

Please don't call me Hero picks up where Alive Day left off as Chief faces the reality of coming home with PTSD and the Moral Wounds of War and must decide on "Mission Next" while a dark character from his covert past invades his life.

Six Days to Zeus: Please Don't Call me Hero

By Samuel Hill

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BASED ON A TRUE STORY



SIX DAYS TO ZEUS

PLEASE DON'T CALL
ME HERO



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DEDICATION

To the men and women of the U.S. military
...and to those families who didn't sign up for war,
but get to pay the consequences anyway.

I wish I could give you ALL a big hug.

Keep the faith, my friends!

Five Meter Targets

Very Respectfully,

Chief

Special Recognition

To Mike Medavoy

Phillip Noyce

Kathleen McLaughlin,

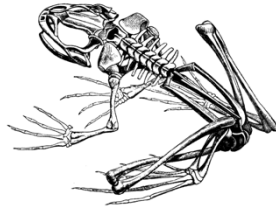
You have each taught me so much about Hollywood, given me hope, taught me so much about "development" and given me "Mission Next." I will never watch another movie as a spectator. I'm in awe of the work and persistence it takes to produce things you've done in your careers, and the ripple effect it has on humanity. I am truly blessed to know you and I'm forever grateful for having you ALL in my life. I have fallen synchronistically into the inner circle of "great Americans" who make movies that resonate, not just entertain. The result of your hard work, your vision, and your heartfelt intentions produce movies that resonate generationally and make people think. And that is precisely what I try to accomplish through my writing.

I can't thank you enough. Your participation in this project has helped me PERSONALLY come from a very dark place, through the five meter targets and back to life. Five meters!

Chief

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Unintended Consequences

*"Sometimes, no matter how hard you try, you lose."
Life lesson No. 29*

Chief stood in the gravel driveway, trying to keep his balance as his feet slid around on the unsteady, moving marbles. Pain shot up his spine as his muscles tried to deal with his balance, instigating the damaged nerve endings to light up his hip flexors and his entire pelvis. The screws were still fresh. And they burned deeply as he struggled to keep his balance. His throat, thick with unshed tears, made it difficult to swallow as he shook his stinging hands intensely, trying to disperse the pain.

Muscle memory kicked in as his brain spoke to him. *Assess. Listen. Scan the perimeter. Focus on the unseen, the unsuspected.* Chief was in full combat mode now, reliving so many training cycles and real-life missions. Like a checklist, his mind went directly to what he knew would bring success.

The front door was closed: Good. Maybe.

The dogs weren't barking: Good. Unless they'd been shot.

No disturbances – no sign of a struggle in the gravel driveway that threatened to up-end him. Definitely good. Unless he carried her body –

And then, out of nowhere, she appeared. There was Emma. Bee-bopping out the front door, skipping up the sidewalk to greet him, a smile on her face. The adrenaline surging through his body was already way too high from the trip up the mountain road. Before he even knew what he was saying, the words exploded from his mouth

“What the FUCK, Emma?”

She froze. *Don't move. Stay small, stay quiet.* Dad was using his military, Team Leader voice. She hated that voice. It made her want to barf. She didn't know how to respond, but she knew what was coming. Next would be an onslaught of questions as if she were a critical care patient and he was going through a combat casualty checklist. Her stomach flipped over and heat flashed up her neck, out through her face. Dad's eyes were black again, his hands clenched into fists. He used the “eff” word. It wasn't dad standing in front of her; it was the monster. Again.

Not now, not today. Not the day when she was going to tell him about Liam, and how he'd asked her to the prom. Not today when she'd already planned everything with her best friend Makayla, from her dress to her hair to how she would convince mom to let her wear makeup and high heels.

She wasn't super excited to tell dad about Liam. He didn't like to hear her talk about boys. But, come on, she was 13, not a little girl anymore! And Liam was *nice*. Besides, mom liked Liam and said dad probably would too. Maybe he could take them to the dance in the Vette, which was cool, right? If everyone could fit in a two seater. Usually, dad was happy with whatever made her happy. But maybe he'd found out about Liam and was pissed? Was that why he was acting this way? What a jerk! Did he really expect her to stay his little girl forever?

Yeah, yeah, mom kept telling her he wasn't like “normal” dads. Not like Ethan's tweaker dad who everybody knew beat the crap out of him. Dad never laid a hand on her. But not “normal” because of all that war stuff and when his brain kinda checked out and then horrible, slashing words would just pour out of his mouth like lava, and those words burned and burned —

No. Please, no! Not today.

