

# **Into the Fire: A Firsthand Account of the Most Extraordinary Battle in the Afghan War Study Guide**

## **Into the Fire: A Firsthand Account of the Most Extraordinary Battle in the Afghan War by Dakota Meyer**

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# Plot Summary

"Into the Fire: A Firsthand Account of the Most Extraordinary Battle in the Afghan War" by Dakota Meyer and Bing West is a fascinating true story of Dakota Meyer's military life, focusing on the tragedies that occurred at Ganjigal in the fall of 2009. When Team Monti is sent into Ganjigal with a substitute sniper, Dakota promises to find his team if things go awry, but when Taliban insurgents ambush the village, Dakota's commanding officers forbid him from entering Ganjigal until it is too late, leaving him with extreme guilt over his friends' deaths. "Into the Fire" is a heart-rending, tragic account of only one battle in the War on Terror which leaves readers wondering about how many similar mistakes resulted in the deaths of American soldiers.

Raised in a small town in Kentucky, Dakota Meyer joins the Marine Corps and trains as a sniper. Eager to fight, he joins a team of advisers being sent to Afghanistan to train the Afghan warriors, and he becomes very close to the other three men on his team, Team Monti. In the fall of 2009, Team Monti is sent on a routine patrol to Ganjigal with many Askars as back-up, but Meyer is replaced by Gunny Johnson because he irritates his commanding officers. Convincing Rod to be his driver, Dakota promises his team that he will come for them if things go badly.

In Ganjigal, Taliban insurgents attack the Americans and the Askars, trapping Team Monti in a house in the village. Capt. William Swenson and Corp. Dakota Meyer repeatedly attempt to acquire back-up and air support to rescue their soldiers, but they are forbidden from entering Ganjigal. Eventually, they are permitted to send men in to retrieve the wounded and dead, and Meyer manages to save several Askars, though he finds the body of his closest Afghan friend, Ali Dodd. When air support finally joins the foray, Meyer is distraught when he finds the corpses of the other members of Team Monti.

Ridden with guilt, Meyer is sent home to Kentucky before being enrolled in therapy for his post-traumatic stress disorder. Depressed and feeling responsible for his brothers' deaths, Meyer attempts to shoot himself in the head, only to find that his gun was unloaded. Because of their bravery during Ganjigal, Meyer and Swenson are both nominated for Medals of Honor, and though Meyer receives the award, Swenson's paperwork is lost. Meyer protests that accountability for Ganjigal will only be seen when Swenson receives the Medal of Honor he so greatly deserves. Dakota knows that he will carry the guilt of his team's deaths for the rest of his life, and he feels that he was rewarded for his greatest failure as he insists that you either rescue your men or die trying; because he did not die trying, he believes that he did not try hard enough.



# Introduction

## Introduction Summary and Analysis

Along the Afghan-Pakistan border during the summer of 2009, team leader Lt. Mike Johnson tells Dakota Meyer that they will love it here as their Humvee continues through the valleys of the Hindu Kush. Johnson and Meyer became friends during their training in California's High Sierras, and Meyer scans the ridgelines for snipers as Johnson talks about how he will live a good life as a forest ranger after his enlistment is over. Meyer's team also consists of Staff Sgt Aaron Kenefick and Navy Corpsman Doc Layton. Meyer is the only grunt on the team, there to train the Afghan soldiers they are on their way to meet, but while the others are looking to do their jobs and go home, Meyer is looking for a fight, foreshadowing the fact that he finds one. As they near Combat Outpost Monti, he can tell that the people they are dealing with are stubborn, plus he knows that these tribes live by the three rules of the Pashtunwali Code: courage, hospitality to strangers and revenge for personal slights. As they approach the outpost, Kenefick explains that the place was named after Staff Sgt Monti who did a suicide run to save a wounded private several years ago. Meyer and his team had left Camp Joyce, ten miles to the south, a half hour earlier, and though Camp Joyce is the Army Headquarters in the area, Meyer's team will live at Monti, though Lt. Johnson reports to Major Kevin Williams at Joyce. There are 21 Marines in the training teams, all spread out among five outposts like Monti, meant to block insurgents' exits from key valleys and prevent them from moving their suppliers. Before Meyer and his team left Joyce, Maj. Williams warned them to hold the Afghans accountable instead of allowing them to use the American soldiers.

