

IN THE CROSSHAIRS

Chris Kyle, a decorated sniper, tried to help a troubled veteran. The result was tragic.

BY NICHOLAS SCHMIDLE

On the morning of August 2, 2006, three Navy SEALs walked onto the roof of a four-story apartment building in Ramadi, in central Iraq. One of them, a petty officer and a sniper named Chris Kyle, got into position with his rifle. Peering through his gun's scope, Kyle scanned the streets below; as other American soldiers searched and cordoned off homes, he waited for insurgents to appear in his sight line.

It was an especially bloody phase of the war, and Kyle, who was thirty-two at the time, had distinguished himself amid the violence. That summer, he recorded his hundredth career kill—ninety-one of them in Ramadi. He was on his way to becoming one of the deadliest snipers in American history, with a hundred and sixty confirmed kills. In a written evaluation, his commanding officer reported that Kyle had “single-handedly thwarted a large-scale attack on a U.S. Marine Combat Outpost,” adding that his “performance under fire cannot be overstated.” Two previous evaluations had recommended Kyle for SEAL Team Six, the unit that later killed Osama bin Laden, and Kyle had received two Silver Stars for his achievements in combat.

In “American Sniper,” a memoir that was published in 2012, and went on to sell more than a million copies, Kyle recounted some of his most dramatic tales of marksmanship. There was the time in Ramadi that he shot two insurgents who were riding tandem on a moped with a single bullet. “When you’re in a profession where your job is to kill people, you start getting creative,” Kyle wrote. On another occasion, he killed an enemy fighter from more than a mile away. A former officer in Kyle’s platoon said that Kyle was willing to spend hours setting up the perfect shot, and joked, “He was

extremely patient while being a sniper. He was not that patient otherwise.”

To other servicemen, Kyle, an affable, brawny Texan with reddish-blond hair, could seem like Paul Bunyan in fatigues. An ex-Ranger, whose unit was housed in Ramadi on the same base as Kyle’s SEAL platoon, recently told me about the day that two Iraqi spies—both working for the Americans—reported being trailed by members of Al Qaeda in Iraq. The spies feared that they would be kidnapped. Kyle climbed a ladder that had been affixed to a palm tree and hid among the fronds. When the Al Qaeda members appeared, he killed them both.

Kyle seemed to consider himself a cross between a lawman and an executioner. His platoon had spray-painted the image of the Punisher—a Marvel Comics character, who wages “a one-man war upon crime”—on their flak jackets and helmets. Kyle made a point of ignoring the military dress code, cutting the sleeves off shirts and wearing baseball caps instead of a helmet. (“Ninety percent of *being cool* is looking cool,” he wrote.) Like many soldiers, Kyle was deeply religious and saw the Iraq War through that prism. He tattooed one of his arms with a red crusader’s cross, wanting “everyone to know I was a Christian.” When he learned that insurgents had placed a bounty on his head and had named him al-Shaitan Ramadi—the Devil of Ramadi—he felt “proud.” He “hated the damn savages” he was fighting. In his book, he recounts telling an Army colonel, “I don’t shoot people with Korans. I’d like to, but I don’t.” HOLY SHIT.

Kyle and his two teammates weren’t on the roof long before they came under enemy fire. A single round hit the M-60 machine gun of Kyle’s partner, a twenty-five-year-old named Ryan Job. Metal fragments tore into his face. Job, who

was critically wounded, was evacuated in a tracked personnel carrier. (He lost vision in both eyes but survived the injury. Three years later, he died from complications that followed facial-reconstruction surgery.) Kyle, deeply shaken, repaired to a combat outpost, about five hundred metres away. But he did not stay at the outpost long; within hours, he and other members of the platoon had rearmed, piled into two Bradley armored vehicles, and returned to the same neighborhood. “As soon as the ramp dropped on our Bradley, bullets started flying,” he later recalled. He and a dozen others ran inside a house and gathered at the base of a stairwell. The point man, a twenty-eight-year-old named Marc Lee, began climbing the stairs. Lee turned around to say something when a bullet cracked through a nearby window, entering through his open mouth and exiting the back of his head. He was killed.

Lee’s death and Job’s injuries “took a toll” on Kyle, his wife, Taya, told me. He’d relive that morning, imagining what he could have done differently. His blood pressure spiked, and he could sleep only sporadically. Sleep deprivation is a key component of post-traumatic stress disorder, or P.T.S.D., according to Jonathan Shay, a clinical psychiatrist who has worked at the Veterans Affairs facility in Boston and is the author of “Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming” (2002). He told me that sleep is “fuel for the frontal lobes of the brain,” which handle “ethical and emotional self-restraint” and “the ability to say, ‘This is now and that was then.’” He added, “In a sleep-deprived brain, there is only an eternal present.” LIKE A TEEN

A few weeks after Job and Lee were shot, Kyle learned that his infant daughter was ill, possibly with leukemia. (He and Taya also had a son, then eighteen

Eddie Ray Routh, left, served in the Marines for four years. Kyle, right, wrote a best-selling memoir about his life as a SEAL.

months old.) Feeling that he had fallen into a "dark hole," Kyle flew back home, to San Diego, California.

Soon after Kyle landed, another tragedy involving three SEALs occurred on a rooftop in Ramadi. This time, an enemy grenade bounced off the chest of Michael Monsoor, a petty officer. He dived onto the grenade moments before it exploded. The blast killed him, but his act saved the others. (Monsoor received the Medal of Honor posthumously.) In his memoir, Kyle affectionately recalled taking part in Monsoor's "hazing," writing, "I remember us holding him down so his head could be shaved." The deaths of Monsoor and others "definitely haunted him," Taya said.

For all the moral complexity of combat, coming home is often a more distressing and disorienting experience. The transition from battle zones and M.R.E.s to parking lots and fast food can unsettle even the most well-adjusted veterans. In a 2008 study, the RAND Corporation estimated that P.T.S.D. affected fourteen per cent of those who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Symptoms of the disorder range from minor insomnia to debilitating flashbacks, and studies of veterans suggest that the likelihood of developing P.T.S.D. increases with each combat deployment.

When Kyle came home on leave, he shut himself in the house for days; Taya

PTSD = residue from war

has said that he was "numb to everything." When he did venture out, his mind was still in Iraq. He swerved to avoid scraps of trash in the road—in Ramadi or Fallujah, such items were used to hide bombs. Once, after Taya accidentally tripped the home alarm, Kyle took cover under a desk. Other times, he'd wake up punching. While sleeping one night, Kyle grabbed hold of Taya's arm, with both hands. Worried that he would snap her arm in half, she repeated his name until he came to his senses and relaxed his grip. (Taya told me that she was never afraid of Kyle, and that he had not hurt her "in any way.")

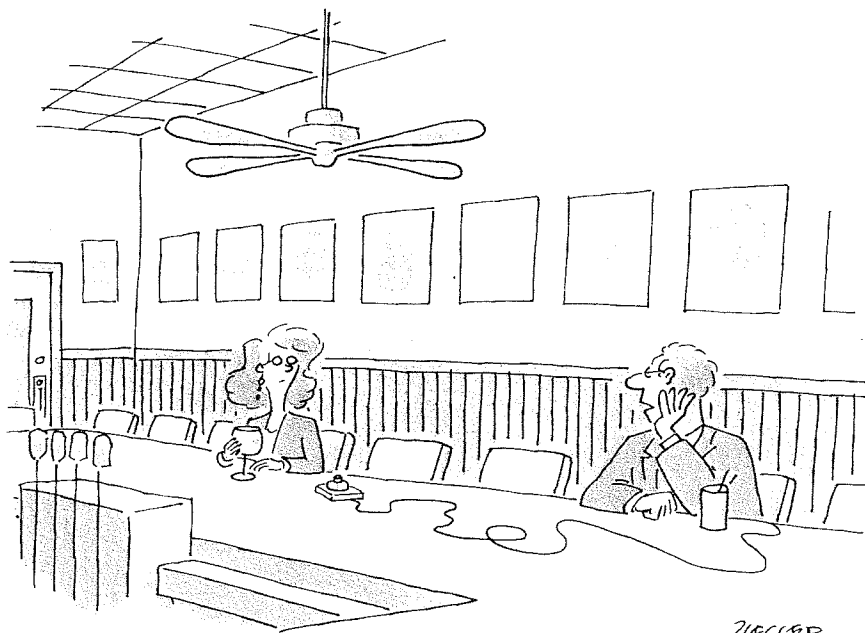
Shay, the psychiatrist, defines combat P.T.S.D. as "the persistence into civilian life, after danger, of the valid adaptations you made to stay alive when other people were trying to kill you." In an interview last year, Kyle observed, "There's no way you can go in, kill people, see people blown up and maimed and everything, and not come out with some stress"; however, he added, acknowledging P.T.S.D. was "hugely frowned on" by most SEALs. Another psychiatrist, who works at a military hospital, said of special operators, "Their culture is still that you don't show any signs of weakness. You have to believe you're invincible and better than anyone else. Narcissism is reinforced in that culture. They're very bright and they're in top physical shape. All they do is train." He added, "They're

trained to sight someone and shoot them in the head and see the bullet shatter the whole head. They're trained not to flinch."