She knew there were medical things that happened to him because of his injuries. For as long as she could remember, he was having surgeries. It was just normal. Wheelchairs, walkers, crutches. Every

year, at least one surgery. Sometimes two or three. She heard everyone talking about PTSD. But none of that mattered when the monster showed up. At this specific moment, it was about her own "fight or flight" syndrome. And she was well rehearsed by now with the flight part.

With absolutely no warning, with no idea why things went sideways so quickly, she got blindsided and stood there, all alone, facing the monster — again. And then the freezing part that struck her, the paralysis that made her hold her breath — broke. Like the glacier calving she'd seen in science class, she felt her soul split. But it was hotter than what she saw in the frigid waters of wherever it was in that documentary. Hers didn't crack; it exploded.

"Do you even KNOW you're doing it *again*? What. Is. Wrong. With. You?" she shouted, articulating each syllable.

He wanted monster mode? She'd show him monster mode. She was done with his Hulk routine.

"Is he in the house?" Chief demanded.

Chief's hands were heavy on the car, holding himself up as he moved along the passenger side of the car to the back hatch. *The Peacekeeper, get the 12 gauge with the deer slugs.* Where did he leave it? Why couldn't he remember? Was it loaded? He couldn't remember that either. And why the fuck hadn't he done that in the first place? Checked? Loaded all the weapons? Or the Desert Eagle .50 caliber pistol in the center console. He was closer to the trunk now. It would take too long to get back into the car and retrieve the Desert Eagle. Oh yeah. It wasn't in the console. It was too big and wouldn't fit. So where was it? Behind the seat? Under it? Why couldn't he remember anything?

Chief was frustrating himself over his own disabilities and the narcotic-induced mental confusion. Adrenaline usually cleared his mind. But today was different. Emma changed everything. It was so unlike the Warrior self he knew from his past. He felt inept. Crippled, unbalanced, unfit. He felt so unqualified for the task and yet so intent on protecting her. He was calculating which direction to go, not

because of speed or efficiency, but because of his disabilities. He calculated his actions while trying to inflict as little pain as possible on a body already consumed by agony and adrenaline.

"Who? What are you talking about?"

"God dammit! Where is the Haji motherfucker that called me from your phone?"

So, not Liam. Big sigh of relief. He was talking about the guys who'd stopped by earlier. The stupid tourists who had gotten lost. But how did they know Dad?

"Did he hurt you?"

"What? No, of course not. Why would you ask me that? They were nice, polite even. They were just asking a few questions! They were lost! How do you know them and why were they here? Calling you?"

"I'll ask the questions! Did they take anything?"

"No! Dad, don't be ridiculous. They just wanted to use the phone."

"And you gave it to him freely?"

"Of course, they were nice!"

"Did he threaten you?"

"Dad, my God. Please. Like I said, they were very nice!"

"Tell me what he looked like!" Chief demanded.

"They were just nice guys!"

"Dammit. Stop it. Don't blow this off when I ask you things. You have to be honest with me, Emma. I need to know what they looked like. What they were driving. What they said to you. Word for word."

"I am being honest with you. What is WRONG with you?"

Didn't she know how much danger she was in? For God's sake, she was so smart about everything else, way beyond her years when it came to every subject he could think of. And now was positively NOT the time to be defiant. Nor was it the time to play games and act stupid. That bastard, whoever he was, invaded Chief's sanctuary. And he wasn't going to stand for that.

Chief popped the trunk. Was he watching, right now, from inside the house with a goddamn silenced 22 caliber rifle pointed at her head? What had that fucker told her?

“Get down! Get behind the car!” he barked, reaching for the gun case, unsnapping the locks. His head was on a swivel, scanning the perimeter, replicating security drills he’d done a million times, all the while assessing Emma, watching her eyes, trying to make a determination. Was she covering? Was she protecting her dad because of what he said to her?

What he needed now was intel. Right now! He had to get more intel and figure out how to prosecute that asshole for violating his sanctuary zone. This drama she was pulling was nothing more than distraction and delay. He couldn't believe he had to fight his own daughter to get information to protect her. He was seething that he didn't have the tools or the training to engage her in the highly professional way he engaged every other situation.

Where the fuck was his Team? They would have surrounded the "source," an intimidating presence that usually worked in gaining the intel they needed. But he didn't want them to intimidate his daughter either.