At Monti, the four advisers move into their bunkhouse, and the Marines they are replacing give them a tour of the facility, warning them that the enemy is a collection of insurgent groups with different names, grievances and ambitions, some of which are allied with Al Qaeda and others are not. The Dog Company makes Team Monti feel at home, and Meyer is eager to settle in and begin combat patrols. A few days later, Kenefick and Meyer hear several loud pops as they leave the head so they dive into the bunker so Meyer can grab his gear and return fire to the lone dushman. Emotionless, refusing to think about the fact that he is aiming at a human being, Meyer fires until the enemy dies, and Lt. Johnson notes that they feel safer with their sniper on the job that Meyer spent four years training for. Lt. Johnson praises Meyer's shooting, and Meyer claims he is a cowboy, not caring as they tease him because they do not know anything about life on a farm.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 1: Finish the Game opens with an allusion to Abraham Lincoln and how Kentucky is known for its independent spirit. Dakota Meyer is from the tiny town of Columbia, KY. As a child, his mother carted him around the state, allowing him to stay with Mike Meyers, his adoptive father, on a farm every summer where he also spent time with Mike's father, Dwight, a former Marine. As a kid, Dakota was allowed to drive the ATV because he started it, and when he was eight, Mike took him hunting, getting him accustomed to what he would encounter on the battlefield. In grammar school, Dakota's mom decided it would be best for him to live with Mike full-time, and this is when Dakota's life changed for the better. At age 11, Dad encouraged Dakota to enter a public speaking contest, and winning allowed him to "develop a confidence in speaking up that would later exasperate Marine sergeants (and cause me some grief on occasion)" (page 18). Growing up, Dakota was given more serious chores, and in eighth grade, he convinced Dad to hire him to pick tobacco from the fields, getting sick from nicotine poisoning when he refused to wear protective gear. Dakota did well in school, but Dad never lets up. In high school, he joined the football team, and Coach Mike Griffiths became like a third father figure. Though he dated girls and enjoyed life, Dakota's life consisted mostly of three demanding men, four including himself, which made him rough around the edges and caused him to offend his cousin, Jennie. His uncle and dad chided Dakota about standing up for his family, so Dakota decided to become more sensitive, but Dad would not let him get carried away with that either. When his elbow was injured during a game, Dad told him to get back in there after halftime. Similarly, Jennie recovered from a coma caused by a car accident; "the Meyer family is not one for giving up. They don't let you" (page 22). Dakota's attempts at sensitivity goes well until he offends a classmate, so he turns to Ann, the school guidance counselor and a family friend, who helps him with social counseling. He does well with guys since they can fight if they disagree, but when he gets a concussion, that ruins his dreams of playing college ball. One day, he notices a Marine sergeant in the cafeteria, but talking to him, he feels like he is failing an interview. The Marine says it is good that Dakota plans to play college ball because he would never make it as a Marine, but knowing that he is being baited, Dakota asks for papers and is told he needs his father's signature since he is a minor. Dakota stresses that he wants to be in the infantry, so the Marine guarantees him a tryout at boot camp. The Marine goes home with Dakota to talk to Dad who is not a hard sell; Dakota tells Dad that he wants something better than college or staying on the farm, and Dad doesn't disagree with him.



# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 2: The Marine Years, Dakota's goodbyes with his family are somber as they are naturally concerned by his desire to be a Marine. Dakota joins twenty other recruits on a bus to Parris Island, SC where they are taught that if one of them fails, they all fail. The first month is spent breaking them down, and they are built back up in the second month. After graduating, Dakota spends two months at the School of Infantry where he learns fundamental tactics, and five months after joining up, he is sent to the Third Marine Regiment in Hawaii where he is assigned to a four-man team led by Lance Cpl Daniel Kreitzer who teaches the team how to move on the battlefield together. When Dakota decides that he wants to be a sniper, he spends 80 days with Staff Sgt Mike Skinta until hitting difficult targets becomes second nature, and he learns that success is determined by who plans the most thorough mission, not by how many people a sniper kills. Only 13 of 31 Marines graduate and become snipers. Finally, after nineteen months of training, Dakota is ready to put it all together.

In July 2007, Dakota's battalion is sent to Kharma on patrol duties, but Dakota is sent home following injury and surgeries on his right hand. At home, he deals with the deaths of two close friends before rejoining his battalion in early 2007 when they return from Iraq. Gunner Sgt Hector Soto-Rodriguez chides Dakota for his excessive drinking, claiming that, as a sniper, he needs to be ready to lead his team. Dakota steps up to the task, taking a marksmanship course to improve his skills before rejoining his battalion in the middle of 2008 and being put in charge of a six-man sniper team. Since American battalions no longer conduct combat patrols in Iraq at this point, Dakota volunteers as an adviser in Afghanistan because he knows he will see action and he looks forward to the adventure. Joining an adviser team in Okinama, Dakota spends a month focusing on the basics of fire and maneuver, but during his simulated training in California's High Sierras, he is exasperated by the lack of focus on tactics as his superior insists they are going to train the Afghans, not to fight; Dakota does not understand how they are supposed to avoid the fight while training Afghans in a combat zone. He narrowly avoids being kicked off the team for his objections, and though he is confused about whether they are supposed to act as garrison instructors or combat advisers, his team is on the way to Afghanistan either way.



# Chapters 3 & 4

## Chapters 3 & 4 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 3: Monti, Dakota is assigned to Lt. Mike Johnson's four-man team when he arrives in Afghanistan during the summer of 2009 which will allow him to see all the action he wants. The other team members are Staff Sgt. Aaron Kenefick who is known for running a tight ship and Doc Layton who will provide medical care. Dakota is put in charge of tactics, operations and weapons training. Monti follows the Pentagon's official counterinsurgency strategy, so Team Monti is supposed to make friends with the villagers, but they quickly learn that the villagers will support whoever gives them the most money. With forty villages in the area and only ten weekly patrols, there is not enough to protect the villages, but Team Monti settles into a routine of patrolling five days a week. The ritual is predictable with each village accusing the Americans of not providing what is promised and always insisting that the Taliban, or dushmen as the Askars call them, are in the next village. The Taliban come and go as they please, and though some villagers are friendly, there is obviously something wrong in other villages. Hafez, the lead interpreter who is loyal to America, serves as their best warning system of difficulties and becomes the unofficial fifth member of Team Monti. The dushmen usually hide when they see the Americans coming, firing as the soldier drive away as a warning not to return. The Askars do not care about the counterinsurgency theory as they are just soldiers. Dakota fires thousands of rounds in response to the dushmen's rounds, but he rarely hits his unseen enemy. He convinces Lt. Johnson to park where previous patrols took fire, but Lt. Johnson complains about allowing Dakota to talk him into insane things as he orders his team to leave the death trap.

