come to see Kyle as a more complex figure. Kyle is aggressive and often unlikeable, but he seems to feel a sincere love for his country, and as a result of this love, he risks his life again and again, saving the lives of his friends in the process.

## Chapter 4 Quotes

☞ *Fuck, I thought to myself, this is great. I fucking love this. It's nerve-wracking and exciting and I fucking love it.*

**Related Characters:** Chris Kyle (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 88

### Explanation and Analysis

During Chris Kyle's first tour of the Middle East, he accumulates a lot of experience firing a gun in combat. While many soldiers in the Middle East later reported being deeply traumatized by the experience of discharging a weapon in the line of duty, Kyle says just the opposite: he claims to love the feeling of firing a weapon, and the overall experience of being in battle.

It's difficult to write about *American Sniper*, in part because it's hard to decide whether to take Kyle at his word, or to assume that his swagger and machismo conceal trauma and stress. In other words, does Kyle really “fucking love” warfare, or does he just say so because he thinks it's his duty as a SEAL to act tough at all times? On one hand, Kyle insists again and again that he enjoys the thrills of war; on the other, Taya reports that Kyle shows many signs of PTSD, including heavy drinking, screaming in his sleep, etc. So it's not entirely clear how we should interpret passages like this one—and, by extension, it's unclear how much sympathy we should feel for Kyle, or how much sympathy Kyle would want us to feel.

●● The people we were fighting in Iraq, after Saddam's army fled or was defeated, were fanatics. They hated us because we weren't Muslim. They wanted to kill us, even though we'd just booted out their dictator, because we practiced a different religion than they did.

Isn't religion supposed to teach tolerance?

People say you have to distance yourself from your enemy to kill him. If that's true, in Iraq, the insurgents made it really easy. My story earlier about what the mother did to her child by pulling the pin on the grenade was only one gruesome example. The fanatics we fought valued nothing but their twisted interpretation of religion. And half the time they just claimed they valued their religion—most didn't even pray. Quite a number were drugged up so they could fight us.

**Related Characters:** Chris Kyle (speaker), Saddam Hussein

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 98

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage is one of the few points in *American Sniper* when Kyle discusses radical Islam—arguably, the threat to which America responded by beginning the War on Terror. In the first half of the passage, Kyle offers a scathing, and arguably very offensive, interpretation of Islam. He points to the radical Muslims who bombed the World Trade Center on 9/11, as well as the radical Muslim insurgents who attacked his friends in Iraq, and argues that they attacked Americans because “we weren't Muslim.” The implication of this point would seem to be that Islam itself is a violent, intolerant religion.

But in the second half of this passage, Kyle seems to offer a slightly more nuanced interpretation of Islam: he suggests that the radical terrorists who threatened American lives may not have been pious Muslims at all. Indeed, many radical insurgents simply pretended to be Muslims, despite not praying, and using a significant amount of drugs (which the Koran forbids).

In all, it's not entirely clear how Kyle feels about Islam—it's not clear if he regards insurgents as representative of Islam in general, or if he believes that Islam is a fundamentally peaceful religion and terrorists are just twisting it to justify their own violent ends. However, there's a convincing case to be made that Chris Kyle was a racist, Islamophobic man, and critics of Kyle often point to this passage as proof.

## Chapter 5 Quotes

●● One time I woke up to him grabbing my arm with both of his hands. One hand was on the forearm and one just slightly above my elbow. He was sound asleep and appeared to be ready to snap my arm in half, I stayed as still as possible and kept repeating his name, getting louder each time so as not to startle him, but also to stop the impending damage to my arm. Finally, he woke and let go. Slowly, we settled into some new habits, and adjusted.

**Related Characters:** Taya Kyle (speaker), Chris Kyle

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 106

### Explanation and Analysis

When Chris Kyle returns to the U.S. after his first deployment in Iraq, it's immediately apparent to Taya that he's changed. He's moody and easily angered, and sometimes, when he sleeps, he inadvertently attacks Taya, here grabbing her arm and seemingly about to break it.

As the passage suggests, Kyle is suffering from trauma brought about by his stressful experiences in Iraq. It's worth noting that Kyle himself never once admits to suffering from wartime trauma of any kind; however, passages like this one strongly imply that he did. Taya endures a tremendous amount of pain as a result of her husband's psychological suffering—she loves her husband, but begins to fear that she doesn't really know him, and that she'll never be able to understand what he experienced in Iraq. However, the passage ends on a cautiously uplifting note: Taya and Chris attempt to adjust to their new life together, and Taya tries to use her love to take care of her husband.

## Chapter 6 Quotes

●● I signed up to protect this country. I do not choose the wars. It happens that I love to fight. But I do not choose which battles I go to. Y'all send me to them. I had to wonder why these people weren't protesting at their congressional offices or in Washington. Protesting the people who were ordered to protect them—let's just say it put a bad taste in my mouth.

**Related Characters:** Chris Kyle (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 134

**Explanation and Analysis**

While he's traveling to Iraq for his second deployment, Chris Kyle notices a group of people protesting America's involvement in the war in Iraq. Kyle finds these protesters despicable, because the protesters choose to target their criticism at American troops, rather than American politicians and military planners. If anything, Kyle argues, protesters should be criticizing politicians and "higher ups," not the people whose job is to protect civilians.

Kyle's comments are interesting because they suggest that he has his own criticisms of the way the war in Iraq was waged (and throughout the rest of the book, we learn more about what his criticisms are). Kyle sees it as his duty to carry out orders without question, not to plan entire wars. Therefore, he carries out his orders in Iraq without question, while still reserving the right to criticize the overall war effort.

●● I didn't go to a doctor. You go to a doctor and you get pulled out. I knew I could get by.

**Related Characters:** Chris Kyle (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 170

**Explanation and Analysis**

Kyle continues to suffer small injuries during his time as a Navy SEAL. However, he never once admits that he's suffering from any kind of pain or injury; on the contrary, he always claims to be perfectly comfortable. In this passage, Kyle gives a very simple reason for doing so: he claims that if he were to go to a doctor, he'd run the risk of being shipped out of Iraq permanently.

It's entirely possible that Kyle is right. However, it's worth considering another reason he would refuse to see a doctor about an injury: the code of machismo. As Kyle goes through the Navy SEALs, he learns to accept and embrace pain, rather than complaining about it. In the eyes of the SEALs, complaining about pain—even very serious pain—is a feminine, pathetic quality. Thus, it's possible that Kyle refuses to seek medical attention because of his own code of values, not just because the doctor would send him back to the U.S.

●● As far as I can see it, anyone who has a problem with what guys do over there is incapable of empathy. People want America to have a certain image when we fight. Yet I would guess if someone were shooting at them [...] they would be less concerned with playing nicely [...] picking apart a soldier's every move against a dark, twisted, rule-free enemy is more than ridiculous; it's despicable.

**Related Characters:** Taya Kyle (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 179

**Explanation and Analysis**

In this passage, Taya offers a carefully worded response to the critics of the war in Iraq who suggest that American soldiers committed human rights abuses and killed innocent people in Iraq. Taya argues that criticizing the American military is "despicable"—American soldiers have a tough job (killing insurgents), and this job shouldn't be made any more difficult due to bureaucracy or nitpicking rules.

It's not clear what Taya defines as "playing nicely." Would it be wrong to criticize the American military, for instance, for torturing and abusing prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison? Would it be wrong to court-martial a sniper for shooting an innocent child? Taya suggests that people shouldn't criticize the American military for its behavior, but surely there must be some standard of ethics to which American troops should be held. However, based on many of Chris Kyle's comments throughout the book (at one point he says he wishes he could kill anyone carrying a Koran), it's possible that neither Taya nor her husband believe there should be any standard of ethics at all for American soldiers—they should be allowed to do whatever they want in Iraq, as long as it gets the "job" done.

**Chapter 7 Quotes**

●● A half-second's more hesitation, and I would have been the one bleeding out on the floor. They turned out to be Chechens, Muslims apparently recruited for a holy war against the West. (We found their passports after searching the house.)

**Related Characters:** Chris Kyle (speaker)

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 186

**Explanation and Analysis**

Here Chris Kyle describes a violent encounter between a group of Chechens and the American military. Kyle and his fellow SEALs enter a house and see a group of blond, Caucasian men. Kyle deduces that these men must be Chechens—Caucasian Muslims, some of whom traveled to Iraq to fight a holy war against the American military. Kyle opens fire on the men, killing them immediately.

There are two disturbing things in this passage. First, although Kyle claims that had he hesitated a little, he would have died, he gives no additional indication that the Chechens were, in fact, armed. Second, Kyle notes parenthetically that he later found the Chechens' passports in the house, confirming that they were, in fact, terrorists. This would suggest that Kyle and the SEALs had to strike preemptively—they had to kill a group of men who may or may not have been terrorists, and later determined that they were terrorists. Whether or not these Chechens were terrorists, the fact that Kyle and his fellow SEALs had to make such a tough, risky decision virtually guarantees that, at some point during his time in Iraq, Kyle accidentally killed an innocent person because he mistook them for a terrorist.

☝ I shot the first beach ball. The four men began flailing for the other three balls.

Snap.

I shot beach ball number two.

It was kind of fun.

Hell—it was a lot of fun.

**Related Characters:** Chris Kyle (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 203

### Explanation and Analysis

In this disturbing passage, Kyle describes one of his most sadistic actions. While stationed at a military base overlooking the Euphrates River, Kyle noticed a group of insurgents trying to swim across the river by holding onto beach balls. Recognizing that the insurgents couldn't swim, Kyle proceeded to shoot each one of the beach balls, slowly allowing the insurgents to drown in the river.

It's frightening that Kyle so jauntily insists that he enjoyed torturing and killing the insurgents. Many American soldiers who fought in the war in Iraq spoke of killing enemy insurgents as a solemn duty—a necessary deed, but hardly something to celebrate—but Kyle claims that he actually

relished the act of killing, and of toying with his victims like this. Some have argued that Kyle's ability to enjoy killing made him a better soldier, and even protected him from the gnawing sense of guilt that causes many soldiers to suffer from PTSD. Others have argued that Kyle was clearly a sadist and a bully.

☝ I never once fought for the Iraqis. I could give a flying fuck about them.

**Related Characters:** Chris Kyle (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 221

### Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter Seven, Kyle explains that he and his fellow SEALs were sent to Iraq in part to install a democratic regime. However, Kyle fiercely denies that he respects the people of Iraq—his goal in the Middle East was to kill as many insurgents as possible and protect his fellow soldiers, not to benefit Iraq itself. Kyle later notes that he doubts democracy will ever flourish in Iraq.

The passage has been cited as an example of Kyle's racism and Islamophobia. Frequently, Kyle refers to Iraqis as "savages"—while it sometimes seems that he's referring strictly to murderous insurgents, it sometimes appears that he's referring to the people of Iraq as a collective group. In this passage, Kyle acknowledges that he doesn't care about Iraqis at all. Perhaps one of the reasons why Kyle claimed not to feel stress or guilt as a sniper is that he didn't care about accidentally killing innocent Iraqis. It would seem he thought that Iraqi lives—even innocent Iraqi lives—weren't worth protecting.

☝ I had trouble holding my tongue. At one point, I told the Army colonel, "I don't shoot people with Korans—I'd like to, but I don't." I guess I was a little hot.

**Related Characters:** Chris Kyle (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 227

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Kyle narrowly avoids a court-martial. He

stands accused of killing an innocent man. Kyle insists that the man he killed was a dangerous insurgent, carrying a weapon, but the man's widow accuses Kyle of murdering an unarmed man, saying that her husband was just carrying a copy of the Koran. During a conversation with his military superiors, Kyle insists again that the man was armed—but more importantly, during this conversation Kyle betrays his true feelings about Muslims: he claims that he'd like to murder anyone carrying a Koran, a clear sign that he wants to kill civilian Iraqis.

Kyle's defenders and apologists praise him as a hero who protected American lives in Iraq. However, comments like the one Kyle makes in this passage (and which he saw fit to print in his book) suggest that, heroic though he might have been, he was also a violent racist.

## Chapter 8 Quotes

☝☝ When he reenlisted anyway, I thought, *Okay. Now I know. Being a SEAL is more important to him than being a father or a husband.*

**Related Characters:** Taya Kyle (speaker), Chris Kyle

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 243

### Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter Eight, Chris Kyle has returned from his duty in Iraq. However, he's seriously considering reenlisting in the military—which potentially means that he'll be in Iraq for years to come. Taya is understandably hurt that Kyle is considering abandoning her and their child again—she finds it difficult to believe that the man she loves would rather risk his life in the Middle East than be there for his family. When Kyle reenlists, Taya draws the obvious conclusion: her husband thinks that the SEALs are more important than his own family.

Taya concisely sums up one basic tension of *American Sniper*: the tension between family and country. Kyle is a brave, talented soldier, and he feels more comfortable on the battlefield than he does back in the U.S. After so many years of combat, Kyle finds it almost impossible to “be himself” in California; he defines himself as a soldier, meaning that when he's back at home, he misses combat.

One thing that Taya misses in this passage is the possibility that Kyle is suffering from PTSD. Like many veterans of deadly wars, Kyle seems to suffer from a constant sense of stress and anxiety. Even though war has left him

traumatized, he feels most comfortable when he's back in the environment that caused him trauma in the first place—in other words, Iraq. (However, it's unclear how greatly trauma influences Kyle's decision to reenlist, since Kyle never discusses his own trauma, and Taya only mentions it at a couple points in the memoir.)

## Chapter 9 Quotes

☝☝ As I watched them coming from the post, I spotted an insurgent moving in behind them. I fired once. The Marine patrol hit the dirt. So did the Iraqi, though he didn't get up.

**Related Characters:** Chris Kyle (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 260

### Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter Nine, Kyle has reenlisted in the military, and he's back in Iraq, faithfully serving as a sniper once more. In this passage, Kyle pulls off a particularly daring shot: he hits an insurgent who is about to ambush two Marines with whom Kyle is working. Kyle's quick thinking and excellent marksmanship save the lives of the Marines, and later on, several of the Marines thank him personally for saving them from danger.

The passage is an important reminder that, whatever one comes to think of Kyle (and there's ample reason to think that he was a bully, a sadist, and a racist), Kyle's actions in the Middle East saved the lives of many American soldiers. Kyle remains a controversial figure; some regard him as a hero, while others regard him as the worst America has to offer. Passages like this one provide an important illustration of why Kyle remains so controversial.

## Chapter 10 Quotes

☝☝ We would bump out five hundred yards, six or eight hundred yards, going deep into Injun territory to look and wait for the bad guys. We'd set up on overwatch ahead of one of his patrols. As soon as his people showed up, they'd draw all sorts of insurgents toward them. We'd take them down. The guys would turn and try and fire on us; we'd pick them off. We were protectors, bait, and slayers.

**Related Characters:** Chris Kyle (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 304

### Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter Ten, Kyle continues to serve in Ramadi, Iraq, alongside the other Navy SEALs. He leads a team of SEALs into one of the most dangerous parts of the region; there, he tries to draw insurgents out into the open, and then he and his fellow SEALs fire at them.

The passage is a good example of both Kyle's bravery and of his often-offensive attitude toward other races. Kyle risks his life to fight insurgents and protect other Americans—in this passage, he effectively offers himself as a human target in order to provoke insurgents. However, it's important to notice the detail that Kyle compares his actions to those of the cowboys who fought with Native Americans (or "Injuns," as Kyle calls them) in the American West. It's very telling that Kyle the Navy SEAL sees himself as a cowboy fighting Native Americans—after all, cowboys, despite being romanticized in American culture, were often murderous, even genocidal figures, who tried to wipe the Native Americans off the face of the Earth. It is sadly appropriate, then, that a 21st-century American racist compares himself to 19th century American racists.

☝ If you loved them, I thought, you should have kept them away from the war. You should have kept them from joining the insurgency. You let them try and kill us—what did you think would happen to them?

It's cruel, maybe, but it's hard to sympathize with grief when it's over someone who just tried to kill you.

**Related Characters:** Chris Kyle (speaker)

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 312

### Explanation and Analysis

Chris Kyle kills many insurgents in Iraq, and in this passage, he witnesses the mother of one of his victims, crying and screaming. Kyle doesn't feel the slightest sympathy for this woman; on the contrary, he blames her for doing a bad job of raising her child. Surely, Kyle thinks, this woman is at least partly responsible for her son's terrorist activities.