Fuck, they couldn't intimidate Emma. They were dead! Fuck, fuck, fuck, his entire goddamn Team was dead!

“I said get behind the car! Now!” he bellowed at her as he turned on the laser designator. He checked the magazine and slapped the bolt carrier release button, jacking a live round into the chamber. As the brass casing entered the chamber, Chief felt that familiar forward momentum as the bolt carrier engaged the locking mechanism, telling him he was “locked and loaded,” ready to kill.

She dropped into a crouch on the driveway, trying to comply with his intensity and instructions. She had no idea what he wanted. She felt so inept, so confused, but did what he demanded anyway. Her hands were stinging from the gravel. But she suspected things would go sideways if she didn't comply. There wasn't anyone in the house! What the hell was wrong with Dad?

Guns didn't bother Emma. Everyone here in the county had guns. She knew how to fire them. She knew not to touch her parents' guns without them being around. But this was different. Dad, the AR-10

against his shoulder, was sweeping the front porch of the house like it was a searchlight. There wasn't anyone there! She told him that, didn't she? Where the heck was mom? Her fingers itched for her phone to call her.

"Ok. Breathe." Chief demanded.

"I AM breathing. YOU are the one who needs to breathe!" she snarled.

"Don't get wise ass with me, Emma. This is serious. Where is this guy now?"

"They left. A long time ago." She rolled her eyes, slumping to her buttocks as she leaned back against the massive Corvette tire. They were just *tourists*. Why did he have to act like every little thing was the end of the world?

Not cooperating. Was she hiding something? Had the guy co-opted her? He could deal with that. Interrogation he could do. Interrogation was what he did. That is what he trained for.

"Alright smartass, why would tourists drive all the way up this mountain, through all the way up this windy, going nowhere, curvy road just to use your phone to call ME? Tell me that. Did it cross your mind? How did they get my phone number? Did you give that to them 'freely' too?"

He was scaring her now. Not just 'cause he was a monster, but because she'd never thought of that before now. How did they know dad?

"I didn't give him anything. I had no idea he was calling you!"

"There is so much more you don't know, Emma. I swear to God, this is not the time for a history lesson about my life. You gotta trust me here. I know what I'm doing."

His head was swirling with the possibilities. But his military intelligence mind was finally starting to focus past the adrenaline and drama. She was safe. Here, with him. And that seemed to calm things if only for a brief moment.

"Did he hurt you?"

"No, they were nice, polite, just asking questions – " like she hadn't already said that three times!

"What kind of car was he driving?"

"I don't know! A car –"

" – Come ON Emma! Work with me here. What kind of car?" The frustration was leaking out again, causing the adrenaline to spike again.

"Dad! I DON'T KNOW CARS!" she blurted out. Now, she was trying desperately to hold back the tears and prevent the outburst she knew would make the situation worse. Damned if she did –

" – What color was it? Start with that."

"I don't know... My God, Dad. What is WRONG with you?"

" – Dark? Light? Black? Blue? Red?"

"I already told you. I don't know. I wasn't paying attention to what kind of car they were driving! Can you PLEASE JUST STOP THIS!"

Mom, mom, where was Mom? The gravel was grinding into her butt and it *hurt*.

"Don't get wise ass with me Emma. This is serious. Where is this guy now?"

"Dad! They left. A long time ago –"

" – When? Where did he go?"

"I don't know! They've been gone for nearly twenty minutes already!" Stupid question. There was only one way to go. Down the hill. There was no left or right, no east or west. Just down for nearly two miles until they hit the blacktop. And how the hell was she supposed to know which way he went then?

"What the HELL is wrong with you Emma? I'm not screwing around here. I need to know who this man is, what he said to you and how he got on my phone. You have no idea the danger you are in, no idea what this guy is capable of, and I need you to start talking NOW!"

"In case you didn't get the message, I *let them* use my phone to talk to you. Didn't you hear the ringtone I put into your phone? I put in that tone so you would know it was *me*! Remember? My god, Dad. I had no

idea he called you until you came in here blowing up about it all. Where's the Haji motherfucker? What is WRONG with you, Dad?"

"Them?" Chief stammered. His heart leapt so far up his throat, he could feel it pulsing in his Adam's apple. She said *them*, meaning more than one. She had been saying *they* from the beginning! Of course, it wouldn't have been just one guy. But she said they were gone.