In Chapter 4: Advising, Dakota gets another chance to impress Lt. Johnson in early August when a mortar shell explodes near them on their way to a key leader engagement. Dakota grabs a few Askars to flank the enemy before Lt. Johnson can object, but Lt. Rhula of the Afghan force has to call off the local police. A few days later, Lt. Johnson learns that Rhula and his men are invading and looting local villages, so he tells Rhula that the Americans will not help the Askars steal. Team Monti adopts Annie, a stray mut, and other than Dakota who has no plans to return to a civilian life, they discuss their plans for after the war. Because the Askars have no standards of group behavior, the advisers feel like parole officers, punishing the Askars for stealing from their supplies by taking their supplies away. The soldiers try to help the poor villagers, and Dakota makes friends with the Askars, discussing religion and women. The Askars scoff at the idea that the Taliban are true Muslims, but they have no faith in the idea of creating peace in Afghanistan. Dakota calls home upon occasion, but Team Monti does not talk much about their lives at home because it is like they are on another planet. Dakota notes that everything else fades away after a while, leaving just you and your team; "You even think you control your own destiny" (page 58).





# Chapters 5 & 6

## Chapters 5 & 6 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 5: Coming Together, the American soldiers at Monti complain about the lack of action once the government tightens the rules about leaving after several outposts are overrun, but the advisors continue with their normal patrols since they fall under the Afghan command. Bored due to the lack of action, Sgt. 1st Class Dennis Jeffords and PFC Lage decide to place their checkpoint at Hill 1911, a dangerous ambush point, and stay until they take fire, so they ask Dakota to be their back-up, but Lt. Johnson tells him to forget it. When Jeffords contacts Dakota on the radio to tell him that they are engaged, Dakota wakes Lt. Johnson and convinces him to deploy two truckloads of Askars to attack the dushmen who disappear within an hour. Lt. Johnson is angry because the event goes against standard procedures, and he yells at Dakota for finagling him into this crap again. Before the Afghan presidential election in late August 2009, Lt. Johnson sends Meyer and Kenefick to guard the polls at Dangham, forcing them to work together since they do not get along. As Meyer scouts the area, he notices a man dressed as a shepherd firing rounds from an AK, so Dakota fires back and throws grenades, and this incident lessens the tension between Meyer and Kenefick, teaching them to work together. Kenefick and Meyer disagree with the locals' decision to announce the poll location in advance, so they change the location the night before, and insurgents attack the original location one minute after voting begins. Kenefick and Meyer return to Monti with a full ballot box and complete camaraderie between them.