The passage is notable for being 1) a particularly clear example of Kyle's cruel, careless attitude toward all the people of Iraq, not just insurgents, and 2) the one moment in

*American Sniper* in which Kyle himself acknowledges the cruelty of his worldview. It seems like a major leap for Kyle to place the blame for his victim's actions on the mother, a woman he's never met before (for all he knows this woman might have tried her hardest to raise her child right, or her son might have been wholly justified in hating America). Kyle's thought process would seem to suggest that he sees all Iraqis as savage—either they're insurgents, or their actions enable insurgents. Kyle's explanation for his own cruelty is that it's a natural reaction when "someone tries to kill you." While there may be a lot of truth in such an explanation, there are many Iraqi veterans who have expressed their sympathy for the families of insurgents, and take a gentler view of Iraqi society.

## Chapter 11 Quotes

☝ I thought Ryan was dead. Actually, he was still alive, if just barely. The docs worked like hell to save him. Ryan would eventually be medevac'd out of Iraq. His wounds were severe—he'd never see again, not only out of the eye that had been hit but the other as well. It was a miracle that he lived. But at that moment at base, I was sure he was dead. I knew it in my stomach, in my heart, in every part of me. I'd put him in the spot where he got hit. It was my fault he'd been shot.

**Related Characters:** Chris Kyle (speaker), Ryan Job

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 322

### Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Chris Kyle makes an innocent mistake that results in the near-fatal injury of his good friend, Ryan Job. The SEALs are patrolling a street, and Kyle tells Job to walk to a certain position; seconds later, insurgents open fire and hit Job in the head. Job ends up surviving his injury, but he loses vision in both eyes. Kyle feels terrible for putting his friend in the line of fire, even accidentally. At the time, he believes that Ryan is going to die, and he can't forgive himself for causing the death of a fellow SEAL.

The passage is significant because it makes one of the only occasions in the book when Kyle discusses the trauma of warfare. Kyle never admits to feeling trauma after shooting insurgents; however, his reaction to the injury of Ryan Job, a friend and fellow soldier, is nothing if not evidence of personal trauma. Notice that Ryan describes his pain and guilt in violent, physical terms—the guilt "hits" him in his stomach and heart. Kyle's descriptions reflect the way that

many veterans have described their own PTSD, suggesting that Kyle suffered from serious psychological trauma as a result of the violence he witnessed in Iraq.

☞ We requested to be cleared hot to shoot anyone on a moped. The request was denied [...] Meanwhile, the insurgents kept using mopeds and gathering intelligence. We watched them closely and destroyed every parked moped we came across in houses and yards, but that was the most we could do. Maybe legal expected us to wave and smile for the cameras.

**Related Characters:** Chris Kyle (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 337

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Kyle has realized that many insurgents in Iraq are riding mopeds and throwing explosives down manholes. As a result, he asks for permission to shoot anyone riding on a moped, and is genuinely puzzled when his superiors deny his request.

It doesn't seem to occur to Kyle—or perhaps it just doesn't matter to him—that innocent civilians might ride mopeds, too. Kyle is so fiercely invested in killing insurgents that he is frustrated by any rule or regulation that might slow him down. Indeed, Kyle criticizes the entire Iraqi War on the grounds that the American military was too slow and bureaucratic—there were too many rules preventing Kyle from a “free reign.”

It's hard not to think that Kyle is indifferent to the possibility of shooting an innocent Iraqi on a moped because he has no respect for Iraqi lives, insurgent or civilian.

## Chapter 12 Quotes

☞ "Where are you?" asked Taya when I finally got a hold of her.

"I got arrested."

"All right," she snapped. "Whatever."

I can't say I blamed her for being mad. It wasn't the most responsible thing I've ever done. Coming when it did, it was just one more irritant in a time filled with them—our relationship was rapidly going downhill.

**Related Characters:** Taya Kyle, Chris Kyle (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 356

### Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter Twelve, Kyle is back in the United States between deployments. He attends the wake of a fellow SEAL, and drinks heavily. In general, Kyle's drinking problems easily spiral out of control at this point in his life: when he drinks, he becomes belligerently violent, and picks fights at bars. One night, Kyle gets in a particularly bad fight and gets arrested (although, due to Kyle's status as a Navy SEAL, the case gets thrown out). When Kyle tells Taya what happened, she's furious—she feels that she barely knows her husband anymore.

It seems likely that Kyle's relationship with Taya is deteriorating in large part because of the trauma he experienced in Iraq, and because he doesn't feel comfortable talking about his feelings. Like many people who suffer from PTSD, Kyle deals with trauma by drinking and fighting, further alienating himself from his wife and loved ones. Kyle and Taya eventually go to marital counseling to confront some of their problems as a couple.

☞ He got up in front of the room and started telling us that we were doing things all wrong. He told us we should be winning their hearts and minds instead of killing them [...] I was sitting there getting furious. So was the entire team, though they all kept their mouths shut. He finally asked for comments. My hand shot up. I made a few disparaging remarks about what I thought we might do to the country, then I got serious. "They only started coming to the peace table after we killed enough of the savages out there," I told him. "That was the key."

**Related Characters:** Chris Kyle (speaker), Dick Couch

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 361

### Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Kyle has an uncomfortable encounter with a veteran and journalist named Dick Couch. Couch is one of the many critics of the war in Iraq who argues that the U.S. military needs to rethink its entire policy in the Middle East. Couch argues that the military has favored an overly aggressive, “shock and awe” style of warfare, when it should be trying to win the “hearts and minds” of average,

moderate Iraqis. Couch's point is simple: the best way to fight insurgency is to prevent undecided people from gravitating toward the insurgents' causes. Therefore, U.S. troops should be trying to work with Iraqi people instead of alienating them and pushing them toward al-Qaeda and other radical groups.

Kyle completely disagrees with Couch's argument: instead, he argues that the U.S. military has been too *lax* in Iraq. At many points in his memoir, Kyle writes about how the bureaucracy of the military delayed him in carrying out his duties. Therefore, Kyle tells Couch, the military should "double down" on displays of force, cutting down on red tape and ignoring the "hearts and minds" approach. The only way to get the people of Iraq to cooperate, he argues, is to intimidate them more than the insurgents do. Kyle's argument has been disproven by the history of the war in Iraq—in places where soldiers adopted a gentler, "hearts and minds" strategy, they reported much greater success with the Iraqi people.

## Chapter 13 Quotes

☝☝ It was a kid. A child. I had a clear view in my scope, but I didn't fire. I wasn't going to kill a kid, innocent or not. I'd have to wait until the savage who put him up to it showed himself on the street.

**Related Characters:** Chris Kyle (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 387

### Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Kyle describes shooting an insurgent carrying a dangerous RPG (i.e., a rocket-powered grenade launcher). After Kyle kills the insurgent, he waits for another insurgent to pick up the weapon, so that he can shoot again. However, Kyle sees a young Iraqi child picking up the RPG and carrying it away from the dead insurgent's body. Rather than kill the child, Kyle allows the child to walk away (and, possibly, return to the RPG to another insurgent).

Kyle seems to intend for this passage to be an illustration of his mercy and humanity; however, his wording betrays his true beliefs about the Iraqi people. Notice that Kyle boasts that he wouldn't kill a kid, "innocent or not"—strongly implying that he believes it's possible for a young Iraqi child

to be *guilty*, and even guilty enough to be deserving of immediate execution. It's very hard to imagine Kyle passing such harsh, sweeping judgments about a young American child, suggesting his bigoted view of Iraqis.

## Chapter 14 Quotes

☝☝ In the simulations, my blood pressure and heart rate would start out steady. Then, once we got into a firefight, they would drop. I would just sit there and do everything I had to do, real comfortable.

As soon as it was over and things were peaceful, my heart rate would just zoom.

**Related Characters:** Chris Kyle (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 408

### Explanation and Analysis

After returning from Iraq for the final time, Kyle participates in a series of medical research projects designed to examine the effects of warfare on soldiers. During one of the experiments, scientists learn that Kyle responds differently to stress and danger than most human beings do: in a moment of crisis, Kyle's blood pressure and heart rate go down, not up—put differently, he relaxes during a crisis and gets stressed during moments of peace.

The scientists' findings confirm what Kyle has already made clear: he's at his most comfortable in the heat of battle, and most uncomfortable while he's back at home with his family. After years of fighting in Iraq, during which he's subscribed to a strong code of machismo, Kyle has taught himself to embrace danger and pain of all kinds. The result is that Kyle is familiar (and comfortable) with gunfire, bombs, ambushes, etc.—whereas "ordinary" situations confuse him. Kyle's behavior suggests, once again, that he suffers from PTSD—like many veterans who suffer trauma during war, he feels disconnected from "normal" life.

☝☝ If there is a poster child for overcoming disabilities, Ryan was it. After the injury, he went to college, graduated with honors, and had an excellent job waiting for him. He climbed Mount Hood, Mount Rainer, and a bunch of other mountains; he went hunting and shot a prize trophy elk with the help of a spotter and a gun with some bad-ass technology; he competed in a triathlon. I remember one night Ryan said that he was glad it was he who got shot instead of any of the other guys.

**Related Characters:** Chris Kyle (speaker), Ryan Job

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 412

### Explanation and Analysis

During Chapter 14, Kyle slowly adjusts to civilian life. One of his most important influences during this period of his life is his old friend and fellow SEAL Ryan Job. Ryan Job was sent home from Iraq after a horrible injury left him blind in both eyes—an injury for which Kyle (who directed Job to stand in the area from which he was shot) feels personally responsible. When Kyle returns to the U.S., however, he returns to being good friends with Job.

Kyle's friendship with Job helps to ease his trauma in two different ways. First, and most obviously, Job's friendship helps to cleanse Kyle of guilt—it's plain to Kyle that Job forgives him for his accident. Second, and equally important, Job is a role model for Kyle. Even though Kyle is the older soldier, Job shows him that it's possible for a veteran to live a normal, happy life after wartime experiences, free from guilt and trauma.

●● If my son was to consider going into SEALs, I would tell him to really think about it. I would tell him that he has to be prepared.

I think it's horrible for family. If you go to war, it does change you, and you have to be prepared for that, too. I'd tell him to sit down and talk to his father about the reality of things. Sometimes I feel like crying just thinking about him in a firefight. I think Chris has done enough for the country so that we can skip a generation. But we'll both be proud of our children no matter what.

**Related Characters:** Taya Kyle (speaker), Chris Kyle

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 420

### Explanation and Analysis

Here Taya Kyle discusses the possibility of her children (or mostly just her son, as she seems to assume that women shouldn't serve) serving in the military, like Chris did. Although she's enormously respectful of her husband's military service, Taya finds it difficult to entertain the idea of her child fighting in a war. She thinks about all the pain and suffering that she endured as the wife of a SEAL, and also the trauma that her husband had to deal with when he returned to the U.S. Nevertheless, Taya seems to accept the possibility that her children might grow up to be soldiers—she claims that she'll be proud of them whether or not they serve.

The passage illustrates the ambiguity in the memoir overall. In no small part, *American Sniper* is about making a choice between one's country and one's family. Again and again, Kyle chooses to fight in the SEALs instead of being with his wife and children; however, in the end, he chooses to be with his family instead of reenlisting. There is, in short, no right answer to the question, "which is more important, family or country?" All people—including Taya and Kyle's children—must answer this question for themselves, according to their own moral code.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## PROLOGUE: EVIL IN THE CROSSHAIRS

It is March 2003, in Nasiryra, Iraq. The American Marines have flooded the city in order to “liberate” Iraq from the dictator Saddam Hussein, and the streets are deserted. A man named Chris Kyle—the narrator and author of the memoir—stares through the scope of his **sniper rifle**. He sees a woman step out of her house with her child and walk down the street.

Chris Kyle’s job is to protect the U.S. Marines as they secure the city, and he’s been in Iraq for roughly two weeks. Kyle is a SEAL (i.e., an elite kind of soldier trained to fight on sea, air, and land), and he’s been training to fight for more than three years. His weapon is a **rifle**, a .300 WinMag. As of now, he’s the “new guy” in Iraq. He’s guarding the streets with the help of his chief (his commander and supervisor).

Kyle watches the woman and her child. They’re walking down the street, toward a group of Marines gathered for foot patrol. Suddenly, Kyle sees the woman take out an object—a bright yellow grenade. Kyle’s chief orders Kyle to fire immediately. Kyle hesitates, but then shoots. The grenade falls to the ground and blows up. This, Kyle notes, was the first time he killed anyone, and the only time he killed anyone other than a male combatant. He notes, “The woman was already dead. I was just making sure she didn’t take any Marines with her.”

In Iraq, Kyle says, he fought “savage, despicable evil,” the kind of evil that would lead a woman to try to murder ten soldiers. Kyle and many of his friends call the enemy “savages.” Kyle killed many people in Iraq, and he wishes that he’d killed even more—not because he enjoys murder, but because he wanted to protect his friends. Kyle remains the deadliest sniper in U.S. history—it’s estimated that he killed 160 people. He is often asked, “Did it bother you killing so many people?” His answer is always, “No.” The first time he shot someone, he was nervous. But soon, he learned to kill without hesitation—“that’s what war is.” Kyle adds that he had “the time of my life” being a SEAL. Sniping, he insists, was “about being a man,” and about love as well as hate.

*The memoir begins with a difficult moral dilemma. Chris Kyle has been sent to fight in Iraq; his job is to keep his fellow Navy SEALs safe. There is a chance that the woman he now sees is an insurgent, who is trying to kill SEALs—does he shoot her or let her live?*



*In the early 2000s, the American government deployed troops to the Middle Eastern country of Iraq, first to find alleged weapons of mass destruction, then to install a democratic government. Kyle, a talented sniper, was involved in some of the toughest fighting of the war.*



*In this passage, Kyle makes a difficult moral choice to protect his fellow soldiers. Instinctively, Kyle doesn’t want to kill anyone, especially a woman; however, he decides to do so for the greater good of protecting a large group of Marines from danger. To use a famous phrase from the Bush era, Kyle engages in a kind of “preemptive strike,” attacking the woman before she attacks.*



*After shooting the woman, and for the rest of his military service, Kyle claims to feel no guilt or hesitation while shooting Iraqis. Critics have focused on Kyle’s use of the word “savage”—historically used by conquerors to describe the “uncivilized” people of another land—and pointed out that most soldiers don’t claim to “enjoy” killing the enemy. It has been suggested that Kyle never felt guilty, and enjoyed his kills, because he regarded all Iraqis—not just a few insurgents—as lesser human beings. Notice, also, that Kyle suggests that killing without hesitation is a part of the code of machismo, which, as we’ll see, dominates military life.*



## CHAPTER 1: BUSTIN' BRONCS AND OTHER WAYS OF HAVING FUN

Kyle was born in north-central Texas, in a small town. He was brought up to be patriotic and respect traditions. He always had a strong sense of justice, and has always considered himself a Christian. He's loved **guns** for his entire life—even as a child, he hunted deer with his father. Kyle's father was a successful manager at AT&T, but he encouraged his son to do what he loved. Kyle and his brother fought a lot growing up. However, Kyle remains very close with his brother.

Kyle's family taught him to be respectful and brave. He got in fights, but he rarely started them—rather, he believed that it was his duty to protect others. Kyle's parents were both hard workers, and they encouraged him to keep busy, too. As a teenager, Kyle worked as a ranch-hand, tending bulls. As a boy, his "first **gun**" was the Daisy multi-pump BB rifle. At the age of seven or eight, Kyle received his first rifle, a bolt-action 30-06. At first he found this weapon frightening, but he quickly learned how to use it.

As a teenager, Chris Kyle loved the idea of being a cowboy. Like any good cowboy, he learned how to break a horse—i.e., stay on a horse until it quit bucking. Kyle proved to be good at breaking horses, and by the end of high school he was competing in rodeos. After high school, he continued to compete, and won many medals for his efforts.

Kyle attended college at Tarleton State University, an agricultural university. He continued going to rodeos until the end of his freshman year, when an accident left him with a dislocated shoulder, effectively ending his career. He worked at a lumberyard for the rest of college, and eventually became a real cowboy, working on a ranch. During this period, Kyle continued to hone his **rifle** skills by shooting raccoons and other pests. He also learned how to train horses, a skill that taught him patience and drive—both important qualities for a SEAL.