"Yeah. There were two of them. The other guy didn't get out of the car."

She suddenly realized what Dad didn't and couldn't know. Dad knew everything... all the time. Somehow that changed things and melted the fury inside her, just a little bit. Made him a little less scary, a little less god-like.

The gravel *hurt*, diverting her attention for a second. Mom always said she might not be able to control his actions, but she could control her *reactions* to him. She stood up. Backed away from him toward the house. She was going to call mom.

"What did *they* look like?" He tried to contain the venom in his voice. The weapon was heavy. Chief was losing the edge. This was harder than anything he'd ever done before. He really was trying with her. He had this talk with Mom more than once about how sensitive she was getting, that she was growing up, hormones were kicking in and that if he really wanted to push her out of his life, his anger and rage were the perfect way to accomplish that.

He would much rather be in a full-blown fire fight than deal with a hormonal, teenage daughter. He could take the blood and guts, the bombs and the bullets, the death and destruction, but he just wasn't wired for daughter drama. Especially teenage daughter drama from the very same girl who used to run into his arms at the mere sight of him. Those days kept him alive and well. But those days were obviously gone.

"Dad, I'm not doing this with you. I swear to God. I'm calling mom!" Emma grabbed her phone from her back pocket and held it out like a water-witch searching for a signal. There: six messages from her

friends and only one bar for reception. How was she going to call mom, when the service sucked this bad?

"STOP IT! Tell me what you know. Right now! Or I swear to God –"

"– What? Swear to God what? You're gonna beat it outta me? Torture me? Waterboard me?"

"Goddammit, girl! Where did you learn THAT shit? And by the way, I'm not your mom, so you better watch what you say! I'm not gonna take that shit! You hear me? Torture you, waterboard you... where the HELL did you get that from?"

"In school, Dad. The news? The Internet. Social media? Whatever. Everybody knows what guys like you do!"

Chief felt the AR-10 drop slowly. He simply couldn't hold it upright anymore as he contemplated what his daughter must think of him. They never talked about that. Was *that* who she thought he was? He was "that guy?" How long was this percolating inside of her, leaching out at a time like this? He'd felt this kind of pain before, but it was at 35,000 feet during a HALO, ending up in a flat spin, forcing the blood up against the sidewalls of his brain, heart, and blood vessels. He got dizzy, he couldn't swallow; his head and chest felt like they were going to implode. And he vomited. Spinning. It wasn't pretty.

"You don't know anything about me." He wanted to shout, but it came out as a whisper. "I love you, Emma."

Why couldn't she see that? His entire day was flipped upside down, simply because he loved her so much. He couldn't reach her. Couldn't get to her in time. And now, it was too late anyway. She was already back inside. Even through the tinnitus, through the ever-present wind in the high pines, through the heart beat that still thumped in his ears, he could hear the loud metal clicking of the door lock, shutting him out of her life.

* * * * *

Grief, guilt, extreme self-loathing were the indicators Chief knew so well. The adrenaline was wearing off and his frontal cortex was finally catching up. He was exhausted. Destroyed. Deep within, he had zero strength left. The very thought of what she must be feeling, based solely on what her face told him, drained Chief on a level he just couldn't understand. He was completely deflated and frustrated with a situation that jumped him like a sniper. The entire day was hijacked by someone else's pre-planned incursion. On one hand, he knew precisely how dangerous this was, how much he loved her and how much he wanted to protect her. But on the other hand, he just didn't have the tools to deal with a teenaged little girl, a civilian, who had no concept of the danger nor really cared. She was bait. And it worked.

The adrenaline, the PTSD, the fucking narcotics made him impotent to stop himself from reacting so heatedly. He hated the fact that he never saw it coming. Chief never realized the impact of his rage on other human beings. Just like his father, beating the hell out of him, his father never understood what he did to anyone else. He never had to. They didn't matter. But she did matter. She was his daughter and he just never saw it coming. Chief never considered she wasn't a hardened soldier. She was his baby girl. And he hated himself for making her feel the way her face reflected what was inside.

He couldn't, on a conscious level, do a damn thing to mitigate what was happening. And he hated himself for that. Not right now, but later, when the adrenaline wore off completely, when his brain came back to center and he was able to think, that's when things would really suck. Days later sometimes, when the guilt complex came in the night to coax him, he would load the gun and move to the dark place, the brink. When suicide was the only option to stop the trauma, to stop *him* from being that monster in her life again. That is when his self-loathing came. That is when the demons came out of the box, broke the lock, and exposed their venom. And that was when it was the hardest to get through the night.