In Chapter 6: Out of the Smoke, Monti is attacked by rockets a few weeks later, and as Meyer pumps out rounds, his gun jams, so he and Lt. Johnson return to the watch tower for another gun while Doc shoots back. Meyer carries a wounded Askar to the medical center for Doc to tend his wounds as Lt. Johnson yells at the Askars to return fire. As Meyer returns to the tower, a rocket explodes into a tree, and he thinks Lt. Johnson has been hit until the lieutenant appears. A rocket hits a bunker, and it is several minutes before Doc and Kenefick assure Meyer and Johnson that they are safe. Attack helicopters arrive ten minutes later, ending enemy fire, and Lt. Johnson and Meyer meet up with Doc and Kenefick. As a grunt, Meyer is resigned to potential death, but the rest of his team now understands that they may not make it home alive. Though they are all too embarrassed to talk about their feelings, they all realize it is real and it is just the four of them as Doc says "we'll be there for each other" (page 72) which is the only thing that makes any sense to Dakota.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 7: Ganjigal, Team Monti receives a call from Camp Joyce that they are needed for a mission, so they prepare, and on September 7, 2009, a convoy of eight vehicles drive south to Joyce; their mission is to provide security for a key leader engagement in the mountain village of Ganjigal, but Hafez tells them Ganjigal is a bad place with bad people, foreshadowing the catastrophe that occurs there. Though there has been tension between Ganjigal and Camp Joyce, the elders of Ganjigal claim to support the Afghan government after Joyce officers threaten to build a new outpost in the valley near the village. When the locals do not react negatively to a U. S. patrol, Ganjigal is deemed pro-American and supportive of the Afghan government, so when they ask for money to work on their mosque, the mission is scheduled. Fourteen advisers attend the mission brief and plan to advance from the west, expecting the Taliban to shoot at them as they leave the village since the insurgents do not typically ambush the military from within villages. Meyer is not happy with the plan, but Lt. Johnson signals for him to keep quiet about things he cannot change. Meyer is glad to see Capt William Swenson at the briefing, and Swenson concentrates on planning their retreat in case something goes wrong. After the briefing, Meyer learns that Gunny Johnson will replace him on the mission, but his and his team's objections are ignored. Meyer becomes increasingly upset as he is unable to shake a bad feeling, again foreshadowing the tragedy at Ganjigal. Meyer seeks out Staff Sgt. Juan Rodriguez-Chavez, AKA Rod, and tells him they will need heavy firepower if things go wrong, and Rod agrees to drive if Meyer says the word. Meyer tells Lt. Johnson that he is coming in if things get hairy, and though Lt. Johnson jokes that Meyer is always trying to get into a fight, he is obviously relieved since he does not try to dissuade Meyer. Unfortunately, the head of the Taliban in the province has intelligence of the military's movement and sends reinforcements to Ganjigal. As the convoy sets out for the village, Hafez continues to note this is a bad valley, feeling that breaking up Team Monti is unlucky, and when Lt. Johnson claims it is Meyer's fault for not knowing how to kiss up to his superiors, Meyer reminds them of his plan with Rod as they head toward their own Little Bighorn.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 8: Into the Valley, the convoy parks thirteen vehicles at the jumping off point, and Kennefick instructs Meyer to monitor the net because he wants him listening to what goes on. Meyer assures him that he and Rod will get to the wash and pick their team up if things go wrong. As Team Monti sets off in the lead, Meyer is irritated that he is stuck in the rear. He and Rod watch the column file out, but when the village lights go out, Lt. Johnson sends a warning on the radio, so Meyer tells Rod to be ready, yet the patrol proceeds to the village. Just before 5 A.M., Meyer sees villagers leaving the valley, but when he approaches an old man and a teenager, they smirkingly ignore him as they walk past. As dawn breaks, Team Monti and the lead platoon enter Ganjigal, and as they near the home of the village elder, they are attacked by the hidden enemy opening fire. Meyer waits for the fire to die down, but it does not, and he grows very frustrated that he cannot help. Kaplan's Askars start to flee, but fortunately, Kaplan shouts them back into the position before the dushmen can maneuver up the hill to outrun them. Meyer listens to his men dueling with the enemy for the next hour as Kaplan constantly has his men shift positions so the dushmen cannot zero in on them. When enemy fire swells from the east, Swenson's calls for fire are relayed to Camp Joyce, and hearing the signal for withdrawal, Meyer assumes that Team Monti will pull back, thinking it is obvious what he and Rod need to do once that happens.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 9: Paralysis, Meyer tells Rod that the men need to get out of there, calling for permission to enter the village; however, when Valdez finally answers, he denies the request which makes no sense. Meyer is ready to go anyway, but Rod insists they wait a bit longer, lest they be sent home for disobeying direct orders. Meanwhile at Joyce, Capt. Aaron Harting, the senior officer on duty, asks question after question about the situation. As the attack continues, the patrols are in deep trouble, and Fabayo is infuriated by the lack of support. Team Monti takes cover in a house while the enemy guns down the Askars, and Swenson fears he will not make it out since he will soon be surrounded. As Major Williams calls for air support, Swenson moves his men to prevent being encircled, but they are soon pinned down as dushmen close in from both sides of the wash. Joyce TOC still will not clear missions so Swenson sends it polar, accepting full responsibility for his decision, yet TOC responds with a request for impossible details about the situation in Ganjigal. With his men being gunned down, Kaplan radios that the situation is critical. Two months earlier, high command issued a directive forbidding artillery near a structure likely to contain civilians, shifting high command from the battlefield to the staff; unfortunately, TOC cannot see friendly troops dying, and they worry more about protecting their ranks than protecting the troops. Twenty minutes into the fight, Swenson calls for helicopter support and is told that it will arrive in fifteen minutes. Lt. Johnson comes across the radio to announce that Team Monti is pinned down in a house, and Kennefick passes his location on the grid across the network. When there is no response to Meyer's request for Kennefick to repeat their position, "That broke it for me. I had promised my team I would be there. As far as I was concerned, my command element wasn't in command" (page 105).