*In order to understand what kind of man Kyle is, it's important to understand his roots. Kyle was brought up to feel a strong respect for authority (family, country, God), and to fire weapons. Notice that Kyle feels very close with his brother, despite—or perhaps because—they fought a lot. Many of the close male relationships in this book are strengthened by fighting.*



*As the passage might suggest, owning a gun, and taking care of it, is a vital part of growing up for Kyle. As Kyle learns how to use his rifle, he becomes more confident and mature. Throughout the book, guns represent manhood, bravery, and machismo.*



*It's interesting that Kyle grew up wanting to be a cowboy, not a soldier. The two professions have a lot in common—both are hyper-masculine, physically challenging, and potentially very dangerous. However, being a cowboy (and competing in rodeos) is a more exhibitionist, theatrical job—perhaps suggesting Kyle's flair for self-promotion.*



*Kyle's time as a cowboy prepared him for his military service in many respects: it improved his skills with a gun and taught him how to be patient.*



In 1996, Kyle signed up for the military. A recruiter, impressed with his skill as a cowboy and a marksman, suggested that he become a SEAL, at the time a relatively obscure branch of the military. The SEALs were an elite group, and Kyle liked the challenge of becoming a SEAL—he also found the stories of UDTs (the predecessors to the SEALs, who fought in World War II and Vietnam) to be “badass.” However, Kyle was dismayed when he failed his medical examination, due to his old rodeo injuries. Kyle believed he’d never be able to become a SEAL. Not long after failing his medical examination, however, Kyle got a call from a recruiter, who invited him to join the navy and train to be a SEAL. Without any hesitation, Kyle packed his bags.

*Notably, this passage marks Kyle’s first use of the word “badass,” one of his favorite descriptors. Kyle wants to serve his country faithfully, risking his life if necessary—but he also wants to be cool and impress other people with his “badass,” macho behavior. Thus, Kyle doesn’t hesitate to join the SEALs when he’s given the opportunity.*



## CHAPTER 2: JACKHAMMERED

In 1997, Chris Kyle joins the navy and begins his time in boot camp. He works hard, and, over the course of three months, gets into the best shape of his life. Afterwards, he begins training for Basic Underwater Demolition/Scuba (BUD/S), a skillset necessary to become a SEAL. Boot camp for BUD/S is even more rigorous than ordinary boot camp. Kyle is hosed in the face to train for oxygen deprivation, and does thousands of pushups and pull-ups every week. The physical exertion of BUD/S boot camp is immense; however, the real challenges are psychological—drill sergeants yell at the recruits constantly, and dare them to quit the program. Because he has a swaggering, “cowboy” attitude, the drill sergeants often single out Kyle—however, in the long run, their bullying and intimidation make Kyle a better athlete and soldier.

*It’s sometimes said that military training is harder than serving in the actual military. The goal of basic training, as we can see, isn’t just to improve the health and fitness of the soldiers; the goal is to “weed out” the weakest soldiers, so that the final group is as strong as possible. Kyle’s training prepares him for the physical and psychological rigors of the battlefield: his drill sergeants yell at him, forcing him to become more determined and single-minded. It’s interesting to compare Kyle’s experiences in boot camp with his experiences with machismo culture—in both cases, the bullying and intimidation of his peers makes him (he assumes) stronger and tougher.*



Toward the end of his time in boot camp, Kyle participates in Hell Week—the infamous six days during which recruits work, exercise, and barely sleep. The purpose of Hell Week is to weed out the weakest recruits, leaving only those who have “what it takes” to be SEALs. Just before Hell Week, Kyle fractures his foot in a boating accident. However, he refuses to show up for Hell Week in a cast, knowing that he’d have to start his training all over again. Hell Week began with a drill sergeant waking up the troops in the middle of the night by firing blank bullets into the air. Kyle and his fellow recruits swim, jog, do pushups and pull-ups, and generally work harder than they ever have in their lives.

*Hell Week serves the same purpose as boot camp overall: to weed out the “weak” soldiers, and toughen up the good ones. Notice that Kyle refuses to sit out because of his foot injury. Mostly, this is because Kyle doesn’t want to begin boot camp all over again. But at least in part, it would seem, Kyle chooses not to sit out of Hell Week because of the code of machismo—like any self-respecting SEAL, he refuses to acknowledge pain or weakness, and wants to impress his peers.*



During Hell Week, recruits have the option of ringing a bell at any time—after ringing the bell, the recruits are taken away from the SEALs for good; they’ve failed boot camp. Kyle concentrates on completing Hell Week, never giving into the temptation to ring the bell. In general, Kyle remembers Hell Week being one of the most challenging experiences of his life—but later, after he arrives in Iraq, he says, he’ll think “Hell Week was a cakewalk.”

*Hell Week isn’t just a tremendous physical challenge—its greatest challenges are psychological. Kyle must excel at the physical challenges while ignoring the voice in the back of his head that wants him to give up. Toughness isn’t just a matter of physical strength; it also means not giving up in the face of adversity.*



After Hell Week, Kyle and the other remaining recruits enter “walk week”—a brief recovery period. During this time, Kyle discovers that he has a perforated eardrum. He receives medical attention, but is sent back to training immediately afterwards. He then begins phase two of boot camp: the “dive phase,” in which he learns how to maneuver in the water. Kyle never feels entirely comfortable in the water, and barely scrapes by. Furthermore, during this time, he isn’t allowed to chew tobacco. This poses a problem, since Kyle has always loved tobacco. He sneaks tobacco into camp, and chews it during drills. One day, his sergeant catches him chewing, and orders him to eat his entire can of tobacco, and then do hundreds of pushups. The sergeant is disappointed when Kyle doesn’t throw up—nevertheless, the experience leaves Kyle exhausted. Later on, Kyle becomes good friends with the sergeant, and learns that the sergeant likes chewing tobacco, too.

BUD/S training ends, and Kyle “survives.” Afterwards, he heads to advance training. There, he reunites with his friend, Marcus Luttrell. Kyle first met Luttrell in basic training, and they got along because they were both “Texas boys.” During advance training, Luttrell and Kyle partner up for diving exercises. Luttrell is the first to notice that Kyle has an “O2 hit”—i.e., he’s ascended too quickly, leaving too much oxygen in his bloodstream (a potentially lethal condition). Luttrell and Kyle remain friends, though they later end up on different SEAL teams. After advance training, Kyle is assigned to his top choice for SEAL team: Team 3, the California-based team that saw duty in the Middle East.

After he moves to Team 3 in Long Beach, Kyle falls in love with a woman named Taya. They meet at a bar one night: Taya asks Kyle what he does, and Kyle replies that he’s an ice cream truck driver (there’s an unwritten rule that SEALs don’t talk about being SEALs with civilians). Taya quickly deduces that Kyle is in the SEALs, since her sister’s ex-husband was a SEAL, too. She tells Kyle that she finds SEALs to be arrogant. Instead of getting offended, Kyle earnestly tells Taya, “I would lay down my life for my country. How is that self-centered?” Taya is impressed with Kyle’s humility, and Kyle senses that “this was someone I wanted to spend a lot of time with.” Quickly, they become a couple.

*In this passage, Kyle gives us a particularly vivid illustration of the code of machismo: Kyle’s drill sergeant forces him to do pushups and eat his own tobacco as punishment. Much to the drill sergeant’s displeasure, however, Kyle manages to complete his exercises without throwing up. The “coda” to this story is that Kyle and the drill sergeant become good friends. Strangely, the doling out of pain and punishment doesn’t prevent Kyle from befriendng the drill sergeant—and, in fact, pain and punishment seem to bring them closer together by building an unlikely camaraderie between them. One could say the same of Kyle and his fellow SEALs—they haze and tease each other, but become buddies in the process.*



*Marcus Luttrell was one of the most famous American soldiers of the 2000s. He was the only survivor of the Operation Red Wings disaster, during which Taliban soldiers ambushed Luttrell’s group of Navy SEALs. Luttrell bravely protected himself and, with the help of Pashtun guides, found his way back to an American military base. Like Kyle, Luttrell later wrote a memoir about his service, [Lone Survivor](#), which was made into a successful film starring Mark Wahlberg.*



*Taya is one of the key characters of American Sniper, because she provides a unique civilian’s perspective on the war. Although the majority of the book is narrated in Kyle’s voice, Taya offers frequent asides, commenting on Kyle’s mental state, her frustration with his reenlistments, etc. Notice that, right away, Taya is attracted to Kyle for his apparent humility—he sincerely believes that being a Navy SEAL is an humble, selfless job.*



On September 11, 2001, Kyle awakes to a call from Taya, telling him that terrorists have bombed the World Trade Center. Kyle immediately drives to the Team 3 base for further instructions. As it turns out, Team 3 doesn't see active duty for a full year. When Team 3 does ship out to the Middle East, its target is Saddam Hussein, not Osama Bin Laden (the terrorist who claimed to have planned the 9/11 attacks).

Kyle takes a moment to explain how the SEALs function. SEALs are trained for diving, but the majority of their work takes place on land. Usually, SEAL teams are assigned "direct action"—in other words, short, challenging missions with one clear directive. After 9/11, SEALs were trained for land duty, since most of them would be shipping to Iraq and Afghanistan. In the early 2000s, there was a vigorous debate about whether SEALs should continue to be trained for the water or not. Kyle feels much more comfortable on land than in the water.

In the year leading up to active duty, Kyle trains hard. Team 3 is divided into platoons, and each platoon is made to compete against the others—only one will be shipped off to fight. To prepare for worst-case scenarios, Kyle and his fellow soldiers are water-boarded and forced to run through tear gas. Kyle and the rest of his platoon work hard to outshine the other platoons. In the end, Kyle's platoon ranks second, meaning that they'll stay behind. Afterwards, Kyle and his platoon continue to train for active duty. They go through elaborate drills designed to prepare them for interacting with civilians in Iraq or Afghanistan.

During Kyle's time in training, he gets word that Team 3 will be shipped out to Iraq. Assuming that he'll be in the Middle East soon, Kyle marries Taya. Kyle is deeply in love with Taya but also frightened that the marriage won't last. The divorce rate for SEALs is very high—about ninety percent. But Kyle is so in love with Taya that he ignores the odds. Kyle and Taya are still married today.

Kyle gets into fights during his time in Team 3. In California, he goes to bars with his friends, and often fights with other patrons. There are always "assholes" in the bar, he explains—most people just ignore them, but SEALs don't. Kyle is arrested for bar fighting on more than one occasion.

*Although Kyle doesn't offer many opinions about the Bush administration's handling of the War on Terror, this is one of the few passages in which he alludes to his own feelings about the war in Iraq. Kyle seems vaguely puzzled (as a lot of Americans were) that the U.S. sent troops to fight Saddam Hussein, who had nothing whatsoever to do with 9/11. But as Kyle says later on, his job is to fight wars, not plan them.*



*Kyle is a talented SEAL, but he's not perfect. Like all SEALs, he has his own preferences and specializations—most significantly, he's not very good in the water.*



*Friendly competition is an important part of training: Kyle isn't just working hard; he's trying to outshine other platoons. Also, notice that Kyle gets water-boarded during his training. Water-boarding was one of the most notorious practices of the War on Terror: prisoners and suspects were punished in this way (which simulates drowning) until they divulged useful information. Many argued that water-boarding was a form of torture, and therefore illegal.*



*Kyle and Taya are in love, but Kyle senses that his military service is going to interfere with their relationship (and, as it turns out, he's absolutely right). This passage is an early example of the tension between Kyle's loyalty to his country and his love for his wife.*



*Kyle gets in fights throughout the book, and it's worth thinking about why. Kyle's training as a SEAL teaches him to be aggressive and never back down, meaning that he's likely to get into confrontations in a crowded public place.*



Kyle experiences a lot of hazing during his time in Team 3. One night, his fellow soldiers handcuff him and conduct a “kangaroo court.” They accuse him of being arrogant and overly ambitious, and make him drink a shot of Jack Daniels for each of his “felony counts.” In the end, Kyle passes out, and the other SEALs draw Playboy bunnies on his chest and back—just days before he leaves for his honeymoon. The honeymoon lasts a mere three days, much to Taya’s annoyance—afterwards, Kyle returns to the SEALs and “got back to work.”

*Kyle’s hazing, bizarre though some of it may be, is a crucial part of his training as a SEAL. The SEALs torture Kyle in dozens of different ways—and yet, oddly, these forms of torture make Kyle “one of the guys.” In the code of machismo, being able to accept punishment and pain is the essence of masculinity—thus, in his peers’ eyes, Kyle isn’t really a man, or a SEAL, until he goes through the hazing process.*



## CHAPTER 3: TAKEDOWNS

Chris Kyle wakes up to the words, “We got a tanker.” He and the other SEALs of Team 3 are sailing through the Persian Gulf, approaching a huge oil tanker. The SEALs’ job is to inspect the tanker and, if necessary, turn it over to the authorities. At the time, the United Nations have put trade sanctions on Iraq, which means that the tanker, in all likelihood, is breaking international law by trying to sneak oil out of the country.

*At the beginning of his military service, Kyle is enforcing international sanctions designed to weaken Iraq’s economic position. It’ll be a little while before he becomes a sniper.*



Kyle and the other SEALs board the tanker. Suddenly, the tanker picks up speed—as if the captain of the ship is trying to escape. Kyle rushes to the captain’s cabin, where the captain tries to attack him. Kyle says, “I took the muzzle of my **gun** and struck the idiot in his chest. He went right down.”

*It’s worth noting how much pleasure Kyle seems to take in hurting his enemies and punishing them for trying to resist. Some critics and soldiers have suggested that Kyle was a sadist, while others have argued that it’s impossible to be a SEAL without enjoying combat on some level.*



Kyle takes a step back to explain why he and Team 3 were stationed in the Persian Gulf. In the winter of 2002, Team 3 was shipped out to the Persian Gulf, near Iraq, in order to enforce U.N. sanctions, which forbade oil and other goods from leaving or entering Iraq. (Onboard the oil tanker, for example, Kyle found oil, as well as other goods.) Kyle and the SEALs worked alongside the GROM—the Polish counterpart to the SEALs. Together, the SEALs and the GROM boarded dozens of Iraqi ships every night.

*The War on Terror was a collaborative effort between many different countries, as evidenced by Kyle’s close cooperation with the Polish GROM.*



Team 3 receives an order to board a North Korean ship suspected of running missiles to the Middle East. Near the coast of Djibouti, Kyle and his friends prepare for their mission, and then board the ship. Onboard, they find thousands of tons of cement, and beneath them are fifteen huge Scud missiles (a particularly deadly kind of long-range rocket). Team 3 confiscates the missiles and arrests the captain. It’s unclear where North Korea was sending the missiles, Kyle notes, but it’s possible that they were bound for Yemen or Libya.

*After 9/11, George W. Bush made a speech in which he argued that North Korea, along with Iran and Iraq (together, the “axis of evil”), was a major sponsor of terrorism and crime around the world. In this passage, Kyle seems to give credence to Bush’s assertion, showing that North Korea was, in fact, shipping dangerous missiles to the Middle East, and quite possibly sponsoring terrorism in the region.*



Kyle spends Christmas of 2002 on the Persian Gulf, missing Taya. The SEALs stay in Kuwait, at a large military base that played a major role in the Gulf War of the 1990s. In Kuwait, Kyle is assigned to carry an M-60, a **machine gun** built for lightness and convenience. His cohorts nickname him “Tex.”

*For the time being, Kyle’s nickname is “Tex,” a testament to his obviously Texan attitude and values. Later on, Kyle will acquire other nicknames that testify to his bravery and deadly skill.*



The SEALs begin patrolling the Kuwaiti border. They drive “badass” Desert Patrol Vehicles, or DPVs. Kyle enjoys riding his DPV through the sand, and notes that firing his “big **machine gun** was fun!”