Those fuckers, whoever they were, knew precisely how to play her. Chief learned the exact same tactics in Agency training. Be nice, be calm, and you will get what you want. But that also gets them in closer for the kill. Every action was calculated through the lens of someone coming behind asking questions. Especially law enforcement. The answers would disarm them. They were nice. They were polite. They didn't force her. There was no probable cause. Just two guys, using her phone and being nice.

Ugh... Chief was making himself nuts again, knowing full well these men were trained professionals. Bad men who did bad things to innocent people. It didn't matter what anyone else thought. Chief knew. And now, he had to figure out what they wanted and what to do about it. That was all that mattered. He'd try to figure out how to fix this relationship later. Or not. Chief was already nearly an hour behind. The only thing that mattered at the moment was finding these Haji bastards.

* * * * *

As usual, Mom was out doing horse work at some ranch somewhere that didn't have a cell signal. The voice message sat for the rest of the day, like a ticking time bomb, just waiting to go off. She would check for messages when she finally got back to a good cell signal and hear Emma crying, turning a successful day of surgeries and equine medicine into a shit sandwich. The message would grab her by the heart as her baby girl sobbed into the phone about how bad Dad was "doing it again." That message would duplicate the fury Chief just experienced by the phone call he received. The emotions from hearing that voice message dragged up her own childhood trauma, her own demons, locked away inside her own personal trauma closet. Both her parents were Marines, both Vietnam Veterans. And without even knowing it, Chief was replicating the same trauma in her life from his combat service.

The demons of war permeated every relationship within this family now. Mom would go into a version of her own PTSD, get in the truck,

and speed home with “momma bear” venom at the ready, planning, assuming, loading her canon of vengeance and vindication. God dammit. He didn’t get to keep doing this to *her* kids. She was ready to kick his ass. She had a metaphorical tool box filled with edged weapons. He'd spent the past ten years telling her exactly where he was vulnerable. All bets were off and once again, he never saw it coming. Right about the time he was coming down from his own PTSD episode, right when the immense guilt was about to hit him, perfectly timed when his frontal cortex kicked in and he was starting to make sense of it all, she came flying in the driveway to check on Emma. Round two began without either of them knowing why. The depth of love and desire they had for each other was lost in the fervor of emotion. Trauma emotion. And the devil celebrated his victory.

None of them would ever understand the evil he had seen, the danger he experienced nor the hatred in his soul for those who would do harm to innocents. Innocents like them. The very people in his life who kept him alive, made his heart pump and his soul sing, were in mortal danger from an enemy he couldn't identify.

As hard as he tried, he couldn't figure out what he felt now. What drove his train was based on the emotions he denied in Bosnia, in Zaire, and Rwanda. His love for her, for all of them in the family, was masked by rage. Misinterpreted as anger, when it was nothing more than terror in his own soul that they could end up like them. All those innocents he saw in all those places. They died heinous deaths. In ways he would never speak of to them. He refused to perpetuate the evil by telling the stories. His duty to protect them was minimized, dismissed, and ridiculed simply because they didn't believe there was danger. They didn't see what humans could devolve into, what they could do to each other, and they didn't know how sneaky humans could get nor to what demon levels they would digress to in order to accomplish the horrors. From their shoes, it was "just his baggage," and Chief was trying to justify his unacceptable actions. They were scared. And rightly so. But none of it made sense to the warrior simply trying to protect them without having to disclose his dark past.

He'd seen the grief that the survivors displayed. He watched dismembered corpses get reassembled for burial as the wives, the parents, the children lost their minds in grief and pain. His family had him by the heart and he would take a bullet for them, one by one, then do it again if he had to. But they would have to experience what he had experienced to understand his rage. And that was never going to happen, even if they didn't understand and hated him for what he was doing.

No one saw his reality. *He* was the problem. *He* was the psycho that went off half-cocked all the time for what apparently was "simple stuff." Instead of trying to understand, he was called a "control freak." The air freshener plug-ins were a prime example. Yeah, he didn't like the smell. But that was no reason to go off the way he did. Whatever happened "over there," whatever it was that made him crazy and did what it did to his body, there was absolutely no reason in *her* mind that he should be acting like this. Even when it put him in the emergency room. The doctors were convinced it was a heart attack until they took blood samples, and returned devoid of the enzymes that proved cardiac arrest. He had all the classic signs, the sweat drenched clothing, pains shooting down his arm and into his back, shortness of breath, and tremors. But it wasn't a heart attack. They called it a panic attack. He called it a flashback. But regardless, things were just not okay anymore.