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 10: Lost, Meyer assumed Team Monti was on its way out of Ganjigal until he heard those calls. Hearing Meyer's radio message, Valadez radios for him to stay put, but Meyer responds that they are going in, accepting that it will be his fault for disobeying orders if the situation is under control. Two Humvees full of Askars follow Meyer and Rod on the trail to the wash, but they have to turn back for a different truck when Meyer's gun jams. As Valadez directs them to the village, they pick up five frantic Askars and drop them off behind cover, knowing there are at least fifty more Askars trapped in the valley, along with Team Monti, so Meyer believes it is time to make a move. Over the radio, Valadez argues with the platoon leader that they need to wait for clearance from Joyce TOC, and Swenson's continual requests for air support are denied because a mission north of Ganjigal is a higher priority. When Fabayo tells Lt. Johnson to fall back, Lt. Johnson insists he needs smoke, but since there is no smoke, Swenson calls for white phosphorous rounds. An hour into the fight, Team Monti is trapped in a house, the Askars have no cover, and the U. S. and Afghan commanders are pinned down; also, Meyer and Rod have not yet reached the wash, while the reaction platoon does not react and Joyce TOC is paralyzed. Angered by the requests for locations, Swenson requests a massive artillery barrage, yet TOC still refuses to fire at Ganjigal. Joyce TOC finally directs the Dog Platoon to move to the valley, but they are not given a location. When Major Williams requests an Afghan quick-reaction force, the Afghan Humvees leave Camp Joyce without any American support. When Lt. Johnson asks for smoke, he is told that the fire mission is too close to the village, and Joyce TOC forbids more artillery support, showing a lack of awareness on the behalf of those trapped in the valley. The villagers provide fire from their homes, allowing the enemy to cut off the Command Group, causing the far ambush to become a near ambush, and the Command Group falls back to avoid being surrounded. Team Monti is still trapped in a house as Joyce TOC finally orders the Army platoon to move forward, and the platoon lines up behind Meyer and Rod and begin moving forward as Meyer hears Lt. Johnson say they are under fire and surrounded. As the insurgents demand surrender, Swenson dismisses the taunt as crazy talk and lobs a grenade at the dushmen. Major Williams is hit by enemy fire but radios that he is alright and tells Fabayo to keep going. Moving through the wounded soldiers, Meyer prepares for the medevac that Swenson ordered. He sees a group of Americans staggering down the wash, but there is no way to get there; Rod notes that the situation looks dire.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 11: Into the Fire, Meyer tells Rod that he is ready, so Rod drives the truck downhill, stopping when they see Hafez who informs Meyer that Lt. Johnson sent him out of the house planning to follow, but Hafez does not see Team Monti after fleeing the house. Hafez joined the Command Group, threatening to shoot any who surrendered, but since he cannot lead them back in, they continue into the valley. Meyer hears Kenefick asking for a medevac over the radio, but the transmission breaks up before he finishes transmitting his location. Wedged in tight with no room to maneuver and no cover, the Command Group tries to get out of the wash, so Rod drives the vehicle to provide cover, allowing them to escape the wash. Moving into the village, Meyer exchanges fire with the dushmen, noting that the multitude of corpses on the ground is surreal. When the Army Humvee behind Meyer and Rod turns around for a truck that rolled over, they are left alone and exposed, but Meyer is not afraid or angry as bullets fly past him; he knows he is dead, and there is nothing he can do about it. Meyer and Rod plan to drive east until they find Team Monti or are obliterated. Five Askars run for the truck and are shot down, but the shooter does not aim at Meyer or his truck. When Valdez announces over the radio that Meyer is being swarmed, Meyer fires into the enemy as Rod drives over a man. Though a medevac approaches, the Askars in the wash are frozen, and Meyer knows they will all die if they do not fight back. Rod tries to avoid fire, but Meyer takes a shot above his elbow without any serious damage. At 8 A.M. with no idea where to go and no sight of Team Monti, Meyer is out of ideas. When the helicopters finally arrive, they cannot do enough to help, so Meyer informs them that four Marines are missing in the village. Rod and Meyer laugh hysterically as the situation worsens, and as the helicopters expend their munitions and leave, Meyer runs out of ammo and requires a new gun. Rod stops to pick up a wounded Askar who took three rounds, but the Askar dies before Meyer can pick him up.



# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 12: Into the Wash, Rod and Meyer return to the wash for more ammo, and since Meyer still worries about his team, Hafez asks around and learns Team Monti did not make it out; they are still in Ganjigal, foreshadowing Meyer's decision to return to the village. As Hafez, Meyer and Rod drive back to the wash, Meyer wants to ignore the wounded Askars, but being an advisor comes with responsibility so he applies a tourniquet to the man's wounds and puts him in the Ranger behind them which serves as an ambulance. As they return to the casualty collection point, they collect Askars, but the incoming fire does not cease. The helicopters return to search for Team Monti, and meanwhile, Meyer is irritated to find many Askars he trained hiding on the ground, too afraid to return fire. When Meyer finds the boy of Dodd Ali, his closest Afghan friend, he is distraught, but as an Afghan man taps him on the shoulder, pointing a gun at his head and ordering him to drop his weapon, Meyer cannot believe how badly he screwed up. Pretending to surrender, he throws a grenade at the dushman, but when it does not explode, Meyer jumps on him and smashes his face with a rock. Meyer removes Dodd Ali's armor and drags him back to the truck. Swenson yells that they need to get out of here, but he helps Meyer get the corpse into the truck. Driving away, they laugh like maniacs as bullets whiz past them. With their truck too ruined to continue, they return to the shelter of the rough trace.