Special-operations forces undergo particularly thorough training. Among other things, they take the most intense version of a course that mimics the experience of being a prisoner of war: Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape, or SERE. Within the military, a widespread sentiment exists that such rigor makes special operators unusually resilient to P.T.S.D. Shay subscribes to this view, in part. But, he observed, "Snipers have the curse that they see the work their round does." The telescopic lens atop a sniper's rifle lends a dreadful intimacy to the act of killing. Whereas an infantryman might see his enemy fall after pulling the trigger, a sniper often watches, with tremendous magnification and clarity, as his bullet penetrates an enemy's skull. Shay said, "When you can see what you are killing, and know who you are killing, the emotional weight of that experience is likely to be way larger than when it is killing either from an airplane at thirty thousand feet or if you have only a general sense of where the enemy is."

Kyle's daughter turned out to have an infection, not leukemia, and was soon healthy again. Within a year and a half, Kyle had redeployed to Iraq. When he returned home on leave, he acted increasingly distant. At one point, Taya caught him texting with an old girlfriend. "Chris didn't think we were going to make it," she told me. She and Kyle had met in March, 2001, and had married a year later; Kyle shipped off to Iraq shortly after that. He participated in almost every pivotal moment of the war: the 2003 invasion; the second major battle in Fallujah, in the fall of 2004; the 2008 fight in Sadr City. No sooner had he flown home than he was preparing to do it all over again. But he was good at his job, and he cherished the camaraderie of the SEALs. "I went back to back to back to back to back," he once said.

One night in 2009, when Kyle and his family were living in San Diego, he and Taya sat down at the kitchen table. Kyle was preparing to reenlist. Though Taya knew he loved being a SEAL, she told him that if he stayed in the Navy she was moving to Oregon, to be close to her



"I don't have all night, Miss. Are you going to push that button or what?"

parents, and that things were “not going to be the same.” Kyle did not want to lose Taya or the kids, and so that night he agreed to quit.

Even before the successful raid on Osama bin Laden’s compound, in May, 2011, the Navy SEALs were a powerful brand. Veterans of the force starred in workout videos and in Hollywood films. During the past decade, many SEALs transitioned from active duty into lucrative careers with contractors, such as Blackwater. In late 2009, Kyle Bass—a hedge-fund manager, in Dallas, who had made a fortune during the housing crisis by betting against subprime mortgages—was looking to help out some veterans. A friend of his put him in touch with Kyle, and they met in Dallas. Bass recalled, “You could tell he was dealing with inner demons. He drew you in. You wanted to help him.” At the same time, Bass added, “Chris was a proud individual. He never wanted charity.” Bass asked him what he hoped to do with his life, and Kyle described his dream: starting a company that offered customized tactical training to people from law enforcement and the military.

Bass enlisted a few investors and provided Kyle with the seed money for the training company, which was given the name Craft International. It would not be hard to market Kyle’s expertise. Not only was he among the best snipers the military had produced; there were days in Iraq when he had fired more hostile rounds than an F.B.I. sniper might shoot in his entire career.

Kyle set up an office in Dallas and moved his family to his home town, Midlothian, a suburb south of the city. Kyle had been born in Odessa, an oil town in west Texas; when he was in elementary school, he and his parents moved to Midlothian. His father worked as a manager at A.T. & T. and ran a feed shop. His mother was employed by the corrections system. Kyle was a big, toothy kid with a laugh that “shook pictures off the wall,” Bryan Rury, a longtime friend, said. Rury and Kyle attended Midlothian High School together. Kyle wanted to be a cowboy: from an early age, he had been around guns, usually on hunting trips. (He learned to shoot a gun before he learned to ride a bike.) He wore cowboy boots, dipped tobacco, belonged to the

Future Farmers of America, and groomed cattle for show. Kyle was well liked, Rury told me, but “every now and then” he’d get into a fight. “Chris was not to be challenged,” he said. “He would beat your ass and smile the whole time he was doing it.”

Kyle graduated in 1992, and enrolled at Tarleton State University, an agriculture school in Stephenville, Texas. His true passion, though, was rodeo. He competed in saddle bronc and showed promise. But at a competition in Rendon, Texas, a horse flipped on its back while still in the chute, pinning Kyle to the ground. He suffered a broken wrist and several broken ribs. Screws were required to hold the wrist together, which meant that his rodeo career was finished.

He dropped out of Tarleton State in 1994, and tried to join the Navy. During the physical, Kyle was told that the screws in his wrist precluded him from attending the rigorous entry school for SEALs. He didn’t want to be a sailor, so he went to work on a ranch in Colorado. Not long afterward, another recruiter called and said that he could attend the entry school. He completed the course and joined SEAL Team Three, which is based in Coronado, California.

Kyle and Rury had not seen each other during the decade that Kyle was in the Navy. But they picked up where they left off, pulling pranks on each other. Several times, Rury sneaked up Kyle’s driveway in the middle of the night and slapped pro-Obama bumper stickers on his truck. (Kyle was a fervent Republican.) In retaliation, Kyle pasted one on Rury’s truck that declared “I Love Black Cock.” Last year, at a crawfish boil for Rury’s birthday, Kyle zip-tied Rury’s wrists and stuffed crawfish—some live, some cooked—down his shorts. Kent Studebaker, Kyle’s father-in-law, told me that Kyle had “a hearty sense of humor.” He was also “a good Christian person” who was a gentle but firm disciplinarian with his kids. (In his memoir, Kyle wrote about telling his son to look at him in the eye while they were talking.) Studebaker described Kyle as “all man,” and observed that “there was a large part of him that he didn’t reveal of himself.”

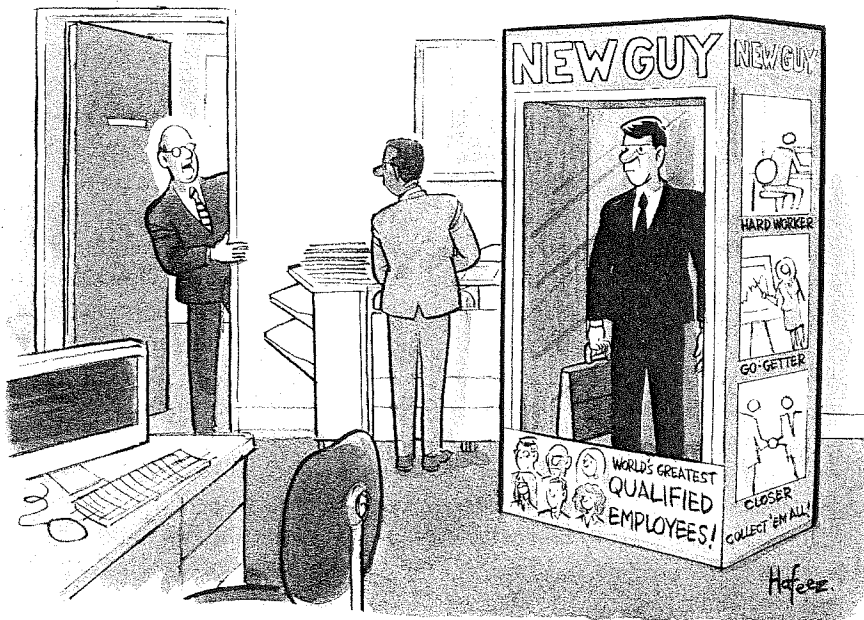
As Kyle set up Craft, he struggled to find the sense of purpose that he had felt in the Navy. He resented Taya for issuing him an ultimatum about leaving the

military; in “American Sniper,” he wrote that he became depressed and began staying out late, “pounding back beers.” He went on, “Pretty soon drinking was all I did. After a while, it was hard liquor, and it was all through the day. . . . I was going downhill and gathering speed.” Just before 2 A.M. on March 5, 2010, Kyle was driving alone in central Dallas, near Love Field, when he lost control of his truck and crashed into a wooden fence, nearly ending up in someone’s swimming pool. A policeman found Kyle with “bloodshot eyes, slurred speech, breath smelling of alcoholic beverage, unsteady balance and nystagmus.” Kyle told him, “I’m stupid. I was drinking and driving. I missed the turn. It was my fault.” The officer arrested him, on a D.W.I. charge. Kyle slept in jail until the morning, when he was released. A judge later dismissed the charges.

Kyle had a knack for finding trouble in bars. Fighting, he wrote, was “a fact of life when you’re a SEAL.” Once, he was arrested after he and a friend “beat the shit out of” several “wannabe U.F.C. fighters.” He broke his hand during a brawl in a bar near Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Cops arrested him after he decked a man in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, for slapping a woman. Kyle chalked up these incidents to having “pent-up aggression.” He added, “I would rather get my ass beat than look like a pussy in front of my boys.”

For all his bravado, Kyle had a more compassionate side. After he left the Navy, he became involved in efforts to help veterans. Exercise had been important to his own physical and mental rehabilitation. Some veterans, he knew, were unable to get to a gym. Perhaps they lived in a remote area; perhaps amputations or battlefield scars made them wary of working out in front of others. One day, Kyle asked Jason Kos, the C.E.O. of FITCO—a fitness-equipment company based in Carrollton, Texas—if he would donate old cardio or weight machines to such veterans. Kos liked the idea, and proposed a partnership: FITCO could provide the hardware, and Kyle could supply the muscle to install gyms in the homes of wounded veterans. The FITCO Cares Foundation, as the organization was named, began distributing gym equipment to veterans across the country.