*Again and again, Kyle writes about how much he enjoys firing a gun and killing people. Kyle’s descriptions of warfare clash markedly with those of other soldiers who served in Iraq, who were deeply traumatized by their killing.*



By February of 2003, Kyle is eager to begin fighting for his country. However, Taya is terrified that Kyle will get hurt. She’s particularly worried after Kyle is involved in a minor helicopter accident. One evening, shortly after Kyle’s accident, Taya turns on the news and sees that a SEAL team in the Middle East has been in a serious helicopter crash. Frightened, she waits for Kyle to call her and say that he’s okay—when he does, she bursts into tears. Afterwards, she stops watching the news.

*In some ways, Taya goes through more stress and fear than Kyle does: she can’t help but worry about her husband’s safety every day. Because communication between Taya and Kyle is spotty, Taya often has to wait days without hearing from her husband, and during this time, she can’t help but assume the worst.*



## CHAPTER 4: FIVE MINUTES TO LIVE

In March 2003, Chris Kyle and the SEALs fly from Kuwait to Iraq. Kyle is about to embark on a mission as a part of Operation Iraqi Freedom, and he’s excited to see active combat. Kyle and the other SEALs have been sent to secure Iraqi oil reserves before the Iraqi authorities can light them on fire (which is what happened during the Gulf War in the early nineties).

*Some critics of the war in Iraq suggested that the war’s real goal was to gain control over Iraq’s valuable oil reserves. (Indeed, the name initially proposed for Operation Iraqi Freedom had been Operation Iraqi Liberation, until someone noticed the initials!) So perhaps it’s telling that one of Kyle’s first duties in Iraq was to secure the oil.*



After landing in Iraq, The SEALs approach a large Iraqi oil refinery. Immediately, soldiers begin firing on the SEALs. Though they’re outnumbered, the SEALs quickly secure the refinery. As Kyle fires his M-60, he thinks, “I fucking love this.” The next morning, the SEALs march through the refinery, noting the dead bodies on the ground. One Iraqi soldier bled to death overnight—Kyle notes, “he tried to drag himself away from the planes. You could see the blood trail in the dirt.”

*Kyle continues to offer vivid, gruesome descriptions of the violence he witnessed in Iraq, insisting that he loves fighting and shooting at his enemies. Kyle’s tone while describing the carnage of warfare reflects his Navy SEAL machismo: by writing dispassionately about death and danger, Kyle may be trying to prove that he’s a “badass.” It’s also entirely possible that the sight of so much carnage traumatized Kyle, “numbing” him to further carnage and killing.*



After securing the refinery, the SEALs drive north to the river Shatt al-Arab, looking for suicide bombers and landmines. At first, the SEALs' directive in Iraq was simple: "If you see anyone from about sixteen to sixty-five and they're male, shoot 'em. Kill every male you see." But in early 2003 the SEALs are under orders not to fire at anyone—the military didn't want an all-out fight so early on, since America hasn't officially declared war on Iraq yet. As a result, Kyle and his friends spend most of their time waiting around and "doing nothing."

In mid-2003, Iraqi soldiers fire missiles at American military bases in Iraq, and the U.S. government responds by declaring war on Iraq. Shortly thereafter, the SEALs drive out to the city of Nasiriya, where they work alongside soldiers and Marines. Kyle is involved in a few battles, but acknowledges that most of the fighting was "by Marines."

One night in Nasiriya, Kyle and his fellow SEALs become involved in a firefight that leaves many of his peers wounded. Afterwards, a Marine hoists the American flag up and plays the national anthem. The experience is one of the most unforgettable of Kyle's career—he's overwhelmed by passion for his country.

In the Middle East, Kyle learns more about Islam. He was raised Christian, and hates that Muslim fanatics kill those who don't belong to their own religion—something that Christians haven't done since the Middle Ages. He writes, "Isn't religion supposed to teach tolerance?" Kyle guesses that the Muslims who try to kill Americans aren't religious at all—they're cowards who use religion as an excuse to do evil.

Muslim extremists in Iraq, Kyle insists, killed any Westerners they could find. They stockpiled weapons of mass destruction—in the sense of deadly chemical weapons—with the intention of using them to attack the West. Kyle also notes that many of the chemicals in these weapons came from France and Germany, "our supposed Western allies."

*This passage is important for a number of reasons. First, the contradictory orders that Kyle and his fellow SEALs receive reflect the confusion in the War on Terror at the highest levels of government. Second, Kyle's initial directive to shoot all Iraqi males he sees seems to reflect the racism and Islamophobia of the "War on Terror": the assumption would seem to be that all Iraqis are dangerous "savages" (to use one of Kyle's favorite words).*



*After a few months, the American government officially declares war on Iraq. Kyle continues to fight bravely, but he's fairly modest about his contribution—he admits that other branches of the military, especially the Marines, did most of the work.*



*During his military service, Kyle remains enormously patriotic. Patriotism sustains Kyle and keeps his spirits high after devastating tragedies like the one he describes here.*



*This is the only time in American Sniper that Kyle discusses Islam, and it's one of the most hotly debated passages in the book. On one hand, Kyle seems to believe that there is something fundamentally wrong with Islam: he implies that Islam encourages its followers to kill those who don't belong to the faith. On the other hand, it could be argued that Kyle sees Muslim fanatics as twisting the religion to fit with their own agenda. This would suggest that Kyle has no problem with Islam itself, only its violent, corrupted versions.*



*In many ways, Kyle sees America as being alone in the fight against al-Qaeda; Germany, France, and other European nations are just "supposed allies," rather than crucial parts of the War on Terror. (It's also worth noting that in the Iran-Iraq War years earlier, the U.S. itself had supported Saddam Hussein's WMD program.)*



The SEALs continue marching north toward Baghdad, the capital of Iraq. Kyle kills “a lot of Iraqis,” noting that for every person he killed, four or five new enemies appeared. Firefights between the SEALs and Muslim extremists are frequent but quick, often lasting no more than a minute. Kyle fears what would happen if he died—Taya would be left alone. One night, SEALs report that there is a huge group of Iraqi soldiers surrounding them—the platoon probably has no more than five minutes to live. At the last minute, Marines arrive on the scene and drive away the Iraqi soldiers, saving the lives of Kyle and his friends.

The SEALs’ new mission is to destroy the Mukarayin Dam near Baghdad—a source of hydroelectric power for the entire country. But then, very suddenly, the mission is postponed, and Kyle is sent out of Iraq and back to the U.S. Kyle is furious—he can’t understand why the army would send his platoon home early.

## CHAPTER 5: SNIPER

Chris Kyle returns from his first deployment. Taya immediately notes how war has changed him: he’s moody and always angry. Sometimes, he wakes up in the middle of the night, screaming. One afternoon, he accidentally activates the burglar alarm in his house, and takes several minutes to realize that he is the “intruder.” But slowly, with Taya’s help, he begins to adjust to his new civilian life.

While he’s back in the U.S., Kyle goes to sniper school. **Guns** have fascinated Kyle since he was a small child, and he knows that the SEAL sniping school is the best in the world. In school, Kyle learns about the importance of “stalking”—in other words, sneaking into a position from which to shoot. Sniper school teaches Kyle two vital skills: patience and discipline. Another important lesson he learns: “You’re not graded on your first shot; you’re graded on your second.” In other words, good snipers need to conceal their positions and remain inconspicuous.

*This passage marks the first of Kyle’s many brushes with death. Facing death, it occurs to Kyle that, if he died, Taya would be left alone. In spite of the danger that his service poses to Taya’s happiness, however, Kyle continues to fight, suggesting that, for the time being, his loyalty and love for America (and his love for fighting) outweigh his loyalty and love for his wife.*



*Here, and at many other points in the novel, Kyle becomes frustrated with what he perceives as the excessive bureaucracy and red tape of the American war effort.*



*In this passage, mostly narrated in Taya’s voice, we see what Kyle himself would never admit: the violence of war has changed his personality. Kyle’s strange experience with the burglar is an apt metaphor for his mental state. In many ways, Kyle’s own greatest enemy isn’t the Iraqi insurgency; it’s himself, in the sense that his trauma is slowly destroying him.*



*At first Kyle doesn’t serve as a sniper, but during his second deployment, as we’ll see, Kyle starts to show tremendous aptitude as a sniper. Kyle is attracted to sniping because it’s important, challenging work, and because it involves great strategy as well as great bravery—the sniper’s job isn’t just to shoot lots of insurgents, but to conceal his own position while doing so.*



Kyle takes a moment to talk about the weapons he uses in Iraq. Sometimes, he uses the **Mk-12**, a gun that's easy to handle and assemble. On other occasions, he prefers the Mk-11, a semiautomatic with more power than the Mk-12, though he notes that the Mk-11 has a habit of jamming. Kyle also describes the .300 Winchester Magnum, a heavy, highly accurate weapon (and his personal favorite). Kyle also takes a moment to describe the scopes that he uses as a sniper. In the Middle East, he uses a 32-power scope, i.e., a tool that can magnify any view by thirty-two times. Kyle also uses Nightforce scopes in order to shoot in the middle of the night.

Sniper school gives Kyle the training in science and mathematics he needs to be a good shooter. He learns about factors that can affect sniping at long distances, such as humidity, which can decrease accuracy, and the Coriolis effect—i.e., the way that the Earth's rotation can impact the motion of a bullet.

Surprisingly, Kyle flunks his practice test at the beginning of sniper school. However, he learns quickly, and by the end of his time in school, he's an accomplished shooter. Yet Kyle acknowledges that he's by no means the best shooter in the military; indeed, he only graduates in the middle of his class. A world-class sniper stationed in a relatively safe part of the world will never kill many people, he says. In other words, Kyle killed a lot of people because of "opportunity," not just talent.

After finishing sniper school, Kyle returns to boot camp to train for Iraq. As usual, he struggles with aquatic training. During one exercise, off the coast of San Diego, a shark bites Kyle's fin—luckily, he's able to kick off the fin and swim away before the shark bites him. Kyle continues with diving exercises but never enjoys them or excels at them.

Around the same time, Taya and Kyle have a baby boy. Kyle feels more nervous watching his wife give birth than he ever was in combat. Taya is overjoyed to be having a child, but also angry with Kyle for going back to the Middle East so soon after the birth of his son.

Before returning to the Middle East, Kyle attends navigation school. Navigation is an important skill for SEALs, but it's not as exciting as shooting or fighting. Kyle learns how to use satellite images to calculate the fastest routes; in the end, he's shipped back to the Middle East early because of his skills as a navigator.

*Kyle is clearly a highly trained professional when it comes to guns—and he also clearly just likes guns, and finds them "badass." He accumulates an enormous amount of experience during his time in Iraq, and here he shares his thoughts and opinions about the various kinds of guns and ammunition he used throughout his service.*



*Kyle doesn't just familiarize himself with guns and ammunition; he learns about the science and mathematics of shooting, so that he can be the deadliest sniper possible.*



*Although Kyle goes on to become the deadliest sniper in American military history, he's not a particularly exceptional shot. Kyle kills a lot of insurgents, not so much because of his talent but because he's given a free reign in Iraq. Kyle's use of the word "opportunity" seems a little disturbing, since it implies, once again, that he's eager (and not merely willing) to kill people.*



*As a SEAL, Kyle is required to train for air and sea, as well as land (indeed, SEAL stands for SEa, Air, and Land); however, land maneuvers are clearly Kyle's specialty.*



*The passage emphasizes the basic conflict between Kyle's loyalty to his family and his loyalty to his country: at this point in the book, Kyle is more loyal to his country (though he still loves his wife and child).*



*In the end, Kyle's impressive skillset enable him to spend more time in Iraq as a soldier (which is, perhaps, what he intended when he went to navigation school in the first place).*



## CHAPTER 6: DEALING DEATH

Kyle returns to Iraq. He feels horrible about leaving Taya only weeks after the birth of their child, but he feels that it's his duty to fight for his country. He still doesn't feel like a father.

Before flying to Iraq, Kyle passes by a group of Americans protesting the war. Kyle is disgusted that protestors would criticize U.S. troops—if anything, he notes, they should be protesting the government, not the people who keep them safe. He writes, “I do not choose which battles I go to. Y'all send me to them.”

When Kyle returns to Iraq, the country has been “liberated” from Saddam Hussein. However, the country is still full of terrorists. Fighters calling themselves the mujahedeen (people on jihad, or holy war) target American soldiers in Iraq. The mujahedeen join with al-Qaeda, the terrorist organization that engineering the 9/11 attacks, and begin planning attacks on military bases in the country. Kyle is stationed in the city of Baghdad, one of the hotbeds of the new mujahedeen resistance. Shortly before Kyle arrives in the area, four American contractors in the nearby city of Fallujah are murdered. Even after the fall of Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi insurgency is growing, and radical terrorists are beginning to control more and more of the country.

Early on, Kyle is promoted to an assault team. He works with the Polish GROM fighters to raid houses suspected of harboring terrorists and dangerous weapons. During this time, Kyle befriends a Polish sniper who uses the code name Matthew, and in general, he comes to admire the GROM for their professionalism and courage.

Kyle takes a moment to talk about the gear he carried with him in Iraq. He wore body armor, and carried **pistols** in his thigh holster. He also carried a “blowout kit”—i.e., medical equipment. Unlike most soldiers in Iraq, Kyle never wore ear protection, because the military's noise-canceling technology makes it impossible to hear what direction a shot comes from—a serious problem for a sniper. Finally, Kyle wore a ball cap, because “you look so much cooler wearing a ball cap.”

*Kyle's loyalty to his country actively interferes with his family life—even though he's now the father of a baby boy, he doesn't feel much of a connection with his child.*



*Kyle thinks of himself as a fighter, not a military strategist. Thus, he finds it outrageous when he sees protesters criticizing American troops—their fight is with the Bush administration, not the troops themselves. As Kyle points out, soldiers are often unjustly hated for fighting wars to which other people send them.*



*After the fall of Saddam Hussein, Iraq remained an exceptionally dangerous place, full of terrorists and insurgents. (It's even been argued that the American government's decision to overthrow Saddam Hussein made the Middle East more violent and less safe, since it destabilized the region and gave terrorists the opportunity to seize power.) Saddam Hussein was not a supporter of al-Qaeda before 9/11, and in many ways, the fall of Saddam Hussein strengthened al-Qaeda's position in Iraq.*



*Kyle continues to work alongside the Polish GROM, as he did during his first deployment.*



*This passage is a good example of the mixture of extreme professionalism and informal machismo in Kyle's personality. On one hand, Kyle takes great precautions with his gear: for instance, he wears body armor designed to keep himself safe at all times. However, Kyle is also interested in looking “cool,” hence the ball cap.*



After about a month of working with the GROM, Kyle is transferred to Fallujah. Fallujah is home to some of the deadliest insurgents in Iraq. In the months before troops entered Fallujah, insurgents fortified the city, building a network of compounds and tunnels, and some converted mosques into bunkers. Insurgent groups continue to plant bombs near military bases.

In Fallujah, Kyle receives his first major assignment as a sniper. He'll be sent out into the outskirts of Fallujah, where the Marines will be leading an assault on a large group of insurgents. Kyle will be stationed high up in a nearby apartment complex, where he'll provide support for troops below. Before he leaves, Kyle calls Taya; it's a brief conversation, and he only tells her that he'll be gone for a while.

At the apartment complex, the Marines clear most of the residents, while keeping an eye out for a man named Mustafa. Mustafa is infamous among the American military forces—he's a former Olympic marksman who is now working as a sniper against the Marines. Kyle takes a room in the apartment, and prepares to shoot enemy forces below. He remembers, "I wanted to shoot someone."

Kyle has already described taking his first sniper shot (the woman from the book's prologue). By the time he arrives at the apartment complex, however, he doesn't hesitate to shoot. He sees men carrying grenades running toward the American Marines, and shoots them before they can hurt his friends. In the following months, Kyle continues to snipe. He shoots from roofs, apartment rooms, and other secure areas. As always, the goal is to draw as little attention as possible to his location.

Kyle's enemies in Iraq, the insurgents, are "savage and well-armed." The Marines raid insurgent houses and find **guns**, missiles, and other weapons. Kyle also notes that the insurgents were deadly not just because of their fanatical religious beliefs, but because they were "pretty doped up."

During his time as a sniper, Kyle gets into shootouts with insurgents. One day, an RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) hits the building on top of which he's positioned; he survives, but with a limp. Though he's in pain, he refuses to go to a doctor, knowing, "You go to a doctor and you get pulled out."