# Chapters 13 & 14

## Chapters 13 & 14 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 13: Primal, Meyer does not see any U. S. soldiers or commanders from Joyce at the casualty collection point. Approaching Major Williams and 1st Sgt. Garza, he insists that it is time for the advisors to take charge and rescue his team. Garza yells about going back in but is stopped because he needs medical attention, yet when Major Williams comments that they lost today before leaving the battlefield, Meyer is furious because his day is not over yet. Fabayo, Rod and Swenson leave for reinforcements, but since Hafez went with them, Meyer cannot organize his Askars since he has no translator. As a quick-reaction platoon covers the vehicles, Swenson calls Joyce TOC to explain that a platoon is moving into the valley. They pick Meyer up, but Meyer laments that they lose focus on his lost team because there are so many wounded to collect. He piles the dead and tries to tend to the wounded as enemy fire persists. The pilots cannot drop bombs since they do not know the location of the missing team, plus fire missions are still denied as TOC asks endless questions. Enemy fire slackens by 10:30 as the pilots run crazy risks to find Team Monti, avoiding return fire since they don't know where the team is. Over the course of the day, Meyer and his companions evacuate over thirty dead and wounded. When Meyer sees groups of Monti Askars, he knows that his team must be nearby. After several false alarms, Meyer and Rod argue testily, and when Swenson claims reinforcements are coming, Meyer objects "That's bullshit! The Army's not coming. They haven't come all day and you know it" (page 154). Though they are all physically and emotionally exhausted, Meyer wants to move into the village, and Swenson finally agrees. While Joyce TOC has known about the missing team for hours, word eventually reaches a three-star general hundreds of miles away, and he declares a personal recovery, so Special Ops Commands dispatches Apache attack helicopters and Air Force helicopters with pararescue jumpers.

In Chapter 14: Team Monti, helicopters believe they have located Team Monti by 11 A.M., but Swenson forbids Meyer from searching the compound, angering Meyer to follow orders from a man who does not know his team. When a pilot announces that he has spotted five bodies, Meyer ignores Swenson's protests and rushes from the truck to find the corpses of Gunny Johnson, an Afghan interpreter, Lt. Johnson, Doc Layton and Staff Sgt. Kenefick; he cannot believe it ended like this, with his entire team wiped out. Because Meyer helped tend to the Askars' dead and wounded, the Askars help his carry his dead team. Meyer feels deflated when it is finally over after six hours, but Hafez tells him they have gone to a better place and advises him not to cry as the Askars will see it as weakness. Meyer is too exhausted to cry or even be angry. As they leave the valley with the corpses of Team Monti, several villagers point and laugh, but Hafez stops Meyer from drawing his weapon. At Camp Joyce, Meyer tells Major Williams that they are all dead. Though others offer to help put the bodies in bags, Meyer insists on doing it because he would want his team to do it for him. He cleans and bags the bodies, marking their names at their heads, and draping the U. S. flag over each bag, he prays and drives his team to the helopad.





# Chapters 15 & 16

## Chapters 15 & 16 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 15: Dab Khar, Meyer rejects the psychologist's help and refuses to talk to his dad after the helicopter leaves to take his brother home. He washes the blood off him and watches the sun set on a roof with Hafez and several Askars. The next day at Monti, the guys are upset about how TOC failed the soldiers in Ganjigal. Meyer insists on packing up his brothers' belongings, and he is devastated when he finds that Annie, his dog, has been shot since dogs are no longer allowed on base. For the first few days, Meyer tries to keep busy to avoid thinking, but he is standoffish with others since he does not want new friends. Because the Askars refuse to continue their patrols unless they are accompanied by U. S. soldiers, the pace of the patrols drops. Meyer finally gets another chance when Col. Daniel Yoo visits him and receives an alert that an Army convoy was ambushed north of Monti in Dab Khar. They rush to Dab Khar to find vehicles wrecked and jammed in. Walking in on foot, Meyer is confused that the Army Humvee is not returning fire, but the men insist they do not fight because they are in logistics. Meyer feels good to save a young Afghan kid from death; though the kid may eventually join the Taliban, Meyer cannot hold that against him. He is furious to find the Army allowed an Afghan to bleed out mere feet from their truck because they were afraid of him, so he demands water for the wounded. After the battle ends, the captain in charge of the logistics company suggests that Meyer may be too high-strung, so psychologists keep an eye on him as the weeks creep by. Shots from enemy snipers taunt Meyer, and when two bullets crack past an open door in October, Meyer hops into the turret without thinking and returns fire until the sniper ceases shooting. A few days later, a farmer complains about his dead chickens, and when a civil affairs officer awards him \$200 for the loss, Meyer is irritated that they pay extortion when a sniper on the man's farm tried to kill them; he feels he is losing the battle after Ganjigal.

In Chapter 16: Cheerleaders, Ganjigal generates a lot of paperwork, and Sgt. Maj. Jimmy Carabello takes a special interest in the affair. He arranges for a visit from the New England Patriots' cheerleaders because he wants the soldiers to see real, beautiful women. The event goes smoothly until they receive a radio warning, and they wave goodbye to the cheerleaders a half hour before a rocket slams into Joyce. Carabello recommends Meyer and Swenson for Medals of Honor, but neither care as they are both leaving the military and are both furious about Ganjigal. The captain at Joyce TOC is accused of poor battle management, and Major Williams forbids him men to talk to the press. When a journalist visits Monti in October, he asks to talk to Meyer, asking if Meyer was really left alone at Ganjigal, and Meyer feels relieved to tell the truth about how they were disappointed with the lack of aid. He knows there will be repercussions, but he is surprised when Lt. Gen. Joseph Dunford, the Marine general in charge of Afghanistan, comes to talk to him and Swenson. Meyer repeats how they were let down by not getting the fire they asked for. Gen. Scaporrotti says the lessons learned at Ganjigal were submitted to his subordinate commands, but Meyer never heard any lessons at Monti. Though he is angry about the investigations, he runs on autopilot,