Supporting veterans was only one



"Firkins, when you're done with those photocopies, remove the new guy from his packaging, will you?"

way that Kyle tried to establish a new identity off the battlefield; it was hard to let go of being a hero. In January, 2010, Kyle later told friends, he was once again put to the test: two men tried to carjack his truck. He was parked at a gas station, southwest of Dallas. "He told the robbers that he just needed to reach back into the truck to get the keys," Michael J. Mooney wrote in a recent article about Kyle, in *D Magazine*. Mooney, who had worked on the piece with Kyle's cooperation, wrote that Kyle "turned around and reached under his winter coat instead, into his waistband. With his right hand, he grabbed his Colt 1911"—a sidearm that is popular with military personnel. "He fired two shots under his left armpit, hitting the first man twice in the chest. Then he turned slightly and fired two more times, hitting the second man twice in the chest. Both men fell dead."

Police officers arrived at the scene. When they ran Kyle's license, Mooney wrote, something unusual occurred: "Instead of his name, address, and date of birth, what came up was a phone number at the Department of Defense. At the other end of the line was someone who explained that the police were in the presence of one of the most skilled

fighters in U.S. military history." According to Kyle, security cameras documented the episode.

Like Mooney, I also heard many of Kyle's friends and associates tell this story. Details varied, but the ending was the same: Kyle drove away without being charged and, as Mooney put it in a related blog post, later received "e-mails from police officers all over the country, thanking him for 'cleaning up the streets.'" Mooney never saw the security tape or found other corroborating evidence, such as police files or a coroner's report for the dead carjackers. "Consider this story confirmed by the man himself," he wrote in the blog post, in which he described Kyle as a "true American badass" and a "real-life action hero."

There is cause to be skeptical. The counties of Erath, Somervell, and Johnson cover the stretch of highway where the incident supposedly happened. Tommy Bryant, the sheriff of Erath County, told me that he could "guarantee it didn't happen here." Greg Doyle, the sheriff of Somervell County, said that he had "never heard" the story, which he found "kinda shocking," and added, "It did not occur here." Bob Alford, the sheriff of Johnson County, told a local reporter, "If something like that

happened here I would have heard of it, and I'm sure you all at the newspaper would have heard of it." These denials do not automatically disprove the story, of course. And it's true that certain operatives, from certain government offices and agencies, drive government-registered vehicles whose license plates prompt civilian authorities to contact a call center in the event of an accident or a traffic stop. But a SEAL with extensive experience in special-mission units told me that the notion of such a provision being in place for a former SEAL driving a private vehicle was "bullshit."

In 2010, Peter Hubbard, an editor at HarperCollins, sent Kyle an e-mail, asking him if he had "given any thought to writing a book" about his remarkable exploits as a sniper. "I would be very interested in talking with you," Kyle wrote back, but added that the conversation couldn't happen for a few days: "I am packing right now for an antelope hunt my company is putting on for several wounded vets."

The hunt was co-sponsored by the Troops First Foundation, a nonprofit that organizes outings and hunting trips for "wounded warriors." Kyle had participated in such events before, and he relished them, because they allowed him to interact with veterans on a more personal level. (He had no appetite for office work, and never got involved in the day-to-day operations of FITCO Cares.) He was a natural teacher. In military evaluations that I obtained, he was consistently praised for his leadership and instruction; in one such document, he was called an "exceptional" mentor. By working directly with veterans, Kyle began to feel once again that his life had a mission.

That evening, Kyle, a colleague from Craft, and Rick Kell, the executive director of Troops First, were welcomed at Kyle Bass's ranch, east of Dallas. Bass was on the board of Troops First. (Bass drives a Ford F-250 with a bumper sticker that reads "GOD BLESS OUR TROOPS, ESPECIALLY OUR SNIPERS.") Kell explained to me the rationale behind the hunts: "This is not just about killing the deer and getting the head mounted. The purpose of the trip is to meet someone who could have a potential impact on their lives." Typically, he invited along someone who was "ready

to create a bond" with the veterans. Kyle was ideal, Kell told me: "You felt good being with him, like the world is right in the order of things."

Joe Washam was among the guests that night. In April, 2004, Washam, then a sergeant in the Army, was preparing to inspect a paint factory in eastern Baghdad—intelligence reports had indicated that chemical weapons were possibly being manufactured there—when the building exploded. Washam spent the next twenty months in a hospital. Third-degree burns covered forty per cent of his body. He learned to walk again and regained the use of his hands while contending with waves of P.T.S.D. With so much of his time spent around doctors and other injured men, he deeply appreciated Kyle's company.

Kell pulled Washam aside and asked him if he wanted to go antelope hunting—the next day, in New Mexico. Washam, elated, said yes. He and a dozen other vets slept at the ranch that night; the following day, several of them flew to Lubbock, near the state's western border. Kyle and his colleague met them at the Lubbock airport. They had collected hunting rifles as the others were going to sleep, and then driven all night, napping in the car. "They just wanted to make sure we had a good time," Washam told me. The men spent the day hunting across tumbleweed expanses in New Mexico. As Kell recalled it, Kyle adopted Washam as his "battle buddy." Every one of the wounded warriors shot an antelope.

"American Sniper" came out in January, 2012. Kyle wrote the book with two other people: Jim DeFelice, a novelist, and Scott McEwen, an attorney from San Diego, who brokered the deal. Even within the growing genre of commando memoirs, the book stood out for its casual, at times flippant, tone. (On rank: "Truth is, I never cared all that much about rank." On officers: "Some are good, some are bad. And some are just pussies." On killing: "We were just slaughtering them." On congressional oversight: "How would they know? They've never even been in a combat situation.")

The book, which appeared eight months after the bin Laden raid, was a runaway success, and remains on the

Times best-seller list. Kyle split the earnings with DeFelice and McEwen, and donated his profits to the families of fallen soldiers. Peter Hubbard, the editor, would not disclose Kyle's advance or subsequent royalties, but said, "It was easy to see how it could get to seven figures." Bradley Cooper bought the film rights, and Steven Spielberg recently agreed to direct a biopic. HarperCollins signed Kyle to another book contract, "American Gun: A History of the U.S. in Ten Firearms," which will be published on June 4th. (One of the guns Kyle writes about is the Colt pistol that he purportedly used at the gas station—he describes it as a "weapon that in the right hands could turn bad luck good.")

Kyle became a minor celebrity. He was on the cover of *Soldier of Fortune* and was invited to gun events, such as the annual SHOT Show, in Las Vegas; during an interview there, in January, he said of President Obama, "I know he's definitely against the Second Amendment and he was trying to ban everything." He appeared on Conan O'Brien's talk show with a pinch of tobacco in his lower lip. NBC created a reality TV show around him and seven other veterans, coupling them with actors, athletes, and the like. Kyle partnered with the actor Dean Cain; Todd Palin was also a contestant. The show, "Stars Earn Stripes," aired last fall. In one episode, Kyle fired at plastic targets, while a camera installed inside his helmet—the Chris P.O.V. Cam—captured the action. Desmond Tutu and eight other Nobel laureates sent a letter to NBC, criticizing the network for glorifying and sanitizing war. The show has not been renewed.

To promote his memoir, Kyle went on "The Opie & Anthony Show," a popular satellite-radio program. On the air, Kyle claimed that he had once got into a bar fight with Jesse Ventura, the former professional wrestler who, between 1999 and 2003, served a term as governor of Minnesota. In the seventies, Ventura was a member of the Underwater Demolition Teams, a predecessor of the SEALs. One night in 2006, he and Ventura were both at an Irish pub in Coronado, at a gathering of SEALs and their families. According to

Kyle, he overheard Ventura talking, loudly, about his opposition to the Iraq War, and asked him to keep his opinions private, out of respect for the families. (Relatives of Michael Monsoor, the SEAL who deliberately fell on a grenade, were in town, for his wake.) Kyle said that, when Ventura told him that the SEALs deserved to "lose a few guys," he punched him, and Ventura "went down." After he repeated the story, on "The O'Reilly Factor," Ventura—who denies disparaging SEALs, and claims that no altercation occurred—filed defamation charges.

Not long after the radio-show appearance, Kyle was contacted by Brandon Webb, a veteran who had served with him on SEAL Team Three. Webb, now the editor of SOFREP, a Web site covering special-operations forces, invited Kyle and another former SEAL to participate in a taped discussion about life as a special operator. Webb asked Pat Kilbane, an actor, to moderate the discussion. Kyle met them at a bar in San Diego to tape the program.

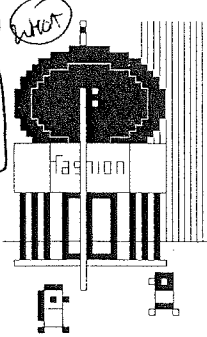
The session went well. Kilbane told me that he was struck by Kyle's "aura," noting that whenever "he walked in the room the dynamic would change, the energy in the room would shift." Afterward, a larger group went out for dinner, closed the hotel bar, and hung out in Kyle's suite, drinking until late. The SEALs began telling stories, and Kyle offered a shocking one. In the days after Hurricane Katrina, he said, the law-and-

order situation was dire. He and another sniper travelled to New Orleans, set up on top of the Superdome, and proceeded to shoot dozens of armed residents who were contributing to the chaos.