*In Fallujah, Kyle experienced some of the deadliest fighting of the war in Iraq. Insurgents had an important advantage over the SEALs: they knew the territory well, and constructed secret tunnels and compounds that the SEALs initially found difficult to navigate.*



*As Kyle prepares for his first assignments as a sniper, his relationship with Taya seems to become increasingly distant. He continues to love Taya, but he focuses on his responsibilities to his fellow SEALs, not his responsibilities to his wife.*



*In the film version of American Sniper, Mustafa is the most prominent villain; in the book, however, he's barely mentioned at all. Notice, also, that Kyle is hungry for violence—unlike many other soldiers in Iraq, he seems to enjoy firing at his enemies.*



*Where other soldiers might hesitate to take a human being's life, Kyle never pauses. Instead, he does his duty as a sniper quickly and efficiently, protecting American lives in the process.*



*Kyle reiterates his point that the insurgents in Iraq are "savage," and suggests that, contrary to their claims of religious devotion, some insurgents were more inspired by drugs than religious piety. (The Koran prohibits taking drugs.)*



*Like most SEALs, Kyle refuses to acknowledge any weakness or pain—as with Hell Week, he continues to serve his country in spite of his injuries.*



Sniping is difficult, Kyle recalls, because “you make an unjustified shot and you could be charged with murder.” Kyle has to be very cautious with his shots—he has to have visible evidence for shooting at anyone. Kyle shoots at two or three targets a day.

One day, Kyle and another soldier—who he’ll refer to as Runaway—are walking along the street when a group of insurgents begins firing upon them. Kyle shoots back, then waits for Runaway to “cover him,” so that he can run away. Kyle discovers that Runaway has, true to his nickname, run away, leaving Kyle alone. Kyle is forced to call for backup immediately. The Marines save him, but barely. Later, Kyle yells at Runaway for abandoning him, and concludes that Runaway is “just a coward.”

Shortly afterwards, Kyle and another soldier are sent to provide backup for a group of Marines. The two soldiers see a group of wounded Marines near an alley, being shot at from all sides. They also round up a second group of Marines, many of whom are wounded, from the roof of a nearby house. Kyle gathers the Marines at the base of the house, while, all around him, insurgents fire. Unable to locate the direction of the fire, Kyle tells the Marines, “We’re all just gonna shoot.” Thinking that the uninjured Marines will follow him away from the house, Kyle runs out, sees an insurgent with a **machine gun**, and fires at him. Suddenly, Kyle turns and sees that none of the Marines have followed him—he’s on his own. He runs down the street, trying to avoid machine gun fire from the insurgent. As he runs, another insurgent throws a grenade at him, and the explosion throws him to the ground. Nevertheless, Kyle gets back up and continues firing at the insurgents, covering the group of Marines as they get away to safety, and then running after them. Miraculously, none of the uninjured Marines are killed.

By providing cover outside the house, Kyle has saved the lives of multiple Marines, and his superiors award him a Bronze Medal (a prestigious honor recognizing valor in combat). Kyle notes that he ended his military career with two Silver Stars and five Bronze Medals.

*This passage marks one of the few times that Kyle discusses the moral challenge of sniping: his job is to preempt insurgents’ violence (by shooting first), but he also needs to be careful not to shoot an unarmed civilian. Kyle never mentions a case in which he accidentally shot a civilian—some argue that this is because he was good at his job, and never hit anyone who wasn’t an insurgent, while others have argued that Kyle did, in fact, kill civilians, and yet was never punished for it.*



*Kyle has respect for many of his fellow SEALs, but he also finds some of them to be cowardly and unfit for military duty. The passage is a good example of why SEALs need to form a close bond of friendship and trust during their basic training—if they don’t, then they won’t work well together in the field.*



*Kyle contrasts Runaway’s cowardice with his own bravery and willingness to sacrifice his life. As Kyle explains here, he provided backup for a group of Marines that had been surrounded by heavily armed insurgents. Kyle risks his own life to protect the Marines, and continues to protect them, even after they refuse to follow him into dangerous gunfire. As Kyle told Taya on the night that they met, “I’d lay down my life for my country.” Here, his selfless service saves the lives of many other soldiers.*



*Kyle is clearly a brave, hardworking SEAL, and his willingness to sacrifice his life for the good of others earns him many official military honors.*



Kyle returns from his second deployment and reunites with Taya. Taya finds it increasingly difficult to talk to her husband: he wakes up screaming in the middle of the night, and tells grisly stories about his military service. Taya senses that Kyle is testing her, trying to see how much she can “handle to hear.”

*In Iraq, Kyle's life is in near-constant danger; thus, he doesn't know how to conduct himself back at home, where there's no immediate danger to be stressed about. Kyle struggles to open up to Taya about his experiences overseas; he seems unsure whether or not to tell her about the horrors he's witnessed.*



Taya also senses that Kyle feels guilty about some of his actions in Iraq—he believes that he violated some of the rules of the Geneva Conventions (the internationally accepted rules governing wartime ethics). Taya responds by arguing that “picking apart a soldier’s every move against a dark, twisted, rule-free enemy is more than ridiculous; it’s despicable.” She also admits that she finds Kyle “kind of a bad ass” when he talks about “killing someone up close.” While back in the U.S., Kyle bumps into veterans with whom he served in Iraq. Many of these veterans are proud to meet Kyle, noting that he saved their lives.

*In this troubling passage, Taya suggests that it's immoral to expect American soldiers to follow the international rules of war. While Taya never says so explicitly, it's strongly implied that she's defending her husband from allegations that he killed innocent people during his time as a sniper in Iraq. Additionally, Taya seems to regard her husband's “badass” kills as something to celebrate and glamorize, rather than a sobering, necessary duty.*



## CHAPTER 7: DOWN IN THE SHIT

Back in Iraq once again, Kyle finds that the insurgents have become more cautious; they stay inside for longer periods, as if sensing that a sniper is waiting for them. Kyle spends more time doing “room clearances”—i.e., raiding houses suspected of harboring insurgents. Kyle quickly realizes that Marines aren't very good at room clearances. He begins to organize room clearances, passing on his considerable expertise to the Marines.

*Kyle seems to suggest that his work as a sniper (and, presumably, the success of other American snipers) has influenced the way insurgents wage war in Iraq. As Kyle becomes a more experienced SEAL, he begins giving advice to other soldiers.*



One day, Kyle and the Marines raid a house and find a strange group living inside: they're Caucasians, and some have blond hair. Suddenly, Kyle realizes that these people are Chechens: “Muslims apparently recruited for a holy war against the West.” He opens fire on the Chechens, and notes, “A half-second's more hesitation, and I would have been the one bleeding out on the floor.” He adds that the Marines found the Chechens' passports after searching the house. Shortly afterwards, Kyle turns thirty—by Marine standards, “an old man in Fallujah.”

*In this troubling passage, Kyle gives a vivid sense for the moral challenges of counterinsurgency. He and the Marines shoot a group of Chechens, whom Kyle insists are terrorists. Although Kyle implies that he shot first in a “kill or be killed situation,” he gives no other indication that the Chechens were, in fact, armed. Kyle offers a strange, parenthetical justification for his actions: he later found the Chechens' passports, presumably proving that they were known terrorists. In all, the passage suggests that sometimes soldiers have to kill before they know for certain that their targets are dangerous. While Kyle claims that, in this case, his suspicions were vindicated, it seems reasonable to assume that at other times he jumped to conclusions and killed unarmed, innocent people.*



Kyle acts as a sniper during a raid on an Iraqi cemetery known to be a hiding place for explosives. Almost as soon as Marines approach the area, insurgents begin firing. Kyle shoots many insurgents, helping the Marines secure the cemetery safely. “Just another day in Fallujah,” he muses.

*As Kyle describes his insurgent kills, he tries to sound casual, emphasizing his toughness and “badass” attitude about killing.*



One day, Kyle gets an assignment to provide cover for a group of Marines fighting a group of insurgents hiding in a minaret (a tower attached to a mosque). The Marines call an airstrike on the minaret—i.e., they send a plane to drop a bomb on the minaret—but the plane misses its target, only grazing the minaret. Later, Kyle learns that the bomb decapitated an enemy sniper stationed in the minaret, and then blew up a crew of insurgents hiding in an alley nearby. Kyle concludes, “I think it was the best sniper shot I ever saw.”

After about two weeks of working with the Marines to clear houses and provide backup, other SEALs tell Kyle that he needs to spend less time “in the field”—he’s too good a sniper to risk his life clearing houses. Kyle argues that he wants to help in any way he can. Reluctantly, the other SEALs agree not to tell Kyle’s commanding officer (CO) about Kyle’s work clearing houses—they know that if the CO found out, he’d discipline Kyle for his recklessness.

One day, Kyle and the Marines encounter a young, wounded Marine. The wounded Marine begs Kyle, “Please don’t tell my momma I died in pain.” Kyle reassures the marine that “everything will be okay,” but the Marine dies almost right away. Kyle writes, I went back to my block and continued to fight.”

Kyle celebrates Thanksgiving, eating packaged “Thanksgiving food” out of plastic tins. Shortly afterwards, he’s sent to the Euphrates River, where he’ll provide sniper backup for the SEALs—he won’t be clearing houses anymore. While stationed near the Euphrates, Kyle reunites with Runaway, the soldier whose cowardice almost cost him his life. Runaway continues to be a coward—one night, when the SEALs get word of an Iraqi military assault, he runs downstairs, out of danger, instead of fighting. Runaway is eventually transferred away from the Euphrates. Kyle notes, “he has a bright future as a military planner.”

While stationed at the military base on the Euphrates, Kyle and the other SEALs realize that the number of insurgents in the region is growing. One afternoon, a group of insurgents on the other side of the river opens fire on the base. Kyle sees a bizarre sight: the insurgents jumping in the water, holding on to beach balls, trying to swim to the opposite side. Kyle decides to have some “fun”: when the insurgents are halfway across the river, he fires at the first beach ball, waits for the insurgents to regroup, then fires at the second beach ball, etc. He notes, “It was a lot of fun,” and concludes that the insurgents drowned.

*The American military has a tremendous advantage over the insurgents in Iraq, as they have access to powerful airplanes and missiles. In this scene, we see the American military’s technological advantages over the insurgents: the military has huge missiles, while the insurgents have guns.*



*Kyle seems willing to risk his life unnecessarily in the field—a personality trait that could be interpreted either as recklessness or bravery, or both.*



*Kyle is surrounded by death and danger, but when other soldiers die, Kyle isn’t sure what to tell them. Instead of comforting the dying, it’s implied, Kyle wants to prevent his fellow soldiers from being hurt in the first place.*



*Kyle seems very critical of the overall American war effort. When talking about his cowardly fellow soldier, Kyle can think of no greater insult than to say that Runaway would make a good military planner. Kyle’s observation, coupled with other comments he makes about the war in Iraq, suggests that he believes the war was mismanaged. Kyle has the utmost respect for his fellow soldiers; however, he doesn’t seem to have much respect for the highest levels of military leadership.*



*Critics singled out this passage as exemplary of Kyle’s cruelty and sadism. It is evident throughout this passage that Kyle is enjoying torturing Iraqi insurgents—he thinks of sniping as a great pleasure, not just a solemn duty. Kyle’s enjoyment could be interpreted as a survival mechanism—surrounded by death, he preserves his own mental health by learning to enjoy killing. It could also be interpreted as a sign of Kyle’s racism and amorality.*



Another day at the Euphrates base, Kyle sees three insurgents gathered about a mile away, pointing and laughing in his general direction. He notes that they look like “a bunch of juvenile delinquents.” Even though the group is at least 1600 yards away, Kyle fires on them, and shoots one “in the gut,” leading the other two insurgents to run away. Despite being able to shoot faraway targets, Kyle admits that he prefers his targets close.

*Kyle appears to fire on a group of unarmed “insurgents” whose only crime is pointing and laughing at him from 1600 yards away. Indeed, Kyle seems to be trying to shock readers with his description of the killing, emphasizing the insurgents’ youth and distance. While Kyle claims that snipers aren’t supposed to fire at anyone who doesn’t show immediate signs of danger, this passage seemingly disproves his own claim.*



After another week, Kyle is pulled out and sent back into the heart of Baghdad. While in Baghdad, he reunites with his old platoon. Right away, Kyle learns that his friends have been out on a dull mission in the Philippines, and they’re jealous of Kyle for getting to fight in Iraq. Now, Kyle and his platoon begin raiding houses for bombs and explosives. Kyle also works as an “advance convoy,” meaning that he plans safe routes for important visitors.

*Kyle’s fellow SEALs, like Kyle himself, are hungry for danger in the Middle East—thus, they’re exceptionally jealous of Kyle for getting to fight in Iraq for so long.*



In December 2005, Iraq prepares for its first national elections since the fall of Saddam Hussein. Insurgents, eager to sabotage the elections, are targeting democratic officials, particularly in Baghdad. Kyle joins up with an Army unit from Arkansas, and provides sniper backup. Kyle initially finds it difficult to communicate with “hillbilly” Army soldiers. Nevertheless, he bonds with them as they patrol Haifa Street—a particularly dangerous part of Baghdad. Kyle shoots al-Qaeda operatives, ex-Iraqi soldiers, kidnapers, and other “bad guys.”

*In 2005, Iraq prepared for its first national elections in many years—a sign that the U.S. had deposed a violent dictator and installed democratic leadership. However, Iraq remained a dangerous place, overflowing with insurgents and terrorists, suggesting that American military intervention, while it had done some good, hadn’t made Iraq a safer place.*



At nights, insurgents usually don’t attack the troops—they know that soldiers have night vision goggles. Kyle spends many of his nights calling Taya, though he rarely tells her what he’s been doing. One night, gunfire breaks out while Kyle is talking to Taya, and he’s forced to hang up the phone suddenly. After the skirmish with the insurgents, Kyle finds that his phone’s battery is dead; in the end, he doesn’t call back for three days. When he finally calls, he tries to calm Taya—naturally, she was extremely worried.

*In this ambiguous passage, it’s hard to tell why Kyle waits three days before calling Taya again—is it strictly because the battery dies, or is it also because he’s reluctant to communicate with her? The passage is also a vivid example of the hell that Taya experiences as the wife of a Navy SEAL in active duty.*



Kyle sustains a few minor injuries during his time in Baghdad, but refuses to get medical attention—he’s afraid that doing so will result in his being sent back to the U.S. Kyle also builds a considerable reputation as a sniper, but claims that he is “just one lucky motherfucker” to have so many insurgents to shoot at.

*Kyle continues to subscribe to the SEAL code of machismo, refusing to complain about pain of any kind. He acquires a reputation as a “badass” sniper, but claims that he’s just “lucky” to be in a city where there were so many enemy insurgents to kill.*



The elections take place in Iraq, to much fanfare in the American media. Privately, Kyle doubts that the Iraqis will ever have “truly functioning democracy” because “it’s a pretty corrupt place.” He also claims that he didn’t risk his life to bring democracy to the Iraqis; he risked his life to protect his friends, both in the army and back in the U.S. Kyle concludes, “I never once fought for the Iraqis. I could give a flying fuck about them.”

Insurgent violence in Baghdad seems to be dying down, at least for now. Kyle and the rest of his unit are transferred to an area called Habbaniyah—the place where Saddam Hussein built chemical weapons in the nineties. There, the soldiers are put to work building a tactical operations command building for housing computers and military gear. Kyle finds this work immensely boring.

During his time in Habbaniyah, Kyle visits a doctor and learns that he has tuberculosis (TB). The doctor claims that Kyle will eventually die of TB. Kyle informs Taya of this news, and claims that Taya will “find somebody else.” Taya is heartbroken to hear Kyle talk about his own death so calmly. Soon after, Kyle learns that his TB isn’t fatal at all—the doctor made a mistake. However, Taya notes, Kyle’s “attitude about death stayed.”

Kyle and the unit switch to a new assignment: arresting local insurgents. However, locals sometimes give the soldiers bad tips to punish their enemies and rivals, meaning that Kyle and the unit end up arresting the wrong people.