training new Askars. The advisors lose clout since they cannot acquire fire support, and Dargham is abandoned. When Meyer is forced to talk to a psychologist, he is told that his behavior at Ganjigal was reckless, so he is sent home in December 2009. A few months later, Gen. Scaparrotti issues a press statement claiming that his command made progress in eastern Afghanistan, but Meyer disagrees; he saw no progress, and Dargham is now Taliban territory. As Meyer leaves Afghanistan, another effort is made to win over Ganjigal, and over a hundred U. S. soldiers are sent to hand out Korans and prayer rugs. Meyer hopes that someone stopped to pray for his dead team.



# Chapters 17 & 18

## Chapters 17 & 18 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 17: Old Haunts, Dakota feels like he has landed on the moon when he gets home in December. His family is happy to see him, but he feels exposed without cover and guns; he feels like the enemy is waiting to attack, yet he is unprepared to protect anyone. Though he does not really go crazy, the fact that he did not get his friends home as promised gnaws at him. At the end of 2009, Dakota is sent to Fort Thomas, KY for eight weeks of therapy for post-traumatic stress disorder, and he is eager to be cleared because his reenlistment date is quickly approaching and he does not want a desk job. He tries not to judge the others in his therapy group of ten, but few of them have even seen a shot fired, and they seem to be motivated by the monthly allowance drawn from attending the program. After the clinic, Dakota decides not to reenlist because he knows he will end up behind a desk, but it hurts because he loves the Marine Corps. When he returns home after the clinic, he starts drinking heavily, and his father watches Dakota out of the corner of his eye. On the way home from a friend's house one night, Dakota pulls over to assist a man who got in a car wreck, assuring him that he will survive; it feels good to save someone.

In Chapter 18: All In, Dakota is irritated when he reads the Ganjigal investigations which are released in 2010 as no one is held accountable since everyone did something wrong; still, Dakota holds himself accountable because he told his team that he would come, but he pulled back because of pressure. Dakota drinks too often, laughing about how badly he screwed up, and he does not know or care about what is in front of him. In the spring of 2010, he hits his lowest point when he has a bit too much to drink and starts thinking about how empty his life is and how he failed his team when it mattered most. He pulls over, texts his friends that he cannot do this anymore and puts a Glock to his head, but luckily, the chamber is empty. Dakota knows who unloaded his pistol, but they never discuss it. He knows Team Monti would be disappointed, and though there is no sudden change of direction in his life, he knows that quitting is not right. Dakota gets a job testing new military equipment, but he continues drinking nightly until his friends introduce him to Chris Schmidt, the dean of the local college who sets him up with a biking group which is like a team that Dakota does not want to let down. He does not want to let himself down either so he takes college courses that summer, arguing with a professor about losing the war because he cannot agree that his men died for nothing. In August 2011, President Obama calls Dakota to inform him that he has signed Dakota's citation for a Medal of Honor. Dakota flies to Washington, D.C. where he has a beer with the president and admits he does not know what to do with his life. Obama tells him to never stop learning, but Dakota realizes he is being told to be careful because he is expected to represent those who went before him with dignity. Dakota does not smile during the ceremony because "my country was recognizing me for being a failure and for the worst day of my life" (page 190). After a ceremony at Ground Zero in New York, ironworkers sneak Dakota up a work elevator, and he tries to make sense of his feelings as he looks at the most beautiful country in the world where it all started

and caused people he knew to fight and die because they believed it was right. Using a silver market, he writes on a girder: "for those who gave all" (page 192).



# Postscript & Epilogue

## Postscript & Epilogue Summary and Analysis

In Postscript: Swenson, Dakota cannot finish his account without making a special appeal; Capt. Swenson was treated unfairly. Infuriated by the lack of fire support at Ganjigal, Swenson signed statements blasting the rules of engagement and the attitudes of the higher headquarters. Hundreds knew that Swenson was nominated for a Medal of Honor, but the nomination was lost during Gen. Scaparrotti's investigation because Swenson symbolizes Ganjigal which conveys the wrong message of failure. Though Swenson authored several briefings, he was never called in for a chat. Swenson quietly serves the remainder of his term and resigns. The four fallen members of Team Monti are posthumously awarded with Bronze Stars. When Col. Yoo asks Marine Central Command about Swenson's nomination in August 2010, it causes disquiet among the survivors of Ganjigal, leading to Gen. John R. Allen asking for the file and endorsing his recommendation with an apology for the delay. After two years, the Army is poised to do the honorable thing, yet no one calls Swenson. In November 2011, Dakota writes Lt. Gen. Douglas Lute at the White House, claiming it is unfair that he stood before President Obama without Swenson by his side, and Lute responded that he forwarded Dakota's email to the proper authorities. The Army continued their internal reviews during the summer of 2012. Dakota is sure the Army will eventually reach the right conclusion; "Capt. William Swenson fully deserves the Medal of Honor for his gallant leadership and valor. Only when that happens will fairness and accountability have prevailed after Ganjigal" (page 198).