Three people shared with me varied recollections of that evening: the first said that Kyle claimed to have shot

thirty men on his own; according to the second, the story was that Kyle and the other sniper had shot thirty men between them; the third said that she couldn't recall specific details.

Had Kyle gone to New Orleans with a gun? Rumors of snipers—both police officers and criminal gunmen—circulated in the weeks after the storm. Since then, they have been largely discredited. A



Book of a feature

SPECIAL FORMS

Sniper / Katrina

spokesman for U.S. Special Operations Command, or SOCOM, told me, "To the best of anyone's knowledge at SOCOM, there were no West Coast SEALs deployed to Katrina." When I related this account to one of Kyle's officers, he replied, sardonically, "I never heard that story." The SEAL with extensive experience in special-mission units wondered how dozens of people could be shot by high-velocity rifles and just disappear; Kyle's version of events, he said, "defies the imagination." (In April, Webb published an article on SOFREP about the incident, but took it down after concluding that Kyle's account was dubious.)

Perhaps this story, like the one about the gas station, contains a kernel of truth. Both narratives, however, portray Kyle as if he really were the Punisher, dispensing justice by his own rules. It was possible to see these stories as evidence of vainglory; it was also possible to see them as attempts by a struggling man to maintain an invincible persona. Kilbane, having read Kyle's book, knew about his drinking habits and his battles with combat stress. Watching Kyle put down pint glass after pint glass of whiskey-on-the-rocks, he said, "It made me think there were still demons bouncing around in there."

The media attention boosted the profile of Kyle's company, Craft, which picked up contracts to help provide security for the Olympics in London and to guard ships off the coast of Somalia. Kyle himself spent time as a bodyguard for Sarah Palin. Pilots from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, the secretive unit that transported SEALs into Pakistan the night of the bin Laden raid, participated in Craft exercises, allowing the company to train people in the art of shooting from aerial platforms. One of Craft's instructors was John Wayne Walding, a former Green Beret and a Silver Star recipient, who lost a leg in a 2008 battle in Afghanistan. "The biggest problem after you get out is finding work that has meaning," Walding told me. "That purpose, everybody needs that. Chris helped me get that."

Last September, Kyle Bass and Rick Kell brought another group of veterans to Bass's ranch. A marine named Brady,

who asked to be identified only by his first name, was among them. Brady, a sniper, was nervous about meeting Kyle. As he put it to me later, he feared that he "was going to be like a little girl in the nineteen-fifties meeting Elvis." But Brady found Kyle unpretentious; Kyle, he said, acted as though they had been friends for years.

Later, while most of the guests sat talking inside the main lodge, Brady excused himself and went outside. He had recently returned from Afghanistan, and he was not in a good frame of mind. Two of his friends had been killed by enemy fire during a six-day mission. As their team leader, he felt responsible. And he'd seen other terrible things during four combat tours: another friend's face had been shorn off by a bomb blast in Ramadi; a young Iraqi girl had been burned alive by a bomb explosion. It took nothing more, he told me, than "a pitch in the atmosphere of the room, hitting a certain tone, that just clicks in my head and puts me in a bad mood, bringing all these memories back." His marriage had failed, and he was growing apart from his parents and his siblings. Out on the porch, Brady sat in a rocking chair.

After a bit, Kyle pulled up a chair beside Brady. It was past midnight, and the air was filled with the sound of crickets. Kyle said that Brady reminded him of himself. Although neither of them suffered from physical injuries, Kyle said, "inside our head it's a fucking labyrinth." P.T.S.D., he said, "can destroy us and the ones we love. It's all how you look at it." Brady nodded, and Kyle went on, "All our brothers who have died, it was just their time. God has left us alive for a reason." Brady went over the mission in which he lost his two friends, moment by moment. Kyle then recalled his own comrades who had been killed in battle. Both men stood, hugged, and sobbed. "People put the Devil of Ramadi on a pedestal, like a god, but here we were, crying on each other's shoulder," Brady told me. "I would take a brother like that over a god any day."

They kept in touch through calls and text messages. In December, Kyle invited Brady to attend a sniper course run by Craft. Brady expected merely to watch, but he was quickly put to work, instructing snipers from the F.B.I. and the Dal-

las SWAT team. The training included a simulation of a hostage scenario inside the Cotton Bowl. After several days, Brady left, feeling buoyed by the experience. In the past, he had sought help from Marine Corps psychiatrists, but that had been unproductive. This was different. Brady, who remains on active duty, told me, "I realized that, only by pushing myself past the limit, both physically and mentally, could I replace the doubt I have for letting my guys die in combat." By supplanting that feeling of loss with a feeling of success, he said, "I'm honoring them."

This sentiment formed the foundation of Kyle's charitable philosophy. During the SOFREP taping, he said, "Those guys and girls who came back with P.T.S.D., they're not to be shunned and looked down on. Let's help them. They can still be trusted."

On the morning of January 25, 2013, Kyle dropped off his children at school. As he eased his black Ford F-350 through the parking lot, a woman stopped him and introduced herself. Her name was Jodi Routh, and she worked as an aide in the special-ed program. Her son, Eddie Ray Routh, was a twenty-five-year-old former marine who was suffering from P.T.S.D. She had heard about FITCO Cares, and was desperate to find him help. Kyle suggested that she write down her contact information and send it home with his kids.

Jodi and her husband, Raymond, lived in Lancaster, Texas, twenty miles east of Midlothian. In 1997, Jodi had taken a job in Midlothian so that Routh and his sister, Laura, could benefit from a better school system. In 2002, Routh began attending the same high school that Kyle had graduated from, ten years earlier. Routh was an uncommitted student. (Jodi described him as a "good, strong C student.") Jeff Diener, one of Routh's classmates, told me that he was "kinda hard to get along with." Another classmate told me that Routh was a "standard troublemaker" who "didn't show a whole lot of respect" for the teachers. Kc Bernard, who was a security guard at the school for two of the years that Routh was there, said that Routh was "always ready to fight" and "had a chip on his shoulder."

According to Jodi, Routh left home

during his junior year and moved in with his aunt and uncle, who lived in a nearby town. Laura, who had already graduated, was also staying there. She told me that they had wanted to get away from their overprotective mother. Jodi doesn't dispute this: "They were rebellious, and they wanted to drink and smoke pot and stuff, and that wasn't gonna be allowed at our house." The aunt told me that she kept alcohol and marijuana around, but denied making them available to kids. Laura, however, said that friends often passed out on the floor, and described the aunt's house as "a squatter pad." Meanwhile, in a house not far away, Routh and Laura's grandfather was dying of cancer. The aunt was among those who had been entrusted to handle the grandfather's prescriptions, including morphine; some of the morphine was stolen, and the aunt's husband eventually overdosed on it. Routh's grandfather and his uncle both died on January 11, 2005.

Laura was spooked and returned home. Routh stayed with his aunt for almost another year, but he sought a new direction for his life, signing up with the Marines. In order to enlist, he needed a diploma. According to Jodi and Laura, his aunt stopped driving him to school, and Routh, who couldn't afford to miss more classes, made amends with his parents and moved back home. Ten days after graduation, Routh shipped off to California for boot camp. It was the summer of 2006, and all the recruits knew that they were on their way to Iraq. Routh finished basic training with meritorious distinction. Jodi and Raymond flew out to California for the ceremony. Though Routh was still tall and slender, with sleepy eyes and a spoonbill chin, muscles now rippled down his frame. When Jodi saw him, she recalled, "I just bawled and bawled because he wasn't a kid anymore. He was a man."

The Marines trained Routh to be an armorer, a specialist at fixing weapons. It was natural work for him; he and his dad had hunted since Routh was young. "You could hand him a gun and he was on it," Jodi said. In September, 2007, Routh deployed to Iraq, where he was stationed at Balad Air Base, fifty-five miles north of Baghdad. He witnessed several mortar attacks on the base; once, while he was on the phone with Raymond, sirens began blaring, and he said that he had to take

cover. He spent much of his time guarding prisoners. Routh told Raymond that he found some of the jail's rules too harsh, noting that prisoners received only three squares of toilet paper a day. Balad contained at least one "black" prison, according to a 2009 *Times* article.

Early one morning, Routh called Raymond from Iraq after he had been out on a patrol. He was upset. Raymond, who retains the accent of his native Mississippi, recalled, "Eddie said to me, 'How would you feel if I killed a kid?' I said, 'You gotta do what you gotta do to survive and come home.' That's a dad talking to his son. I told him, you know, 'It's you or them. Come home.'" Raymond told me that he didn't discuss the matter more specifically, but added, "They got into some stuff over there they shouldn't have to do."