One day, Kyle snipes a man walking down the street, holding a heavy **gun**. Shortly afterwards, Kyle learns that he’s going to be investigated for shooting the man—his widow claims that he was walking to a mosque, carrying a Koran. Kyle finds this story ridiculous, and tells his superiors, “I don’t shoot people with Korans—I’d like to, but I don’t.” After three days, Kyle’s investigators decide that he’s telling the truth and “drop the matter.” Shortly afterwards, Kyle finishes his third tour of Iraq and heads home. He’s amassed an enormous number of kills, and thinks, “I’d done a hell of a job.”

*Even though Kyle has supposedly been sent to Iraq to install democratic leadership, he doubts that democracy will ever flourish in Iraq—perhaps because he regards Iraqis themselves as inherently corrupt and untrustworthy. The passage is one of the clearest examples of Kyle’s racism and Islamophobia: here, in his own words, he makes it clear that he couldn’t care less about Iraqis.*



*Kyle continues to hunger for dangerous assignments—he finds his assignment to build a command center important but also boring.*



*Kyle’s TB scare marks how comfortable he’s become with the thought of his own mortality. Kyle’s acceptance of his own death could be considered a symptom of military machismo (it’s not “badass” to worry about dying) as well as a survival mechanism: Kyle grows numb to the concept of death because, if he didn’t, he’d be too frightened to do anything as a SEAL.*



*We see the disorganization of the war in Iraq: although Kyle is supposed to be working with the Iraqi people to arrest terrorists, it’s implied that his arrests don’t take many actual insurgents off the streets.*



*This passage is important because it marks one of the only times in the memoir when Kyle gives a sense for the legal controversy that results when he’s accused of killing an innocent Iraqi. Notice that Kyle claims he’d like to shoot anyone holding a Koran—a clear sign of his Islamophobia. While Kyle continues to insist that he never killed anyone who wasn’t a dangerous insurgent, the relatively little scrutiny he receives from his commanding officer, combined with his own flippant attitude toward sniping, suggests that he probably did at some point.*



## CHAPTER 8: FAMILY CONFLICTS

Kyle returns to Taya and his son. He left for Iraq just days after his son was born, and, in many ways, he doesn't feel like a father. Back home, Kyle spends a lot of time bonding with his boy. At the same time, he and Taya begin to have marital problems. In particular, they argue about their child. Kyle entertains himself by pulling pranks; one afternoon, he moons his neighbor, which irritates Taya. Kyle also begins getting into fights. However, he enjoys the respect that he commands by virtue of being a veteran. Kyle and Taya also struggle with intimacy.

During his time back in the states, Kyle goes to a New Orleans school run by FBI agents; there, he learns about picking locks, hiding cameras, deploying parachutes, and other skills. In particular, Kyle savors the adrenaline rush of jumping from a plane. Kyle enjoys spending time with Taya and his son, but also wishes that he could be back in Iraq, fighting alongside his good friend, Marcus Luttrell (who heroically fought off hundreds of Taliban fighters in Afghanistan, and later wrote a book about it, [Lone Survivor](#)). Although many military strategists schedule meetings with Kyle to talk about his experiences in the war, they mostly refuse to listen to his advice, which frustrates Kyle greatly.

Kyle wants to be back in Iraq more and more each day. Taya is devastated when she learns that he is planning on reenlisting in the military. She tells him that if he goes back to the Middle East, she'll know that "being a SEAL is more important to him than being a father or a husband." Nevertheless, Kyle proceeds to reenlist.

Kyle reenlists and bonds with his new unit. During basic training, he hazes an overweight recruit named Ryan Job—the standard treatment for any new recruit. Instead of caving in to pressure, Job remains in training, loses weight, and earns his peers' respect. Kyle and the other soldiers force Job to annoy the biggest, strongest soldiers in basic training, with the result that Job gets beaten up a lot. Another memorable soldier Kyle meets in training is Marc Lee. Lee is charismatic and funny, but he's also devoutly Christian. Lee leads prayer groups and "was always there" to talk about the Bible.

Before shipping out of training, Kyle gets two tattoos: a Trident, symbolizing his SEAL affiliations, and a cross, symbolizing his faith. He also learns that Taya is pregnant with their second child. She begs him not to leave her for the Middle East, but Kyle insists that he has a duty to "kill bad guys." He admits that he's excited to be back in Iraq.

*Kyle struggles to adjust to civilian life during his time back in the U.S. His pranks and off-color humor, a fixture of his time with the SEALs in Iraq, don't translate to his home. Furthermore, Kyle finds it increasingly difficult to talk to Taya—his experiences as a soldier in Iraq are so harrowing that he can only open up to other people who've had similar experiences.*



*A few things to note about this passage. First, Kyle continues to savor danger, excitement, and adrenaline. Second, he continues to feel divided loyalties—on one hand, he loves his family; on the other, he wants to fight. Third, Kyle mentions his old friend Marcus Luttrell, who was involved in the Operation Red Wings disaster, during which he became the lone survivor of a Taliban ambush. Fourth, Kyle continues to show signs of disrespect for military leadership—he disagrees with their counterinsurgency recommendations for Iraq.*



*Kyle's choice to reenlist in the military is a clear sign that he's more loyal to his country than to his family (and that, perhaps, like some people who suffer from trauma, he feels drawn back to the environment that caused his trauma in the first place).*



*Previously Kyle was hazed by older, more experienced SEALs, and in the process, he became "one of the guys." Now that Kyle is an older SEAL, he hazes the younger recruits, including Job. The SEALs don't tease and haze Job simply to discourage him; rather, they're trying to encourage Job to work harder. In the culture of machismo, pain and bullying often build friendship (however problematic that friendship might be) instead of ruining it.*



*Kyle continues to love Taya, but feels that his primary duty is to his country and to his fellow SEALs, not to his wife and children. At the same time, Kyle isn't only motivated by an abstract, lofty sense of duty—he clearly gets a lot of pleasure from killing insurgents, and he's eager to be back in Iraq.*



Two days before Kyle deploys, Taya learns that she'll have to have an emergency C-section—her umbilical cord is wrapped around her baby's neck. Kyle witnesses the long, painful birth of his daughter, and fears for his wife. In the end, however, the operation is a complete success. Kyle holds his newborn daughter, feeling "real warmth and love." But two days later, he leaves the country for Iraq.

*Kyle's love for his wife is plain in this passage, in which Kyle fears for Taya's safety during her lengthy C-section. But as much as he loves Taya and their new baby, Kyle refuses to give up on his promises to the SEALs.*



## CHAPTER 9: THE PUNISHERS

Kyle arrives in Baghdad in April 2006, a few days behind the rest of his platoon, which has just shipped out to the region of Ramadi, known for being one of the most dangerous parts of the country. He's forced to improvise his own way to Ramadi, and manages to persuade a Navy corpsman to take him there.

*Kyle's time in Ramadi is more dangerous than his previous deployments, reflecting the escalating crisis in the region. The fact that he's delayed in joining his platoon again reflects the tension between family and country in his life.*



Kyle arrives in Ramadi and learns that his platoon has been shipped out east of Ramadi for a few days. In the meantime, Kyle gets to work providing sniper support for the Marines stationed in the area. One day, Kyle is stationed in a tall building nicknamed Seven Story. From Seven Story, he kills two Iraqi snipers firing on the Marines below. Later, one of these Marines shakes Kyle's hand and thanks him for saving his life.

*In spite of his conflicting loyalties and seemingly traumatic experiences during previous tours of the country, Kyle continues to enthusiastically perform his duties as a sniper, saving the lives of his fellow soldiers.*



Kyle's platoon returns from the east and greets him happily. By this time, Kyle has gained the nickname "Legend"—he's famous throughout the military for his kills. Kyle enjoys his nickname more than "a full-uniform medal ceremony." Kyle notes that almost everyone in his platoon had a nickname—for example, Ryan Job's nickname was "Biggles," a portmanteau of "Big" and "Giggles." As a group, Kyle's platoon is nicknamed "the Punishers," after the "badass" Marvel comic book character.

*Although Kyle seems capable of incredible humility, he's clearly proud of his nickname, "Legend," and continues to aspire to be a badass—as, it would seem, do the rest of the Punishers.*



Kyle works alongside his chief, a highly experienced sniper named Tony, who's rumored to be forty years old (unheard of for a sniper). One of the platoon's first assignments is to claim land surrounding a hospital in an area of Ramadi nicknamed "Viet Ram" (because of the dense foliage). During the operation, insurgents shoot Kyle's ankle. Kyle is hurt, but not badly—he's able to pull the casing out of his ankle and make it back to base.

*Kyle continues to weather injuries during his time in Iraq, recognizing that complaining about pain would put him in danger of being shipped out of the SEALs.*



Kyle and his fellow soldiers patrol Ramadi; their plan is to draw fire from insurgents, and then fire back. Eventually, army command orders the soldiers to capture a hospital that's known to be harboring insurgents (and which, it's believed, has been evacuated of all injured patients). Soldiers fire a Carl Gustav rocket (a particularly deadly explosive) into the hospital, and, as Kyle reports, "bodies flew everywhere." The remaining people in the hospital run away, and the soldiers claim the hospital. On later tours, the soldiers use the Carl Gustav rocket again, and Kyle notes that it's always a "big hit, pun intended."

Back in the U.S., Taya struggles to take care of her children. Her mother comes to help her, but she misses Kyle terribly. She also takes an especially long time to recover from her C-section.

Kyle and his platoon continue fighting off insurgents. As the fighting goes on, the SEALs collaborate more frequently with the military's anti-terror unit in Ramadi. Kyle notes that, all things considered, he should have joined the anti-terror unit instead of the SEALs. He respects the anti-terror soldiers for their daring, and envies them for getting to fight so frequently. He also admires them for their humility and down-to-earth attitude about their service.

Every day, Kyle and the platoon receive tipoffs about bombs and landmines being planted in Ramadi—some of the tipoffs are true, and others aren't. During their operations to find bombs, the soldiers fight off many insurgents. As time goes on, the troops get into a TIC (a term meaning "troops in combat"; in other words, a fight) almost every day.

In June 2006, Army command gives word that U.S. soldiers will be put on the offensive soon: their mission will be to reclaim Ramadi from insurgents. Reclaiming Ramadi is important for the war effort because Ramadi is a haven for insurgents, and because insurgents target Iraqi civilians as well as U.S. soldiers. Army leadership puts out the word that soldiers should prioritize killing "hard-core Islamist fanatics," while also trying to persuade local gangs to work with their tribal leaders. Kyle doesn't dwell on the details of the military's strategy in Ramadi—instead, "What we knew was that many people wanted to kill us. And we fought back."

Another priority for Kyle and the troops is to work with Iraqi soldiers and police officers—collectively, *jundis*—by training them to be better at their jobs. However, most of these *jundis*, Kyle claims, are incompetent, "if not outright dangerous." Kyle believes that training *jundis* to run their own country "is not what my job was about. My job was killing, not teaching."

*In this disturbing passage, Kyle seems to take great pleasure in describing the gory spectacle of dead bodies flying through the air, as if blowing up a hospital (even one without any patients left inside) is a treat, instead of a horrifying duty of combat. Perhaps Kyle makes dark jokes about the war because humor represents a way of staying sane—by joking about death and destruction, Kyle maintains a distance between himself and his brutal actions as a soldier.*



*Kyle serves his country faithfully, but as a result he's unable to take care of Taya during her own time of need.*



*Kyle is proud of being a SEAL, but he recognizes some of the weaknesses of the SEALs, too—in particular, he doesn't like that the SEALs have to train to fight in the sea as well as on land. Kyle has a lot of respect for the other branches of the military, including the anti-terror units.*



*The fighting escalates in Ramadi, and in Iraq overall, reflecting the overall chaos of the war in Iraq. There is no indication that Americans are becoming safer during this time—as Kyle says elsewhere, for every insurgent he shoots, more insurgents appear.*



*Kyle again displays his indifference to the fine details of military strategy. His goal, it would seem, isn't to make Iraq safe—he just wants to kill as many people as possible. The passage offers another indication that Kyle was an Islamophobe who didn't care about the precise differences between different Iraqi people: instead, he thought of all Iraqis as equally "savage" and potentially dangerous.*



*Kyle has nothing but contempt for the Iraqi soldiers and police officers; he accuses them of being lazy and undisciplined. Kyle's attitude toward Iraqi authorities contrasts markedly with his respect for the soldiers from European countries, such as Poland.*



On June 17, the American troops prepare for an offensive strike in Ramadi. Kyle is stationed at a COP (Command Observation Post) at the edge of Ramadi, where he's instructed to provide sniper backup if necessary. To his surprise, no fight breaks out as the day goes on; instead, American tanks roll in, and American soldiers take the nearby houses without any insurgent fire. For the rest of the day, there isn't "much action at all." Kyle thinks, "This was the most dangerous city in Iraq?"

*For the time being, the fighting in Ramadi isn't particularly dangerous for the SEALs; however, in the following chapters, we will learn about the insurgent pushback to the American troops' presence in Ramadi.*



## CHAPTER 10: THE DEVIL OF RAMADI

Several nights after the June 17 raid, Kyle and a group of Marines and *jundis* are sent down the river running through Ramadi to scope out a potential COP (Command Observation Post), which may or may not be harboring insurgents. Suddenly, Kyle notices that the laser on his **gun** isn't working. Before he has a chance to replace the battery, he notices an insurgent sitting near the water. Kyle motions for his lieutenant to shoot, and the lieutenant kills the insurgent. Kyle seizes the dead insurgent's gun and then follows the rest of his platoon to the COP site. The platoon reaches a big house with a wall around it; Kyle and the other soldiers climb the wall, where they find civilians sleeping in the courtyard. They secure the house, drive out the civilians, and claim the house as COP Falcon, a military base.

*This passage marks one of the only times in the book when Kyle has a significant problem with his weapon; for the most part, his gun serves him well at all times. Notice the way that Kyle and the other SEALs claim private Iraqi houses in the name of the U.S. military: one could argue that the SEALs' claim to the house that becomes COP Falcon is far less valid than the claim of the civilians Kyle finds sleeping there. But because the SEALs are armed and dangerous, they claim the house for their side.*



After securing COP Falcon, Kyle is ordered to work with military strategists in Ramadi. His job is to provide input about upcoming offensive operations. While Kyle enjoys giving advice, he finds the work too bureaucratic—"coat and tie stuff," as he puts it. Another one of Kyle's duties at this time is evaluating the soldiers in his platoon. Kyle hates having to give feedback about other soldiers.

*As Kyle becomes a more respected soldier, he's given increasingly bureaucratic assignments, which involve evaluating his fellow soldiers. Kyle doesn't enjoy these assignments, because, as we've seen, his preference is always to fight in the field.*



As Kyle continues his work, the U.S. military sends more tanks and trucks to Ramadi. COP Falcon becomes an especially important military base—it also becomes a prime target for insurgents. One day, a group of insurgents armed with AKs surrounds COP Falcon. However, Kyle and the other soldiers stationed inside snipe the insurgents over the course of the next few hours, killing almost all of them. Around this time, Kyle makes his 100th kill as a sniper—Kyle describes this as "a huge milestone."

*As before, Kyle continues to accumulate kills without displaying any (acknowledged) signs of guilt, hesitation, or trauma. He kills his hundredth insurgent in Iraq, and treats the kill as a major milestone, almost as if he's an athlete setting a record, rather than a professional killer.*



The military sends new orders to Kyle's platoon: clear the area surrounding COP Falcon. Kyle and a few other SEALs volunteer to secure the most dangerous area near COP Falcon. Kyle gets permission from the ranking captain in COP Falcon, but the commanding captain warns Kyle that if he gets in trouble, he won't be able to send any backup, since there'll be too many IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices). Kyle and his fellow SEALs successfully clear the dangerous area, and afterwards, the captain is so impressed that he says, "I don't care where you go, if you need me, I'm comin' to get you."

While stationed in Ramadi, Kyle becomes more interested in prayer. Before fighting, he joins a prayer circle led by Marc Lee. Kyle doesn't always pray before a fight, but he always thanks God afterwards. He also enjoys smoking cigars at the end of a long day. Kyle tries not to think about the possibility of death—instead, he thinks of himself as "invincible."