Chief had absolutely no idea what was going on this day. It all came out wrong, got twisted and turned into "this." Every single time. He didn't have the tools, the training, nothing that would prepare him for what he experienced and the reality was, Chief was just too close to the trees to see the forest.

The incident, Goose, losing his Team, the court martial, the divorce, losing his sons, had absolutely nothing to do with someone on the phone saying what they said to him. But it did. All of his prior experiences came together like training. Every reaction he had was directly related to the intensity he felt. Yet he was back in peacetime. A place he'd not been in three decades. His responses were over the top. And no one understood why.

Something had to change. Maybe he should just go away. Off himself like so many others had done. Get rid of the problem that everyone was scared of. Him. In the common-sense region of his damaged brain, it made complete sense. If he was the problem, the only honorable thing to do was take the problem out of the equation. He spent a lifetime doing exactly that. Taking out the problem. Then maybe the very people he loved so much, his wife, his kids, his precious Emma, could then live in peace, without the fear they lived with now. That thought simmered in his head for a very long time. After nearly a decade of these problems, after justifying so much of the bullshit in his mind, after realizing the enormity of it all, maybe it was just a mistake to have fought so hard to stay alive that day in the desert.

Chief was doing the warrior dance no one ever talked about. He was uninformed, untrained, dancing the only dance steps that he knew. And they just didn't work back here. The joy he felt being with his kids, that which kept him alive and sane, was precisely what he had to sacrifice. In order for their happiness to continue, he had to self-isolate and remove himself from the situation. It felt like he was chewing his own heart out of his chest.

"Humans have an innate need to feel safe." Those words, coming from a marriage counselor, rattled him to the core. He never knew safety. Not from birth and positively not in Berlin, or any of the other places he lived. But he believed it. He saw it. Instinctively he himself sought that safety, because peace resided right next to it somewhere inside where the light lived. The problem now was he had no idea how to execute life and provide that safety, that security, that peace to his family without weapons, explosives, and violence. The dichotomy of that alone made his head spin. He had zero training when it came to raising stepchildren, zero training when it came to being a father and no real mentor or father figure to gain any intel from. He was a soldier. And the two were diametrically opposed when it came to success. Maybe he missed out on it, maybe there was some classroom instruction he never got, that taught soldiers how to be good fathers, good husbands. Normally, people learned how to be a good parent

from their own parents. But what happens when your own parents were fucked up, violent alcoholics? The children of those people learned the same tools, even when they didn't want to be that way. The human condition was a mess to begin with, war just exacerbated the issues.

Chief was wearing dirty boots back into Ft. Livingroom, the boots that still had war on them. Just like soldiers did after World War II and Korea and Vietnam. It was in no way intentional, but the consequences were the same. He had every intention of keeping war compartmented. He loved his wife, adored the children, and wanted nothing but happiness and peace in their lives. He expended enormous amounts of time making sure they were happy, made them laugh, put up with the pain and agony of his spinal condition to make sure they were well taken care of. Yet in a split second, when he failed, when his superman cape went into the cleaners, that was when the damage happened. And boy did he take it in the shorts. For whatever reason, the good stuff was never remembered. The joy and happiness were completely wiped out and the good times were just never good enough to endure the carnage and perceived victimization. He was forever branded as "the Monster."

Unable to remember most of what transpired during his flashbacks and PTSD, all he really knew was the response he got for days after and the guilt train that crushed his soul. He really wanted to just kill himself. To end the madness. He should have died that day and so many other days during his Tier One time. Survival was instinctual. If he knew the damage he was going to have to endure, he never would have fought so hard to live. If any soldier knew then what they knew now, about the loss of limbs, the loss of brain function, the damage to their bodies, and how war would affect their base personality, they all knew they never would have struggled so hard to live.