In March, 2009, Routh returned to the U.S., and a month later he flew to Texas for Laura's wedding. He didn't talk much about Iraq, but his family noticed changes in his personality. Once, he and Laura were in the back yard when a neighbor fired a nail gun; Routh lunged for the ground and hollered, "Get down!" He also drank heavily, which, to Raymond's mind, was his son's way of "pushing back all the memories." Raymond told me that Routh had been a drinker since high school, but it had been mostly beer, three or four at a time. Now Routh

drank hard liquor until he passed out. He started drinking early on the day of the wedding and became belligerent, at one point hurling a deodorant stick at a female cousin.

On January 12, 2010, an earthquake devastated Haiti. Routh, along with thousands of other marines, was sent there on humanitarian duty. He was unprepared for the corpses that had been piled on the side of the road. As Routh later told his mother, "They didn't train me to go and pick up baby bodies off the beach." He pushed corpses into front-end loaders, which deposited the bodies into dump trucks, which were emptied into mass graves. When the marines offered survivors wooden pallets loaded with provisions, they snatched them up in seconds, and re-used the pallets for shelter. Routh told his sister, "I've never seen people take so much so fast."

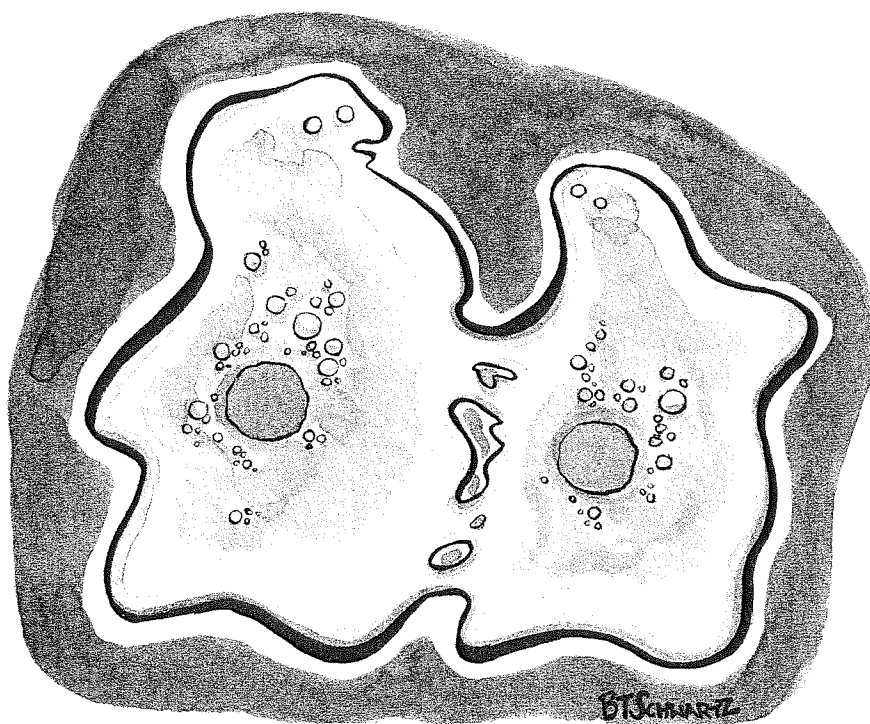
The experience haunted Routh long after he returned. He said that his sergeant had reprimanded him for trying to give his M.R.E. and water to a Haitian boy. Jodi recalled, "He said, 'I was strong, I could have made it. He needed some food and I didn't give it to him, Mom.'" Raymond said, "That hurt him real bad. You live with that. I always taught the boy to give—give to receive." In June, 2010, after four years in the service, Routh left active duty, as

Reprimanded for giving an M.R.E. to a Haitian boy...



JOE DATOR

"It's meat loaf. We didn't make our Kickstarter goal for steak."



"It's not you—it's me."

a corporal. Laura told me, "The core of him was still there, but he wasn't the same Eddie we've always known growing up."

Routh foundedered without the structure of life in the Marines. "If someone was telling him what to do and where to go, he was good," Laura said. "But, when someone didn't have control of what he did, that's when he veered real far." At the end of the summer, an old marine friend helped Routh get a job at a military contractor headquartered in New Jersey. He travelled to bases around the country, repairing weapons. But he began having panic attacks during flights, and left after five months. He picked up odd jobs for a while, mowing lawns and delivering pizzas. He moved back home.

In July, 2011, a male cousin offered Routh work in Houston, putting up metal siding for storage units. Routh headed south. Summers in Houston are muggy and, as Raymond said, "You know them boys are probably drinking all day and not really drinking enough water." Routh got heatstroke and fell ill. Laura drove to Houston to bring her brother home. On the way back, he told

her that he had a tapeworm. He "kept obsessing over it," Laura said. Raymond took him to the Dallas Veterans Affairs Medical Center. Doctors there failed to find a tapeworm. Routh stayed in the hospital a few more days, for further tests, then checked himself out. (The V.A. does not comment on the treatment of individual patients.)

Not long after, Raymond took him to Richland Chambers Lake, in Corsicana, Texas. "That's where we always went to relax and get away, had the father-and-son moments," he said. "I got him there and he was talking all kinds of goddam bullshit. I mean, this off-the-wall shit—how he's Dracula, how he's a werewolf, and all this shit." Twice, Routh walked over to his father's car, retrieved a .357 Magnum that Raymond carried with him outside the house, and threatened to kill himself. Raymond took the pistol away both times; after the second instance, he emptied the cylinder and threw the bullets into the lake. He finally persuaded Routh to go back to the Dallas V.A. Raymond recalled, "The doctor was writing all the stuff down and I said, 'Eddie, why don't you tell her what you've been telling me all day? About wanting

to hurt yourself, and how you're Dracula and all this bullshit?" This time, Routh stayed for three weeks. Raymond recalled that when Routh had been admitted, in the emergency room, one of the doctors had given him a diagnosis of P.T.S.D.

Diagnosing P.T.S.D. is an inexact science. Before the American Psychiatric Association formally codified the disorder, in 1980, Vietnam vets who complained of flashbacks were routinely classified as paranoid schizophrenics, according to David Morris, a former marine and the author of a forthcoming book, "The Evil Hours: A Biography of P.T.S.D." Many symptoms of the disorder—insomnia, depression, flashes of terror—are shared by other forms of mental illness. Scientists have not found a biological test that can reliably determine that a patient has P.T.S.D. rather than, say, bipolar disorder. Peter Chiarelli, a former vice-chief of the Army, and the C.E.O. of One Mind, a research organization that focusses on traumatic brain injury and P.T.S.D., told me, "When you look at diseases of the brain, injuries to the brain, we have nowhere near the certainty in diagnosis or treatment that we do with other maladies of the body."

During Routh's stay at the Dallas V.A., Raymond and Jodi failed to notice much progress, but his doctors eventually cited sufficient improvement to release him. They prescribed eight medications for his son, which, according to Raymond, were placed in "one of those gallon baggies." Among the drugs were lithium, which treats mania; prazosin, which can help decrease nightmares; and Zoloft, an antidepressant that is a common treatment for P.T.S.D. Raymond said that the cocktail of pharmaceuticals "made Eddie worse," adding, "I ain't no doctor. I ain't no rocket scientist or nothing, but I could tell a difference in him." Routh was still jobless and continued to drink. He went back to cutting grass for a real-estate agent, who told me that Routh was a "good worker" and "very congenial." In January, 2012, he was pulled over in his pickup truck and arrested for drunk driving. In Routh's case, no judge dismissed the charges; he was found guilty and held on a fifteen-hundred-dollar bond. Unable to pay, he served a thirty-day jail sentence.

Not long after he got out, he met a

woman on Plenty of Fish, a dating site. Jen, who asked that I refer to her only by her first name, found Routh fun and “goofy,” but also gentle. At times, Routh struck her as a bit too impassioned in his idealism. He disdained waste, whether it was uneaten food on a plate or a shower left running. Jen eventually connected this impulse with his experience in Haiti. He hoarded things as well, such as scrap wood. When an old fence in his neighborhood was torn down, Jodi said, “He was bound and determined it was used for something. ‘I can make that into picture frames and into signs.’ He hassled the crap out of me one day until I finally drove over there and let him pick up a whole truck full of wood.”

Other, more disturbing, episodes suggested that Routh’s experiences in the Marines were still causing him duress. He would swim only in pools where he could see the bottom; Jen suspects this was related to the trauma of removing dead bodies from the water in Haiti. He was menaced by the prospect of someone drowning. On a family vacation in Colorado, he “freaked out” when he spotted his baby niece on a bridge. “He thought we would let her fall in the river and drown and be gone forever,” Jodi said. Crowds made him anxious. Last year, he spent the Fourth of July at his parents’ house, and was repeatedly jangled by the sound of neighborhood fireworks. “A lot of the things we did were outside, or with family,” Jen recalled. “He didn’t have a very vast friend group.” Although she recognized that his behavior was strange, she thought that he was just excitable—someone who had “extreme A.D.D.”