Kyle, now the head sniper in the area, trains new American snipers. However, his greatest passion is still shooting his own **gun**. Luckily, he thinks, there are lots of insurgents walking through the streets of Ramadi. Indeed, he says, "We were just slaughtering them." During this time, the SEALs sustain very few serious injuries—for instance, the first person to be shipped out of Ramadi gets a piece of shrapnel lodged in his patella (kneecap), a painful but not particularly serious injury. One day, Kyle kills an insurgent who attempts to fire at him; immediately afterwards, the insurgent's mother weeps and cradles her son's dead body. Kyle thinks, "If you loved them, you should have kept them away from the war." Kyle admits that this is a cruel way to think, but "it's hard to sympathize with grief when it's over someone who just tried to kill you."

Taya calls Kyle, and learns that he's written letters to her and their children, in the event that he dies. Taya finds herself getting angry with Kyle for writing letters rather than expressing his feelings for his family "here and now." She thinks, "Tell me now. Make it real. Don't just say some sappy shit when you're gone."

Fighting in Ramadi escalates, and a total of ninety-six American soldiers are killed. Kyle has a few close calls, but survives the fighting. Kyle realizes that he's become a target for insurgents, since his reputation has spread to insurgents as well as U.S. soldiers. Kyle learns that the insurgents have put a bounty on his life, and that they have their own nickname for him: the Devil of Ramadi. This makes Kyle proud. In the meantime, he continues setting up COPs across the city. He notices signs of progress in Ramadi: tribal leaders are more vocal in calling for peace, and some sections of the city are fairly safe.

*Like many people in the memoir (including Taya, initially), the COP Falcon captain has the idea that all Navy SEALs are arrogant and reckless. However, Kyle and his friends prove themselves to be highly competent, serious-minded people, earning the captain's respect in the process.*



*Kyle isn't the most religious person in his platoon, but, like many soldiers in times of uncertainty, he turns to God for reassurance and comfort. The passage is also a good example of how Kyle uses machismo to disguise his trauma and fear. He tells himself he's invincible to distract himself from the thought of his own mortality.*



*Again, Kyle uses dehumanizing language like "slaughtering," a word more often applied to animals than people, to talk about his actions against the insurgents. Kyle's lack of sympathy for insurgents (or even neutral Iraqis who happen to be related to insurgents) is plain in this scene: he can't even muster sympathy for the mother of a dead insurgent. However, this passage marks one of the only times in the book when Kyle admits that his attitude toward Iraqis is cruel; nevertheless, as he says here, he hates insurgents because they're trying to kill him.*



*Kyle still struggles to express his feelings to his wife and children. His experiences in war act as a barrier in his relationship with Taya: it's suggested that he can't express himself to his wife because he thinks she won't understand what he's been through.*



*As the danger in Ramadi increases, Kyle comes to enjoy the fighting more, not less. For instance, he's not intimidated when he learns that there's a bounty on his life—rather, he takes the bounty as a compliment and a badge of honor. The passage also gives the sense that Kyle and the SEALs' aggressive style of warfare has intimidated the Ramadi leadership into negotiating for peace.*



Kyle and the other SEALs fall into a “rhythm” of working in Ramadi: securing COPs, cordoning off areas, fighting insurgents, etc. Things seem to be improving, but there’s still a lot of danger—on one operation, Kyle recalls, “Ryan got shot.”

*The chapter ends with a cliffhanger—Kyle mentions that Ryan Job, his friend and fellow SEAL, gets shot. So far, none of Kyle’s close friends have been seriously hurt.*



## CHAPTER 11: MAN DOWN

On a hot summer day, Kyle walks through Ramadi with the other SEALs, scanning for insurgents. He and Ryan Job are joking and laughing—Ryan is a funny guy, and always makes Kyle feel better. Kyle tells Ryan to stand on the side of the road, providing backup. Then, suddenly, shots fly out. After a few seconds, the shots subside—but Kyle turns and sees that Ryan has taken a bullet to the head, and he’s bleeding heavily. Kyle thinks that Ryan’s going to die; then, Ryan coughs and says, “I’m good. I got this.” Kyle walks Ryan to a personnel vehicle, which rushes Ryan to the hospital. Kyle is devastated by Ryan’s injury, and worries that he’ll lose his friend.

*In this frightening scene, Kyle makes an innocent mistake: he tells his friend, Ryan Job, to stand on the street. However, Kyle’s order turns out to be a bad call, putting Job into the line of fire. Kyle, thinking that he’s inadvertently killed his close friend, is consumed by grief, guilt, and self-hatred—notably, things he doesn’t feel after killing Iraqis.*



In the end, Ryan is evacuated from Iraq with severe wounds. He survives with his life but loses his vision. Kyle feels guilty for telling Ryan to stand by the road—it was he who put Ryan “in the spot where he got hit.” The SEALs agree that they need to go back into Ramadi and “get some payback” for Ryan.

*Notice that the SEALs’ response to Ryan’s injury is to go back into battle and avenge their friend’s death. In the culture of machismo, any act of aggression, whether it’s a shove in a crowded bar or a shot at a friend, must be retaliated against.*



The SEALs get a tipoff that the insurgents who fired on Ryan are hiding in a house nearby. They raid the house, but find no insurgents. While they’re gathered outside, a bullet hits Marc Lee in the head. Kyle sees that the fire is coming from a nearby house—he realizes that someone must have set up the Marines, sending a tip about the wrong house. Kyle realizes that now, Marc Lee is going to die. Tony, Kyle’s chief, gives the order that the SEALs need to stand down before they lose any more men.

*The SEALs’ attempts to “get payback” for Ryan Job’s attack fail initially: they’re ambushed by insurgents, and end up losing another SEAL, Marc Lee. Tony, recognizing that morale and organization in the platoon is falling apart, wisely orders the SEALs to stand down and regroup before they have another accident.*



Back at base, Kyle calls Taya and breaks down while telling her the sad news. Taya feels sorry for her husband, though she’s grateful that he wasn’t killed. In Ramadi, the troops hold a memorial service for Marc Lee, and the SEALs stand in the front row: as Kyle says, “We were his family.” Marc Lee is the first SEAL to die in Iraq. In the following weeks, Kyle spends more time than usual reading the Bible. He continues to feel guilty for putting Ryan in danger.

*We see another aspect of the conflict between country and family. Marc Lee’s fellow SEALs stand in the front row at his funeral, the area traditionally reserved for the family of the deceased. This might suggest that SEALs like Lee and Kyle don’t just experience a tension between family and country—instead, their fellow soldiers become their true family.*



Despite missing seven men (Ryan, Marc, the soldier with a shrapnel injury, and the four soldiers who traveled back to the U.S. with Marc's body), Kyle and the rest of his platoon decide to continue fighting, rather than "taking it easy." The platoon gets seven new recruits—SEALs who haven't seen much active duty yet. Kyle and his friends haze the recruits, but also respect them for their courage and humility.

The SEAL platoon tours Ramadi, isolating bombs and clearing buildings suspected of harboring insurgents. The platoon works closely with a fleet of Apache helicopters, which provide useful backup. The helicopters also provide the platoon with surveillance information about potential insurgent bases.

One day, Kyle sees two potential insurgents riding a moped. They stop and drop a heavy-looking backpack into a manhole on a busy street—it appears that they're planting a bomb. Kyle kills both insurgents with one shot, noting, "The taxpayer got a good bang for his buck on that one." Afterwards, Kyle begins to notice that Iraqis who ride mopeds are always carrying heavy backpacks, probably containing bombs. He asks his superior officers for permission to shoot anyone riding a moped—but much to his irritation, this request is denied. Kyle also complains that he was forced to write a "shooter's statement" for every person he killed. Supposedly, statements are supposed to protect Kyle if there's ever an investigation for an unjustified killing, but Kyle believes that the statements are designed to "cover the butts of people much further up the chain of command." He complains that writing a shooter statement is just "the red tape of war."

Kyle continues to discuss the bureaucracy of the war in Iraq. He notes that there were lawyers, journalists, and reporters in Iraq, alongside the troops. Every time a reporter filmed a soldier, it seemed, "the Marines got in trouble." Marines didn't only have to worry about fighting the insurgents; they had to worry about being court-martialed for breaking rules. Kyle says, "Most Americans can't take the reality of war, and the report they sent back didn't help us at all," and adds, "Tell the military the end result you want, and you'll get it. But don't try and tell us how to do it."

In September 2006, Kyle learns from Taya that their daughter is sick with leukemia. Kyle is devastated by the news, and decides that he needs to leave Iraq to be with his family. Kyle feels guilty about leaving his fellow soldiers behind in their time of need.

*Even after the tragedies of Ryan Job and Marc Lee, the SEALs continue to wage all-out war against the insurgents. Furthermore, the culture of machismo persists, with the older, more experienced SEALs hazing the younger recruits. The process of hazing is a critical part of building their unity and brotherhood.*



*The U.S. military continues to enjoy a tremendous technological advantage over the insurgents in Iraq.*



*Kyle offers an unusually thorough account of bureaucracy in Iraq. Kyle dislikes having to write statements after killing an insurgent; he thinks this process serves no purpose other than to protect his superiors from getting court-martialed. While many soldiers and journalists argued that the war in Iraq was too disorganized and chaotic, Kyle offers the opposite point of view: he believes that the war was too bureaucratic and bogged down in red tape. Terrifyingly, he suggests that he be given the right to murder anyone in Ramadi seen riding a moped, and seems genuinely perplexed when his superiors deny his request. Kyle seems unable to understand why his commanding officers might want to protect the lives of innocent Iraqis—suggesting, once again, that Kyle has no respect for Iraqi lives.*



*Kyle expresses his irritation with human rights and international law; by his account, the U.S. military should be allowed to do whatever it wants in Iraq (including, by Kyle's own reckoning, murdering anyone riding a moped or carrying a copy of the Koran).*



*Kyle's time in Iraq is drawing to a close: his family's need for him is growing, while his fellow SEALs' remains the same.*



## CHAPTER 12: HARD TIMES

When Kyle returns to Taya and his children in 2006, Taya senses right away that he's stressed and "numb to everything." Taya still loves Kyle, but she doesn't know how to treat him—she doesn't know if she should ask him about his service or not. At the same time, Taya is still angry with Kyle for leaving for Iraq so soon after the birth of their children.

Back in the U.S., Kyle watches as the doctors run tests on his daughter. Eventually, the doctors realize that Kyle doesn't really have leukemia; she's just suffering from a bad case of jaundice. When Kyle's daughter leaves the hospital, Kyle tries to show his love for his daughter, but, since she barely knows him, she often cries when he's near her. Kyle also becomes annoyed with his young son for "little things," and insists that his son needs more discipline.

While he's back with his family, Kyle is shocked to learn that, after his departure from Ramadi, the troops lost another SEAL, Mike Monsoor. Monsoor was trying to save the lives of some of his fellow soldiers when a grenade struck him in the chest. Rather than running from the grenade, Monsoor alerted his fellow SEALs of the danger and allowed them to run past him. In effect, Monsoor sacrificed his own life to save the lives of his two friends. A group of SEALs travels back to the U.S. for Monsoor's funeral and wake. Kyle attends the wake and gets exceptionally drunk.

In April 2007, Kyle and some fellow SEALs go to a bar, where they see a group of professional mixed-martial-arts fighters celebrating. The fighters bump into Kyle's friends, and a fight breaks out. The cops rush into the bar and arrest Kyle and the other brawlers. The next day, Kyle goes to court and pleads guilty to assault, and the judge drops the case. Taya is furious when she finds out what Kyle did; their marriage is "rapidly going downhill." Kyle recalls that he's gotten in bar fights on many occasions: once, in Colorado, he defended a waitress from an aggressive customer. Kyle was arrested for fighting, but, as usual, the charges were dismissed.

*Taya continues to struggle with her conflicted feelings toward her husband. While she loves Kyle and respects his military service, she feels personally wronged by Kyle's decision to reenlist—she interprets Kyle's decision as a sign that he prefers being a SEAL to being a husband and father.*



*Kyle tries to express his love for his children, but struggles to do so. In particular, he realizes that he barely knows his son—he's spent most of the last few years in Iraq. Poignantly, Kyle's own daughter cries when he's near her—a sad reminder of the distance that's grown between Kyle and his family over the course of the book.*



*More of Kyle's friends and associates die or sustain serious injuries, further contributing to Kyle's own guilt and self-hatred. Kyle wants to be back in Iraq, fighting insurgents. However, he goes to Monsoor's wake. (In the original version of American Sniper, there was a passage describing a drunken fight between Kyle and another guest at Monsoor's wake—later, it was revealed that Kyle's opponent was none other than Jesse Ventura, the governor of Minnesota and former professional wrestler.)*



*In part, Kyle gets into fights because the code of machismo tells him that he can't back down from danger or aggression of any kind. But at the same time, the escalating frequency and viciousness of Kyle's fights might suggest that Kyle is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a condition common to veterans of war. Like some victims of PTSD, Kyle feels disconnected from others and so turns more easily to violence.*



While back in the U.S., Kyle and other SEALs go to speak with a famous author and former SEAL, Dick Couch. Couch delivers a lecture to the SEALs, arguing that the troops in Iraq should be focused on winning the “hearts and minds” of the Iraqi civilians, rather than simply killing insurgents. Kyle strongly disagrees with such an idea—he interrupts Couch several times during his lecture, and argues that the only way to bring Iraqis “to the peace table” is to first prove that the U.S. military is as dangerous as the insurgency. Couch becomes increasingly irritated with Kyle, and after a while, Kyle’s CO orders him to leave the room, which Kyle is happy to do. Kyle continues to believe that the “hearts and minds” approach to war is wrong—the reason that the U.S. military saw any success at all in Iraq is because it intimidated people into obedience. He insists, “This is how the world works.”

Kyle learns that he’s suffering from serious knee injuries sustained over the course of his last few tours of Iraq. In the end, he spends five months working with a physical therapist to strengthen his knees. Kyle also tries to use this time to repair his marriage. Kyle realizes that he’s forgotten what it feels like to be in love with Taya. Around this time, he begins talking and texting regularly with one of his old girlfriends. Taya eventually “figures out that something is up.” After a long talk, Kyle and Taya agree that they want to remain married, and that they still love each other. They agree to go to marriage counseling.

After many weeks of counseling, Kyle decides that he will not reenlist in the military when the time comes. He says, “Others could do my job protecting the country, but no one could truly take my place with my family.” However, Kyle still has another tour of Iraq coming up. For this upcoming tour, Kyle and the rest of the platoon are broken up and sent to different places. Kyle is assigned to Delta Platoon. Furthermore, he is now an LPO, or “lead petty officer.” This means that he will be assigned more bureaucratic duties on this upcoming tour. He’ll have to assign responsibilities to different soldiers, like deciding which soldiers detonate explosives.

Kyle is still back in the states, recovering from his knee surgery. This means that he’s unable to participate in the normal training for his upcoming deployment; however, he works with his physical therapist and gets back into shape. One night, Kyle gets into another bar fight, and winds up breaking his hand, further delaying his deployment. When Kyle goes to the military hospital the next day to fix his hand, he sees the “kid” whose jaw he broke at the bar the previous night. When the “kid” tries to confront Kyle, Kyle claims that the kid is lying—he broke his fist during a routine training exercise. The medics believe Kyle. A few weeks afterward, Kyle’s hand is back to normal, and Kyle prepares to ship out and “kill some more bad guys.”

*It’s often said that the War on Terror—the war in Iraq as well as other U.S. military operations in the early 2000s—was a failure, because it created more insurgents than it killed. While soldiers like Kyle killed many terrorists, the overall brutality of the U.S. military polarized the Middle East, causing many moderate people to gravitate toward terrorist groups. Kyle utterly disagrees with such an interpretation of the War on Terror—in his mind, precisely the opposite is true. In other words, he believes that U.S. troops weren’t severe enough with Middle Easterners, and that any success the military achieved was due to intimidation and fear, not the “hearts and minds” strategy.*



*During his time back from Iraq, Kyle struggles with his marriage, and is tempted to begin an affair with his old girlfriend. However, he rekindles his love with Taya, and decides to go to marriage counseling to talk through his feelings—something he’s always struggled to do, having been trained to suppress emotion and channel his feelings into violence.*



*Kyle makes the difficult decision to spend time with his family rather than reenlisting in the military. For most of the book, Kyle has operated under the assumption that his country needs him more than his family does. However, he seems to realize that the opposite is true: with his children growing up and his wife sick with worry, his family needs him much more than his fellow SEALs do. Kyle will return to Iraq for one final deployment, but afterwards he’ll return to Taya and his children.*



*Kyle continues to fight with strangers at bars, reflecting his strong machismo and, more debatably, his trauma sustained during the war in Iraq. (It’s interesting, however, that Kyle lies about his fights—one might assume that refusing to own up to one’s deeds would conflict with the code of machismo.) In spite of his psychological issues, Kyle continues to serve his country—after breaking his hand in the bar fight, for example, he still ships off to Iraq for the last time.*



## CHAPTER 13: MORTALITY

In April 2008, Kyle is stationed in Sadr City, near Baghdad. He and his SEAL team clear houses suspected of harboring insurgents. On their first night in the city, Kyle and the SEALs raid a house; suddenly, insurgents open fire on the house from across the street. A massive bomb explodes, throwing Kyle to the ground.