The biggest problem was his lens. The lens through which he saw life now was completely different. He couldn't relate to his 17-year-old stepson, the one who complained about how bad his childhood was. Chief knew what real trauma was. He'd lived through some of the

ugliest things humans could do to each other. He continually compared "their story" to the discomfort and pain constantly thrown in his face, represented as an atrocity no one should ever live through. And they hated him even more when he didn't buy the Kool Aid they were selling. Those around him continually ridiculed him for minimizing and dismissing their "trauma." How do you compare being yelled at, or spoken harshly to during an argument to a child who watched her mother's headless body drop to the ground, while she was clinging to her hand? How does one explain, without being ripped apart as an "asshole with no soul," what you've seen...what you've smelled...the absolute horror that Chief related to the term "trauma" when no one around him had any idea what he was talking about?

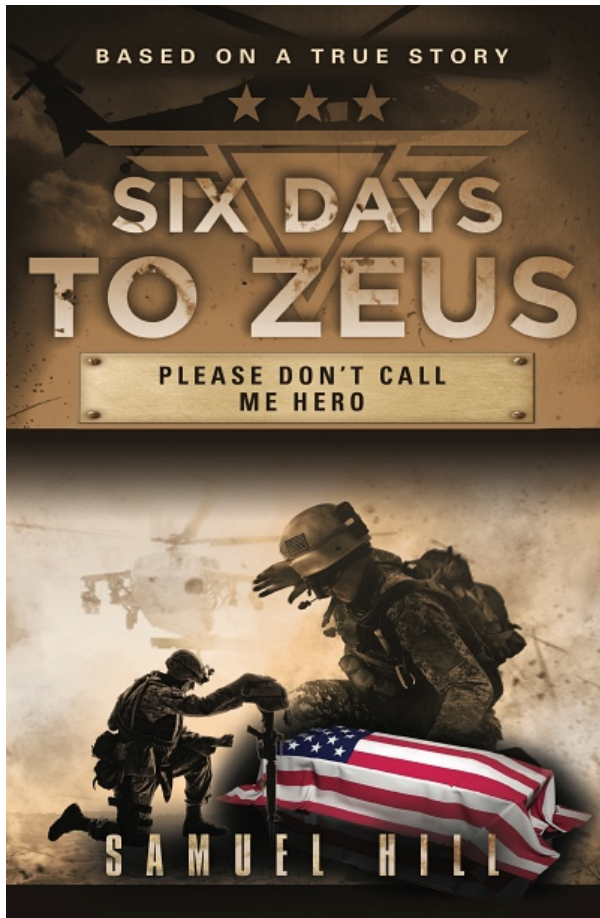
"Trauma is trauma" he kept hearing. And to him, that was absolute bullshit. Being ten years old, forced into combat as a child soldier to do horrific things to other humans was a sort of trauma in a category all unto itself. Watching women and children being buried alive by a bulldozer as they screamed far surpassed the "mere mortal" syndrome he saw everywhere in America.

Life was so unfair. And it burned him to the soul. Their giggles, her love, the peace at night when he checked on them while they slept, that was what gave him peace. That is what he lived for. Guardian. Peacekeeper. Protector. And whatever this PTSD was, it ruined absolutely everything, in a second.

Chief, like all Veterans when they came home, was a victim of his training, his muscle memory, his "violence of action" in response to everything deemed a threat. The primal warning system in his brain was on overload after so many years of war. So many missions. The computer chip in his brain, the hippocampus, the amygdala and his highly tuned limbic system kept him and his Team alive over there. Guys like him were famous, looked up to, and sought out among the soldiers just learning, in country for their first or second tours. The "old timers" with multiple tours were the ones you had to hook up with if you wanted to stay alive. No promises you'd go home with all your limbs and a brain worth a shit, but you'd go home if you listened to

them, if you listened and learned. That's what worked over there. That's what kept him alive, that's what kept his soldiers alive. Street smarts and all the little indicators a man learned after so many tours made the difference between everyone dying, or most of them going home. The way the dirt looked sometimes, something out of place, a piece of garbage that just didn't look right, or the reaction of a dog or cat. Most of the time it was just "Spidey hairs" that made an old timer wary. Those tactics, that training was proven, time tested and it worked.

But no one ever trained them to come home, so the same tactics they used in war, they naturally tried to use when they came back. But those tactics and training just did not work back in civilian society. Especially when you were back with your wife, when you were raising children. Chief wasn't the only one experiencing this self-destructive behavior that turned him into "the problem." But it damn sure felt like he was all alone.



Please don't call me Hero picks up where Alive Day left off as Chief faces the reality of coming home with PTSD and the Moral Wounds of War and must decide on "Mission Next" while a dark character from his covert past invades his life.

Six Days to Zeus: Please Don't Call me Hero

By Samuel Hill

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