On a Sunday last September, Raymond and Jodi hosted a fish fry for family and friends at their Lancaster home, a single-story structure with a gray roof and a red front door. Raymond, who had been working up in the Texas Panhandle, installing and repairing cattle-feed equipment, came home for the weekend. Routh started drinking that morning. At the party, he told his father that he was interested in going to college, with the goal of becoming a game warden. Raymond knew that his son didn’t have much money, so he offered to sell some of his guns—heirlooms that had been passed down from his grandfather and his father. “If it would benefit you, sell ‘em,” Raymond said. But something

“clicked in Eddie’s head,” and he flew into a rage. He and his dad got into a fistfight, and Raymond “popped him in his jaw.” Routh stomped toward the house, threatening to “blow his brains out” and “suck-start a rifle.” Jodi knew that he was going for the guns, and she grabbed one of Routh’s friends and told him to get the weapons out of the house. Routh fumed when he found the gun closet empty and shouted, “I’ll blow all your brains out!”

Jodi called the police, telling the operator, “They need to admit him to the mental ward.” Routh left on foot with his dog, a black lab named Girley. He wasn’t wearing shoes or a shirt. The cops found him a few blocks away, reeking of booze. According to the police report, Routh told them that he suffered from P.T.S.D., and that his parents did “not understand what he has been through.” The police handcuffed him, pushed him into their cruiser, and drove him home. Jodi met the officers outside and urged them to take her son to Green Oaks Hospital, a psychiatric facility in Dallas. They did so; after a day or two, Routh asked to be transferred to the Dallas V.A. A few days later, he was discharged. According to Jodi and Raymond, the doctors there were aware that Routh had made violent threats.

After his release, Routh moved in with Jen, who had been at the fish fry but had left before the fighting broke out. She shared an apartment with a roommate, in north Dallas. For a month or so, he seemed healthy, and he got a job making cabinets. “You could finally see the smile back in his eyes,” Laura told me.

But Routh’s depression and weariness remained, and he began to exhibit symptoms more commonly associated with bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. “He would get into these moods where you could understand what he was saying, but you had no idea where it was coming from,” Laura said. “We were talking, and he was, like, ‘Man, I’m ready to hit those ski slopes.’ And I was like, ‘What?’ And he’s like, ‘You know, that would be great. Catch some powder?’ I’ve never been skiing in my life. And we had just been talking about fishing. He would just make absolutely no sense.” Some of the things he said had a conspiratorial tone. He once told Laura, “There’s gonna be a conviction. I’m gonna tell everything,

and it’s not going to be what you think.”

Jen was also worried about Routh. “He was going through a big bout of depression,” she said. “He would go hours without speaking. He was obviously off.”

Routh could no longer manage the anxiety of driving a car, and he moved back home. Jodi recalled, “I was so afraid I’d come home from work sometime and find him dead.”

One Saturday in January, Routh and Jen were hanging around her apartment when he fell into a state of paranoia. He began ranting to Jen and her roommate about government-surveillance activities. He once told a friend that the helicopters overhead were watching him. Outbursts of this nature had become more frequent. He made sure to cover the camera on his computer (“He felt very strongly about that,” Jodi said), and confided to family and friends, “They know what we’re doing.” He also worried that he would be forced to return to Iraq. And yet, for all his distress, Routh sometimes contemplated going back into the service. “He had a lot of guilt that he wasn’t still in the Marines, overseas helping people,” Jen told me.

Inside the apartment, Routh began pacing in front of Jen’s door, clutching a knife. He said that he was prepared to defend her from government agents who were out to get them. For hours, she tried, unsuccessfully, to calm him. Finally, Jen’s roommate texted the police, who arrested Routh and took him to Green Oaks. He was transferred to the Dallas V.A. the next day.

The quality of care varies from one V.A. facility to the next. In 2004, the V.A. Inspector General called the Dallas facility the worst in the nation; last year, a Dallas TV station interviewed veterans who alleged that the facility was so poor that it put “lives at risk.” The V.A. tends to be slow, taking an average of nine months to determine if it will cover a veteran’s health claim. And getting a claim approved can be even more difficult if symptoms are not observed at a veteran’s exit physical. Yet P.T.S.D.’s symptoms may not emerge for a while, and they are often accompanied by a cascade of other health problems. Chiarelli, the former vice-chief of the Army, told me that doctors should be “given more latitude” in assessing combat veterans, adding, “But

there's where you get into cost issues." The V.A. is a sclerotic and overwhelmed bureaucracy; it barely has the resources to maintain its current level of health coverage, let alone expand it. (A spokesman acknowledged that veterans wait "too long for earned benefits," and said, "We have an aggressive plan in place to end the backlog in 2015.")

After Routh arrived at the Dallas V.A., Jodi and Jen visited him in the evenings. A week later, he did not seem much better. He was taking several medications, and Jodi felt that he could hardly carry on a conversation. She urged the doctors to keep him hospitalized, at least until he was stable.

Ignoring Jodi's request, the V.A. discharged Routh the next day, according to Jodi, the doctors shared this news over the phone, saying that Routh was an adult and wanted to leave. When she drove to the V.A. to pick up her son, he was already out, sitting in the lobby. She brought him home and told him about Chris Kyle, whom she had just met. "I said, 'This guy has a big reputation. He's a really good man and he really wants to help you.' And then he's like, 'Mom, that is so awesome,'" Jodi recalled. "Eddie was happy. He could feel that somebody wanted to help him, somebody that understood better than me."

The next few days were difficult. Jen, who is Catholic, said that Routh was fixated on "demons and devils." He went with her to Mass on Sunday, hoping that it would help him. At home with Jodi, he fluctuated between being angry and wound up, and being dazed and emotionless. "I could see him having flashbacks," Jodi recalled. "You know when you're daydreaming? You just kind of get that glaze in your eyes? That was what was happening to Eddie. I knew what he was seeing was not good, 'cause he looked like a scared little child. He didn't look like a man." At night, he popped out of bed at the slightest sound, running into Jodi's bedroom to make sure that she was safe. "I thought someone was trying to get you," he told her.

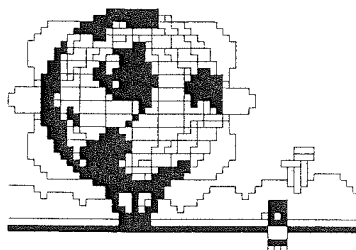
During the day, Jodi said, "he still wasn't able to carry on a good conversation. He wasn't making good sense. He was crying a lot. He would come lay down in our bedroom. We'd bring in the dog and lay in the bed and he'd

say, 'Mom, will you hold my hand? I'm so scared. I don't feel good. I'm not good.'"

As Jodi held him, Routh said, "I just wish you could be in my head for just a second, just so you could know what I'm feeling like."

"I wish I could," Jodi told him. "I would take it from you."

On the morning of Wednesday, January 30th, Jodi brought Routh back to the V.A., for a follow-up appointment. As a



psychiatrist reviewed his chart, he noted that Routh had been prescribed only half the recommended dosage of risperidone—a powerful antipsychotic that has been widely used in V.A. hospitals to treat P.T.S.D. The psychiatrist adjusted the prescription and ordered the medication to be sent to the Routh house in two days. Jodi was livid. When the psychiatrist questioned Routh, he looked to his mom. "He just wasn't capable of speaking for himself," she told me. She explained to the psychiatrist that Routh wasn't sleeping and "couldn't think straight." She pleaded with the psychiatrist to readmit him to the hospital, where "he's not going to be a danger to others or to himself." But the psychiatrist, according to Jodi, shook his head and said that hospitalization wasn't necessary. (The psychiatrist, citing patient confidentiality, declined to discuss Routh's case, but said that any patient who posed an "imminent threat to himself or others" would be hospitalized.)

Jodi then asked the psychiatrist if he could refer Routh to a residential program for people with P.T.S.D., in Waco, Texas. According to the program's Web site, residents there "attend therapeutic groups and rehabilitative activities. Some parts of the program help vets to deal with traumatic experiences, while other parts of the program help the vet to acquire healthy behaviors and coping skills." The Web site notes that the program is intended only for veterans who "are not a danger to themselves or others."

The psychiatrist told Jodi, "He's not stable enough for that program." He instructed Routh to come back in two weeks. Jodi recalled, "I thought, Two weeks! That's a long time. I told the doctor, 'You know, he can't even answer your questions! He can't even carry on a conversation. I really think he needs to be in the hospital.'"

Routh was sent home. Jodi thought again of Chris Kyle. A few hours after she had introduced herself to him in the school parking lot, she was called down to the principal's office and found Kyle there, waiting. He could sense her desperation and had come back to the school to hear more. They found an empty classroom and sat at a horseshoe-shaped table. Jodi explained some of what Routh was going through. Kyle confessed that he, too, struggled with P.T.S.D. Fortunately, he did not have to rely on the V.A., because he had private health coverage. (According to one of Kyle's medical records, he had sought counsel from a physician for "combat stress" after his 2008 deployment, though at his exit physical he declared that he had "no unresolved issues.")

Kyle said that he could take Routh fishing or hunting or, perhaps, to the rifle range. He couldn't do it this weekend, though, because his brother's wife was about to have a baby, and he was heading out of town. One of Kyle's former SEAL teammates, Mike Ritland, told me that firing guns was a "common ground we all have, whether you're Marines or Army or Navy. It's a way of blowing off steam—a stress release for both guys." Jonathan Shay, the psychiatrist, is less confident that "going to the gun range and busting some caps" makes sense as "a healing experience." P.T.S.D. veterans, he said, carry "wounds of the mind and spirit, and one of the ways in which these wounds manifest themselves is through explosiveness." GUNS AS HEALING?