Kyle backs up to explain how he came to be in Sadr City. Kyle began his tour in Western Iraq, doing “boring work.” Then, Kyle got an unexpected opportunity to join a task unit. He was recruited for the unit because of his talents as a sniper, as well as his training as an LPO. The unit’s job is to fight a growing group of insurgents, the Mahdi Army, who are training in the Iraqi city of Sadr. They’ll work closely with Army forces, who are building a concrete wall through Sadr City. On their first night in Sadr City, the SEALs are sent out on foot patrol to make sure that the houses near the wall are safe.

We’re back where we were at the start of the chapter: Kyle has been thrown to the floor by the force of a bomb. His head is bleeding, and he can feel that he’s been shot in the back (though his body armor protects him). Luckily, the other SEALs call for emergency backup, and a fleet of Army Strykers—heavily armed personnel carriers—arrives minutes later. Kyle and the remaining SEALs stumble into the Strykers and speed back to base. Kyle thanks God that he survived the night, but senses that his good luck is running out.

Two days later, Kyle and the other SEALs return to the area surrounding the wall, this time with Strykers. They raid a nearby factory, which Kyle begins to use as a sniper post. The next day alone, Kyle snipes eight insurgents. One of these insurgents is carrying an RPG (rocket-powered grenade launcher). Kyle waits for another insurgent to pick up the valuable weapon; eventually, a small child recovers it. Kyle decides, “I wasn’t going to kill a kid, innocent or not.”

Looking back, Kyle decides, Sadr City was the worst place he ever served—even worse than Fallujah or Ramadi. Insurgents fire on him every day, often with rockets and advanced weapons. The Iraqi government claims that SEALs are killing civilians, but Kyle insists that this is “pure bullshit.”

*During Kyle’s final deployment in Iraq, he sustains more injuries than usual, and has more near-death experiences than before, reflecting the escalating chaos in the country.*



*Kyle’s reputation as a sniper helps him get special assignments during his final tour of Iraq: because he’s spent so many years raiding houses and firing on insurgents, he’s the ideal candidate for a mission to attack the Mahdi Army.*



*Kyle survives his first night in Sadr City, but is severely shaken by the experience—had the bullet that hit him gone a few inches higher, he’d have been shot in the head, just like Ryan Job. Kyle has thought of himself as “invincible” in the past—now, he’s finding it increasingly difficult to preserve such an illusion.*



*In this disturbing passage, Kyle seems to think that he’s behaving kindly to the small child carrying the RPG. However, notice that he says he refuses to kill a child, “innocent or not”—the clear implication being that Kyle believes it’s possible for a young Iraqi child to be “guilty” enough to deserve death. Even when he’s merciful, Kyle’s language betrays his contemptuous attitude toward all Iraqis.*



*Kyle continues to deny that he killed any civilians during his long tenure as a sniper.*



After a month, the soldiers complete the concrete walls through Sadr City. During this time, Kyle and his fellow SEALs kill hundreds of insurgents. Soon after the barriers go up, the leaders of the Mahdi Army begin to negotiate a peace treaty with the Iraqi government. “Imagine that,” Kyle writes.

Back in the U.S. Taya continues to worry about Kyle. Her friends tell her that she doesn’t really know her husband. Privately, Taya wonders what Kyle is doing in Iraq; over the phone he just says he’s on a “training trip,” but Taya senses that this isn’t true.

After the Mahdi Army begins negotiating for peace, Sadr City becomes much safer. Kyle gets a new assignment: find bomb makers and other insurgents in the villages surrounding Baghdad. Kyle, temporarily separated from his platoon, joins up with a team of Army soldiers. Together, they fight many insurgents in the village, and Kyle notes, “It was surprising how many idiots you had to kill before they finally got [the point].” Kyle spends three months patrolling the villages; in this time, he kills about twenty insurgents.

One day in the villages, Kyle and the other soldiers come upon a man wearing a police uniform. Kyle is immediately suspicious that the man is an insurgent—the Army has received reports that terrorists have been stealing police uniforms. Kyle arrests the man, but his superiors in the Army order him to release the man immediately; the Army has no intelligence on the suspect. Kyle is outraged that he has to let the man go, and he thinks about him “every time we heard of an attack by insurgents dressed as policemen.”

On another night, Kyle and the soldiers raid a building. Kyle sees a man standing in the window of another building far away. At first, he’s unable to see anything, but after a few moments, he realizes that the man is aiming an RPG at the troops. Kyle aims his **gun** and fires at the man with the RPG; even though the man is 2,100 yards away, Kyle hits him in one shot, saving his fellow soldiers’ lives. The shot, Kyle notes, remains his longest confirmed kill, though it was partly luck that led him to make the kill.

*Previously, Kyle argued that the “hearts and minds” approach to warfare will never work, because people only respond to violence. Kyle takes the Mahdi Army’s peace treaty as proof that violence and intimidation work better than kindness and diplomacy.*



*Taya continues to worry about Kyle, especially because this is his final tour of the Middle East. Knowing that Kyle will soon be back in the U.S., living with her, Taya wrestles with the possibility that she doesn’t really know her own husband.*



*Kyle continues to accumulate more and more kills; furthermore, he betrays no signs of regretting his actions. Rather, he regards the Iraqi insurgents as foolish animals, who only respond to violence after many months of “reinforcement” (earlier in the memoir, Kyle makes a similar point about the Iraqi people in general).*



*Kyle has argued that the war in Iraq was too bureaucratic, with the result that dangerous insurgents were allowed to walk free. He offers this anecdote about the alleged insurgent wearing the police uniform as proof of the higher-level incompetence of the war effort: his point seems to be that ground-level SEALs like himself were forbidden from doing their jobs by pesky rules and human rights regulations.*



*Kyle seems enormously proud of his kill, since it testifies to his talents as a marksman (although he modestly admits that there was an element of luck involved).*



U.S. soldiers continue to occupy the building until the next day. By mid-morning, insurgents are firing on them. The soldiers try to make their exit, and they run out of the building, toward a soccer field, where the army's RG-33s (big, bulletproof vehicles) are parked. Kyle and his friends run for the RG-33s; one of the soldiers throws a smoke bomb, hoping to disguise the group's movements. However, the smoke bomb also makes it impossible for the soldiers to see where they're going. Even so, the soldiers manage to run toward their vehicles and drive away.

Shortly after the incident in the village, Kyle applies for a transfer and returns to Delta platoon. At this time of year, it's often 120 degrees outside. Kyle learns that he's been promoted to chief petty officer (CPO). Before shipping out for his current tour, Kyle had taken a "chief's exam"—now he learns that, although he barely passed his exam, his reputation as a sniper won him the promotion. At first, Kyle isn't "crazy about becoming a chief," as he enjoys his current, hands-on work.

In the following weeks as CPO, Kyle finds himself reliving the experience of being shot in Sadr City. He's unable to sleep, he feels a constant sense of danger, and his blood pressure is unhealthily high. Kyle goes to the doctors and tells them about how he's been feeling. The doctors propose that Kyle go home early—the tour is due to end in only a couple weeks, and the "mission tempo was practically nonexistent." Kyle agrees.

*Even while Kyle and his fellow soldiers amass more and more kills, the insurgency effort refuses to die down. Indeed, the situation in Sadr City seems to be getting more and more dangerous—in this passage, for example, Kyle has another near-death experience running away from the building toward the RG-33s. The escalating chaos in Sadr City calls into question Kyle's claims that violence alone will win the War on Terror.*



*Kyle's talents as a soldier continue to earn him promotions and added responsibilities; nevertheless, he remains happiest when shooting at insurgents.*



*This passage marks one of the only times in the book that Kyle even alludes to his own trauma. It seems fairly likely that the symptoms Kyle describes here, such as stress and high blood pressure, aren't sudden reactions to the situation in Sadr City, but rather long-term, chronic conditions that Kyle developed over many years of dangerous combat. In the end, the stress and trauma of warfare probably contribute to Kyle's decision to come home.*



## CHAPTER 14: HOME AND OUT

Kyle ships out of Iraq in late August 2008. It feels surreal to be leaving the Middle East for, probably, the last time. Back in the U.S., Kyle participates in a scientific research program designed to measure the effects of stress on soldiers. Scientists tell Kyle that when he enters a crisis, such as a fire, his blood pressure and heart rate actually *drop*—exactly the opposite of how the average person would react.

Kyle is sorely tempted to reenlist, even though he promised Taya that he wouldn't. Taya insists that Kyle's children need him, even more than his country needs him. Kyle tries to find a compromise: he speaks to a Navy officer, who tells him that he could work in Texas as a recruiter. However, the only way for Kyle to get this job would be to first reenlist in the SEALs. Kyle, suspicious, tells the Navy recruiter, "thanks, but no thanks—I'm *getting out*." Taya says, "I believe not one of [Kyle's fellow SEALs] would blame him for getting out."

*Kyle has become so numb to death and danger that he actually relaxes when he's in a high-stress situation. Years in the SEALs have trained him to embrace danger, with the result that the periods between combat are actually more anxiety-inducing for Kyle than combat itself.*



*Even after going to marriage counseling and coming back to America, Kyle continues to feel that he should be fighting in Iraq. While Kyle himself doesn't admit it in this passage, it's strongly implied that Kyle feels guilty about abandoning his fellow SEALs in the middle of a war. Nevertheless, Taya insists that Kyle isn't betraying his friends at all by leaving Iraq to be with his wife and kids.*



Kyle remains in the U.S., and keeps in touch with Ryan, who's lost both of his eyes. Kyle is amazed and inspired by Ryan's sense of humor and optimism. One day, he sees a little girl ask Ryan how he lost his eyes—deadpan, Ryan crouches down and tells the girl, "Never run with scissors." Kyle is also impressed that Ryan's girlfriend marries him after his accident. Ryan goes back to college, graduates with honors, and gets a good job. He also gets into hiking and hunting. Kyle concludes, "If there is a poster child for overcoming disabilities, Ryan was it."

In 2010, Kyle learns that Ryan and his wife are expecting a child. However, Ryan has to go back to the hospital for further surgeries stemming from his time in Iraq. During one surgery, Ryan dies tragically.

Kyle writes about Marc Lee, the SEAL who died shortly after Ryan was shot in Iraq. Lee was an incredibly optimistic person. After his death, his mother, Debbie Lee, became active in veteran affairs; she's currently the president of a veterans' organization called America's Might Warriors.

Kyle tries to move on with his life, but doesn't know what to do now that he's out of the SEALs. He and an old friend named Mark Spicer, a former sergeant major in the British Army, toss around the idea of starting a sniping school in the U.S. Together, Kyle and Spicer found Craft International, a sniper training program with corporate offices in Texas. Kyle enjoys running Craft International, even if it requires him to wear a suit and tie at times. The company slogan is, "Despite what your mama told you, violence does solve problems."

Kyle settles his family in Texas, so that he can continue running the business. Being around his children helps him dissolve the "shell I built up during the war." He bonds with his son and daughter, and has a great time goofing off with them both. He's extremely close with his daughter, and begins teaching his son how to shoot when he's only two years old. He and Taya talk about sending their children into the military. Kyle insists that he wants his son to join the military at some point, but Taya says, "I think Chris has done enough for the country so that we can skip a generation. But we'll both be proud of our children no matter what."

*Kyle adjusts to his new civilian life with the help of his veteran friends. Just as Ryan's accident contributed enormously to Kyle's ongoing sense of guilt and shame, reuniting with Ryan, and continuing to be friends with him, mitigates Kyle's guilt. Even though Kyle is the older soldier, Ryan becomes his role model: he shows Kyle that it's possible to have a normal, happy life even after the most traumatic military service.*



*Ryan's life comes to a sudden, tragic end; even so, he inspires Kyle to try to live a more happy, fulfilling life with his own family.*



*Kyle turns to other role models for life after the SEALs, such as Marc Lee's mother. Like Debbie, Kyle gets heavily involved in veteran affairs, spending time with veterans suffering from PTSD (a decision that, tragically, led to his death in 2013, when a disturbed veteran shot him).*



*Kyle finds a sniping school: it's the perfect way for him to continue his military training in a civilian environment. The slogan of Craft International testifies to Kyle's love for fighting and killing.*



*Veterans suffering from trauma don't always recover from their psychological wounds. Luckily, Kyle seems to readjust to civilian life, in large part thanks to his love for his wife and children. However, it's important to notice that the memoir doesn't resolve one of the central tensions of the book, between service to country and service to family. Thus, it's not clear if Kyle and Taya's children will serve in the military, or if they'll reject their parents' lifestyle altogether. Perhaps we're left to make up our own minds about the virtues of military service, and to decide if it's possible to serve one's country and raise a happy family.*



Although being around his wife and children relaxes him, Kyle continues to struggle with memories of the war. He drinks heavily, and one night he drunkenly drives off the road, totaling his car. Amazingly, he survives without a scratch. Kyle claims that the car accident woke him up. He cuts down on drinking and makes more of an effort to adjust to civilian life.

Kyle becomes involved in veteran affairs; he invites veterans to ranches and shooting ranges and shows them a good time. He finds that “wounded veterans don’t need sympathy”—the best strategy is to treat them normally. Kyle also supports programs designed to put veterans to work. He notes, “There’s no reason someone who has fought for their country should be homeless or jobless.”

After many years of serving in the military, Kyle no longer defines himself as a SEAL—first and foremost, he is a father and a husband. He rediscovers his deep love for Taya, and misses her when he’s on business trips. Taya admits that both she and Chris have made some mistakes in their marriage, but they continue to love each other deeply.

Kyle admits that his experiences in war have changed him deeply: they taught him to embrace death and go to “the Dark Side.” He’s learned to kill people “like it’s no big deal.” But he killed people in Iraq because he sincerely loved his country, and wanted to keep Americans safe. He concludes that, when he dies and goes to the afterlife, God will understand why he shot people—“They all deserved to die.” His biggest regrets in life are the people he failed to save—his fellow soldiers.

Kyle’s experiences in Iraq have made him stronger and more mature. Small things don’t bother him or stress him out—he writes, “There are bigger and worse things that could happen than to have this tiny little problem wreck your life ... I’ve seen them. More: I’ve lived them.”

*Kyle continues to struggle with symptoms of trauma, such as drinking, fighting, and general danger-seeking. However, he makes progress, cutting down on drinking and pushing himself to embrace his new lifestyle back in the States.*



*Much like Debbie Lee, Kyle finds meaning in his new civilian life by fighting for veterans. Kyle’s decision to work for fellow veterans is especially tragic, considering that it was a veteran who murdered Kyle in 2013.*



*For most of the memoir, Kyle defines himself as a SEAL first and a husband second. Now, he defines himself as a husband and father first and a soldier second. Unlike the vast majority of SEALs, Kyle remains married to Taya, reinforcing his new conviction.*



*Kyle makes the same basic point he’s been making throughout the book: every single one of the people he shot and killed in Iraq deserved to die. At times, it can be very difficult to believe Kyle on this, considering his flippant, dismissive attitude towards human rights laws and the people of Iraq in general. Kyle’s allusion to the “Dark Side” might suggest the trauma and guilt he’s endured as a result of being a soldier. However, Kyle barely touches on his trauma in his memoir, meaning that we have to read between the lines to imagine what he went through during and after the war.*



*Kyle ends on an optimistic note: he’s lived a thrilling, adventurous life, and has become a calmer, more mature person as a result. It’s hard to care about small, civilian things when he’s spent so much of his adult life making life-or-death decisions.*





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