



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on February 4, 2013

Navy SEAL Sniper Shot by Ex-Marine He Was Trying to Help

Chris Kyle, a highly decorated Navy veteran and his friend Chad Littlefield [were shot and killed](#) by an ex-Marine suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome at a shooting range south of Fort Worth, Texas, on Saturday. [Kyle](#) was a Navy SEAL who was considered the most lethal sniper in American history, having 160 confirmed kills during his four tours in Iraq from 1999 to 2009. He was awarded the Bronze and Silver Stars numerous times, and earned the sobriquet the “Devil of Ramadi” by Iraqi insurgents who were unnerved by his ability to accomplish long-range kills. A bounty was placed on his head by the insurgents, escalating from \$20,000 to \$80,000 as his kills multiplied.



Following his last tour, Kyle moved to Midlothian, Texas, and started [Craft International](#), a firm providing military, law enforcement, and civilian training, as well as private security training. He wrote an autobiography, [American Sniper](#), in which he detailed his experiences as a sniper during [Operation Iraqi Freedom](#). Reading more like a novel than an autobiography, Kyle noted his first kill — an Iraqi woman setting a grenade in front of a troop of Marines:

The rifle I was holding was a [.300 WinMag](#), a bolt-action, precision sniper weapon....

We were on the roof of an old rundown building at the edge of a town the Marines were going to pass through. The wind kicked dirt and papers across the battered road below us. The place smelled like a sewer — the stench of Iraq was one thing I’d never get used to....

“Marines are coming,” said my chief as the building began to shake. “Keep watching.”

I looked through the scope. The only people who were moving were a woman and maybe a child or two nearby. I watched our troops pull up. Ten young Marines in uniform got out of their vehicles and gathered for a foot patrol. As the Americans organized, the woman took something from beneath her clothes, and yanked at it.

She’d set a grenade. I didn’t realize it at first.

“Looks yellow,” I told the chief, describing what I saw as he watched himself. “It’s yellow, the body — “

“She’s got a grenade!” said the chief. “That’s a Chinese grenade!”

“S—t!”

“Take the shot!”



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“But — “

“Shoot! Get the grenade! The Marines — “

I hesitated. Someone was trying to get the Marines on the radio, but they couldn’t reach them. They were coming down the street, heading toward the woman.

“Shoot!” said the chief.

I squeezed my finger against the trigger. The bullet leapt out. The grenade dropped. I fired again as the grenade blew up. It was the first time I’d killed anyone while I was on the sniper rifle. And the first time in Iraq — and the only time — I killed anyone other than a male combatant.

Upon his return to the states, Kyle became intimately acquainted with [post-traumatic stress disorder](#), or PTSD, which, [according a 2008 study](#) by the Rand Corporation, affects nearly one in every five members of the military. Severe PTSD will overwhelm an individual’s ability to cope with normal life events and result in flashbacks, nightmares, insomnia, fits of uncontrollable anger, and hyper vigilance.

He started a foundation, [FITCO Cares](#), to provide free in-home fitness equipment, personal training, and life-coaching to veterans suffering from PTSD. When the mother of Eddie Ray Routh, a 25-year-old ex-Marine (shown) who also served in Iraq, called Kyle for help, he and a neighbor and work-out buddy, Chad Littlefield, invited Routh to a shooting range in Glen Rose as part of PTSD therapy.

George Everly, an associate professor of psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University, said that the treatment for PTSD involves a [slow but steady re-exposure](#) of patients to their PTSD “triggers”:

It makes sense, in a way, re-exposing people to the thing they fear of in small doses, almost like an inoculation so the body says, “this is uncomfortable, but I can handle it.” Under proper, controlled conditions, re-exposure therapy is certainly one of the most popular treatments for PTSD.

What happened next is conjecture, with details that will likely never be known. According to Erath County Sheriff Tommy Bryant, “[We] kind of have an idea that maybe that’s why they were at the range, for some kind of therapy that Mr. Kyle assists people with. I don’t know if it’s called shooting therapy. I don’t have any idea but that’s what [the] little bit of information [is] that we can gather so far.”

According to Travis Fox, director of FITCO, [that’s exactly what Kyle was doing](#): “[They tried] to give him a helping hand, and he turned [a] gun on both of them, killing them.”

[Fox added.](#)

My heart is breaking. Chris died doing what filled his heart with passion: serving soldiers struggling with the fight to overcome PTSD.

Our foundation, this country and most importantly, his wife Taya and their children, have lost a dedicated father and husband, a lifelong patriot and an American hero.

He wasn’t the American Sniper to his friends. He was Chris Kyle and he was right alongside you. He was proud to be a veteran and he would do anything he could to serve them.

When the news of the shooting became known, hundreds of people whom Kyle had impacted went to the FITCO and Craft websites to express their shock and condolences. Perhaps this one, from Randy Knight, was the most poignant:

To die in defense of freedom is sad, but necessary. To survive war’s tribulations and come home is providence. To be taken by this act ... is almost too much to bear.



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My brother in freedom, you are gone too soon from this fight. We will miss you. But take solace in that we fight on in your name, for the fight is long and not yet won.

Rest easy now. You have done enough.

Photo of Eddie Ray Routh: AP Images

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