Kyle promised Jodi, "I'm going to do everything I can to help your son." They hugged—"a really good hug," Jodi recalled. She began to cry. "I was so happy that somebody was listening and that somebody was willing to help," she told me. "I knew he meant it. He wanted to help Eddie. And he didn't know Eddie. He had never laid eyes on Eddie. But he knew from what I told him that my kid was suffering, that he was hurting so bad. And he knew it was hurting me. That

was the first time in a long time that I had felt a little sense of relief. I felt some hope for Eddie, that it wasn't just going to be bad for him, and that maybe something good was gonna happen." Jodi went home and stuck Kyle's number on the refrigerator.

The next week, they waved at each other when she saw him dropping off his kids at school. One day, around the time of Routh's follow-up appointment, Kyle told Jodi that he planned to call Routh, so that they could get together the coming weekend. She recalled, "The next day, I saw him again, and he pulled up close to where I was, and I stopped the truck and opened the door. And I said, 'Hey, I forgot to ask you, but what'd you get? A niece or a nephew?' He goes, 'I got a niece.' He was so happy. He had such a big smile and he was just so proud of this little baby. And that was actually the last time I talked to Chris."

THE YEAR?

On the morning of Saturday, February 2nd, Kyle and his wife went to their son's ballgame. Afterward, a friend of Kyle's, Chad Littlefield, came over. Kyle and Littlefield had met on the sidelines of a youth soccer game and become fast friends. They hung out whenever Kyle found time—between book events, speaking engagements, and his obligations at Craft. They loaded up Kyle's truck and went to pick up Routh. They were all going to a rifle range.

Routh was looking forward to the excursion. He craved the kind of companionship and solidarity that Kyle seemed capable of providing. "He needed someone to validate what he was feeling, that it was O.K. for other people to go through it," Jen said.

The previous evening, Routh had proposed to Jen. "We were in the kitchen," she recalled. "I was getting him his medicine. I turned around, and he got to one knee and asked me to marry him." Routh didn't have a ring—he was broke—but pledged to save up for one. Jen accepted the proposal, and spent the night at the house in Lancaster. (After the knife episode, Jen's apartment building had banned Routh from the property.) They got into an argument the next morning, however, and she left around ten o'clock. Kyle and Littlefield showed up a few hours later. Routh climbed into Kyle's F-350, and

they headed to Rough Creek Lodge, a resort ninety miles to the southwest. Kyle had helped design the thousand-yard rifle range there, and he was allowed to come and go as he pleased. The drive took a little more than an hour. According to Taya, Kyle thought that the trip would "give someone who was hurting a chance to talk on the drive, spend a short bit of time shooting, and then give him a little more time to talk on the way home, to find some outlets and resources." One of the difficulties posed by P.T.S.D., however, is that the ability to trust others—a necessary component of treatment, according to Jonathan Shay—has often been destroyed.

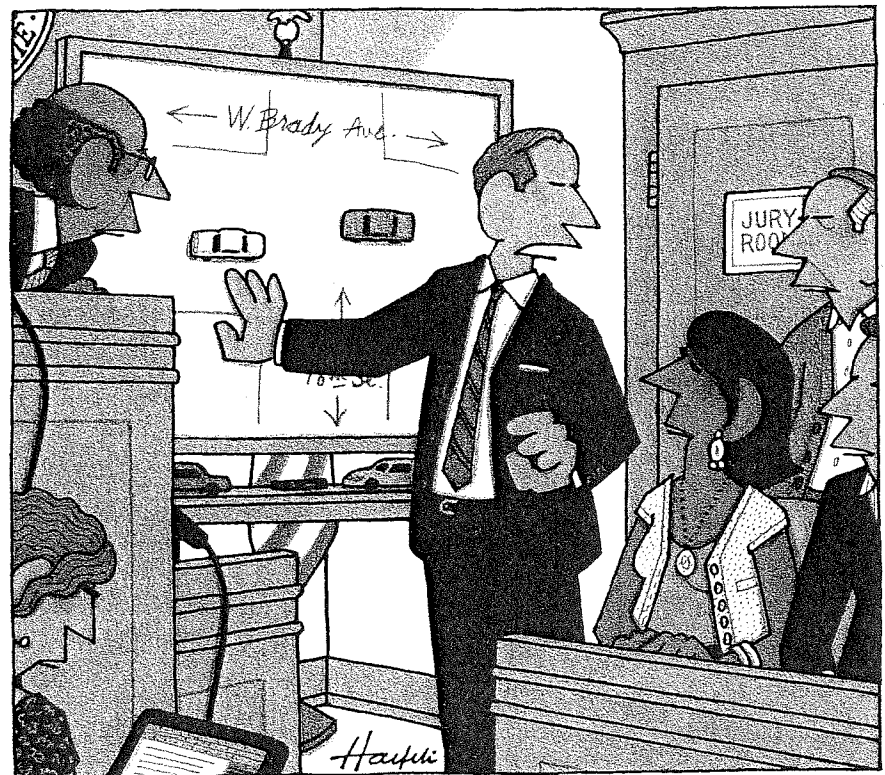
Kyle parked in front of the main lodge around 3 P.M. Routh stayed in the truck while Kyle and Littlefield went inside to register. The property extends over eleven thousand acres; hunting grounds and the rifle range cover more than two-thirds of it, and a locked gate prevents golfers from straying into dangerous areas. At Kyle's request, an employee radioed ahead to unlock the gate. Kyle and Littlefield got back in the truck, and they bumped along a dirt road for a few miles. They reached the shooting platform and

raised a red Bravo flag, to warn others away. Kyle had reserved the range until four o'clock.

At 4:55 P.M., a guide noticed that the flag was still up. He drove toward the platform. He noticed several weapons set out, waiting to be fired, but he did not see Kyle's truck. From a distance, the guide saw what appeared to be a sack. As he drew nearer, he realized that it was a dead body. Littlefield was on his back, with multiple gunshots in the chest; his pistol remained tucked in his jeans. Up close, the guide discerned grooves in the sand around Littlefield's fingers, suggesting that he had clawed for life after hitting the ground.

Several feet away, Kyle was lying face down. He had been shot in the back and in the back of the head. Blood covered his baseball cap. His pistol lay in the sand, within reach. The guide called 911, then bent over Kyle to administer CPR. It was hopeless. He was dead.

As medics and police descended on Rough Creek, Routh was behind the wheel of Kyle's truck. He stopped at a relative's home, in Alvarado, around five, and called his sister. She asked about



"The white car represents my client's hybrid and this blue car represents the defendant's gas-guzzler."

his day, and he said, "It's kind of shitty. I broke up with my girlfriend from Louisiana." Laura, assuming that he was talking about Jen, didn't press him. (Jen is not from Louisiana.) Routh said that he was coming by. Laura plugged in her cell phone, whose battery was drained. "If he says anything crazy, I'm calling the police," she told her husband, Gaines.

Twenty minutes later, Routh entered the house. He asked them if the world was freezing over, then announced that he had a new truck. Laura asked if he had traded in his car, a Volkswagen Beetle; he said no, but added, "I sold my soul for a truck." He went on, "We went up to the gun range. I killed them."

Laura asked her brother what he was talking about.

"Chris and his friend. I killed them. I murdered them," he said.

"I didn't really think he was telling the truth," Laura told me. "And he's, like, 'Are you and Gaines in Hell with me?' And I was, like, 'No, we're not in Hell.' And he was, like, 'Well, do you think I can get to Oklahoma?' And I was, like, 'Oklahoma? What's in Oklahoma?' And he's, like, 'Well, if I can get to Oklahoma, I can get out of this.' And I was, like, 'I don't know what you're talking about, but

I think you're telling me a story. Don't lie to me. Tell me what happened.' And at this point we're almost to the front door, and so we walked outside, and when we walked outside I thought I was gonna throw up on myself, because here's this truck that I know he could never afford. The tires alone were expensive. That's the first thing I saw—these giant, big knobby tires on this pickup truck."

Laura realized that Routh really must have killed two men. He offered to show Gaines the murder weapon, and began reaching into a tool chest in the truck. They told him to stop. Laura was afraid for herself and for Gaines, and she asked Routh to leave and turn himself in. Before he drove off, he said to her, "I love you, Beezer."

"That's my nickname—my family's always called me that," she told me. "In that moment, he was my baby brother again. He started walking toward me and he hugged me. And I gave him a hug back. 'I love you, too, but I hate your demons. Please tell me this is not true,' I said. He just looked at me with this weird look I've never seen from him before."

When he was gone, Laura phoned the police. "He's fucking psychotic," she told the dispatcher. Her brother had

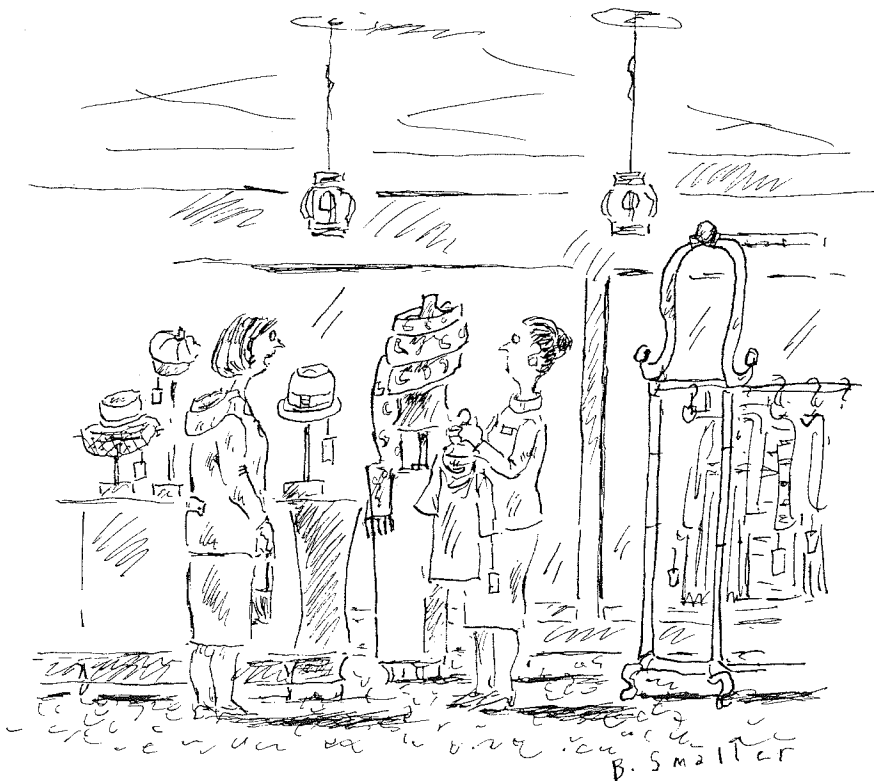
P.T.S.D., she continued, and he had told Laura and her husband that "he killed them"—Kyle and Littlefield—"before they could kill him. He said he couldn't trust anyone anymore."

A police bulletin went out. Two officers waited outside the Routh house, which was empty—Jodi and Raymond were out of town. Routh pulled up around 8 P.M. and parked out front. The cops approached on foot. They carried on a conversation for approximately fifteen minutes before Routh threw the truck into drive and sped away. A chase ensued, and they caught him after authorities spiked his tires. At the police station, he confessed to killing Kyle and Littlefield. When the Texas Rangers searched the Rouths' home, they found a bong and a box of ammunition.

That night, Routh was transferred to a jail in Erath County, where the murders took place. He has been on suicide watch since then. He is permitted to write letters and make phone calls, although Jen has not heard from him in months. She still loves him, and does not know whether she should stop considering herself engaged. Routh is facing charges of capital murder.

Not long after the murders, he sent me a brief letter, written in pencil: "I need out of the box I'm in. If you could help me know. Want to go back overseas to help the world."

Chad Littlefield's memorial service took place at a Baptist church in Midlothian. The turnout exceeded expectations, and Taya Kyle was among those present. Three days later, Chris Kyle's service was held, in Cowboys Stadium. It was an overcast day. Patriot Guard riders lined up outside, holding American flags. Todd and Sarah Palin attended. Although nearly seven thousand people had gathered inside the stadium, it was eerily silent. The Jumbotron flashed a series of photographs; in most of them, Kyle was holding a firearm. A soundtrack set the mood: Rod Stewart's "Forever Young" was paired with images of Kyle's childhood; AC/DC's "Back in Black" accompanied battlefield shots; "You Raise Me Up," by Josh Groban, played behind pictures of Kyle with Taya and their kids. The montage was followed by bagpipes, bass drums, and pallbearers.



"I'm looking for something that won't say anything about me."

Positioned in the middle of the stage was Kyle's battle cross: a geometric arrangement of his boots, his helmet, and his Kevlar jacket (with the Punisher logo). Nobody who stepped to the lectern that day—including Randy Travis, who sang "Amazing Grace"—introduced himself. A chaplain asked God to "help us to forgive our enemy who stole Chris's life," and begged for "sure justice, Father, implemented through our governmental authorities, as it is demanded by the laws of our great state and our great country." Texas executes more prisoners than any state in the U.S.

The chaplain referred to Kyle as a "husband, father, son, brother, friend, teammate, and righteous, mighty, victorious warrior." Several of Kyle's former SEAL teammates spoke about him. "What made him a legend was his heart," one of them said.

Taya eventually went up. She told me that she never considered not giving a eulogy: "I wanted to say it to him, and wanted to say it loud." At the lectern, she said that she was "not a fan of people romanticizing their loved ones in death," and characterized her relationship with Kyle as "messy, passionate, full of every extreme emotion known to man." She went on, "The messy, painful, constantly changing, messy ride was rolled up into the deepest, most soul-changing experience that only one man, Chris Kyle, could bring. Chris was all in, no matter what he did in life." NY ROMANTICISM

The next morning, Kyle's family and friends travelled to Austin for a state burial; the funeral procession is said to have stretched two hundred miles. Since then, Taya has made Kyle's causes her own. (This will include mounting a defense against Jesse Ventura, who has decided to pursue damages against Kyle's estate. A trial is expected to begin later this year.) Taya said of Kyle, "His heart and spirit can be very contagious." In April, she appeared at a daylong seminar for educators in Texas, which detailed the kind of training required for a concealed-handgun license. (Kyle believed that classrooms would be safer if some teachers were trained to carry weapons.) More recently, she addressed the annual convention of the National Rifle Association, in Houston. Wearing a navy-and-gray dress, with Kyle's dog tags dangling from her neck, she spoke at length about

her husband, saying, "He loved his fellow-man enough to take on the immense responsibility of using his gun—the only effective tool he had—to stop the evil coming at them." Guns, she suggested, were part of the fabric of Kyle's identity. After he returned from war, Kyle was "blessed to be able to serve countless numbers of veterans during hunts and shoots." She added, "He discovered a new use for guns: healing." MONIC

Joe Washam, the Army sergeant who had joined Kyle on the antelope hunt, told me that, after Kyle's murder, the idea of using guns for healing was being subjected to a "backlash." In January, Washam had participated in another "wounded warriors" event—a deer hunt on a "beautiful piece of property" near Fort Hood. He shot a ten-point buck from about seventy yards away. The owner of the property invited Washam to stay the night. The next morning, they went duck hunting. His host, Washam said, "went above and beyond. He let me onto his property to shoot a rifle, he didn't check my credentials or anything, and then he let me shoot a big, monster buck." Before he left, his host invited him to come back with some of his veteran friends.

The day after Kyle and Littlefield were murdered, Washam's phone rang. It was the landowner, rattled by the news. "That scares me," the landowner said. "I brought a complete stranger here." Washam told me, "That's what I'm worried about moving forward, that people are going to paint a scarlet letter on us—that we're not to be trusted because we all have P.T.S.D. and we're all fucked up in the head." Washam assured the landowner not to worry, saying, "I will bring guys I trust with my life."

In early May, I flew to northern Texas to see Raymond and Jodi Routh. They had just bought a house in a town, an hour outside Amarillo, where Raymond continues working with cattle-feed equipment. I got there in the late morning; Raymond had already put in a few hours' work. Inside the house, the walls were bare, except for protruding nails from the previous owner. Jodi had been planning to move from Lancaster to join Raymond at the end of the academic year, but, after the killings, she couldn't bear the idea of facing Kyle's kids and has not returned to

the school since. "I just didn't want them to have to see me," she said. "I didn't think it was fair to the children."

We spent much of the day on their back patio. There was a tree house in one corner and a brick barbecue pit in another. Jodi and Raymond smoked Marlboro Lights while Girley, Routh's dog, lay at my feet. Raymond went inside whenever Jodi needed a Kleenex to dry her tears. They know that their son faces one of three possibilities: execution, life without parole, or life in a psychiatric ward. "Is Eddie guilty of what happened?" Jodi asked. "He is. He did it."

Raymond said, "Are we ever going to get our son back? No. We know this."

"But we gotta keep them from giving him the death penalty," Jodi said.

Raymond brought up the telephone conversation in which Routh had hinted that he might have shot a child in Iraq. He said, "It's just like I told him, 'I need you back.' And then when he gets back I ain't got my son no more. I got a body that looks like my son. But that ain't my son. And that's what the people don't understand from the V.A. And that's what I told them down there, too. 'I don't want this. I want my son back.' 'Well, make him take these pills and bring him back in two weeks.' That's too goddam long."

Jodi looked out and said, "All I can think about in my mind is that, if they would have left him in the hospital, then those two men wouldn't be dead today. And, you know, it's not like I want to beat on the V.A., that's not at all what my intention is. My intention is that they step up and give these men—"

"The help they need," Raymond interrupted.

"The treatment they deserve," Jodi continued. She said that a forensic psychologist had recently assessed Routh's capacity to stand trial, though he had not received mental-health assistance from the V.A. since January. She said of veterans, "It's not just that they deserve it. They've already earned it. They've already served their time. They've already done what they were asked to do." Jodi wiped her tears. The Marines had trained her son for war, she said, but they never "untrained" him for normal life. Shaking her head, she added, "And we're some of the lucky ones. Because we had our kid back, you know? He didn't come home in a body bag."

How we treat our veterans