In the Epilogue by Bing West, West notes that Dakota looked like he was going to a funeral when they met in a D.C. hotel two years after Ganjigal, obviously responding civilly to a situation he wanted to avoid. West first met Dakota a few weeks after Ganjigal, and he included a chapter about the battle in his book, "The Wrong War". A year later, Dakota asked West to write a book with him because he wanted a grunt to deliver the message. Ganjigal was an extraordinary battle in terms of ferocity, valor, treachery and bungling, resulting in 13 fatalities, two investigations, two reprimands for dereliction of duty, one Medal of Honor and one lost nomination. "Into the Fire" is based on hundreds of hours of discussion with Dakota, and it focuses on Dakota's character growth as the story is a metaphor for war, illustrating three themes: a frustrating war with no end point, misplaced strategy and the grit of the U. S. warrior. The investigations were cover-ups for the higher-ups as senior command issued rules of engagement without addressing who had the authority to make the final decision; no single person was held accountable. Dakota's story is remarkable because of his dogged aggressiveness. Dakota's belief that he was awarded for his greatest failure is seen in his statement "you either get them out alive, or you die trying. If you didn't die trying, you didn't try hard enough" (page 204). Dakota believes he accepted the award for his failure, and though he saved many, he focuses on the fact that he did not save his brothers. His nature led him to charge into the fire, and he would have been killed in the

valley if he was not so expert with weapons. Nature and nurture drove Dakota into the fire, serving as a testimony to the invincibility of the American soldier.



# Characters

## Corporal Dakota Meyer

Corporal Dakota Meyer is the protagonist, narrator and author of "Into the Fire". As Team Monti's sniper, Meyer's job is to be in charge of tactics, operations and weapons training. Raised in a small town in Kentucky, Dakota Meyer joins the Marine Corps and trains as a sniper. Eager to fight, he joins a team of advisers being sent to Afghanistan to train the Afghan warriors, and he becomes very close to the other three men on his team, Team Monti. In the fall of 2009, Team Monti is sent on a routine patrol to Ganjigal with many Askars as back-up, but Meyer is replaced by Gunny Johnson because he irritates his commanding officers. Convincing Rod to be his driver, Dakota promises his team that he will come for them if things go badly.

In Ganjigal, Taliban insurgents attack the Americans and the Askars, trapping Team Monti in a house in the village. Capt. William Swenson and Corp. Dakota Meyer repeatedly attempt to acquire back-up and air support to rescue their soldiers, but they are forbidden from entering Ganjigal. Eventually, they are permitted to send men in to retrieve the wounded and dead, and Meyer manages to save several Askars, though he finds the body of his closest Afghan friend, Ali Dodd. When air support finally joins the foray, Meyer is distraught when he finds the corpses of the other members of Team Monti. Ridden with guilt, Meyer is sent home to Kentucky before being enrolled in therapy for his post-traumatic stress disorder. Depressed and feeling responsible for his brothers' deaths, Meyer attempts to shoot himself in the head, only to find that his gun was unloaded. Because of their bravery during Ganjigal, Meyer and Swenson are both nominated for Medals of Honor, and though Meyer receives the award, Swenson's paperwork is lost. Meyer protests that accountability for Ganjigal will only be seen when Swenson receives the Medal of Honor he so greatly deserves. Dakota knows that he will carry the guilt of his team's deaths for the rest of his life, and he feels that he was rewarded for his greatest failure as he insists that you either rescue your men or die trying; because he did not die trying, he believes that he did not try hard enough.

## Captain William Swenson

Captain William Swenson is one of the main characters in this novel. When Meyer first meets him at the Ganjigal briefing, he notes that Swenson is a quiet, long-haired Border Police adviser he knows by reputation who has been living with the police for ten months. Swenson was on his third combat tour and had held over a hundred key leader engagements with mountain clans, so Meyer is glad to see him at the briefing, especially as Swenson concentrates on how to escape the valley if things goes wrong. Swenson wants a fire mission to conceal their retreat.

During the battle at Ganjigal, Swenson repeatedly calls for fire report, and he grows furious at the lack of response. He tries to send his request polar, accepting full



responsibility, yet Joyce TOC responds with ceaseless questions about the situation in the village. Swenson fights valiantly to save the lost Marines and the wounded Askdars at Ganjigal. Like Meyer, Swenson is nominated for a Medal of Honor; however, his nomination is lost because he symbolizes Ganjigal which sends the wrong message of failure. Meyer insists that only when Swenson is awarded the Medal of Honor will fairness and accountability prevail after Ganjigal. After leaving Afghanistan, Swenson moves to Washington, and he quietly serves the remainder of his term before retiring from the military.

## **Lt. Mike Johnson**

Lt. Mike Johnson was the leader of Team Monti. With a specialty in communications, his job as an adviser was to improve the leadership procedures of the Afghan officers. Lt. Johnson was stranded in a house in Ganjigal and ultimately killed.

## **Staff Sgt. Aaron Kenefick**

Staff Sgt. Aaron Kenefick was the staff NCO of Team Monti. A by-the-book officer, there was friction between Kenefick and Meyer at first, but that ceases after their time together in Danganham. As an advisor, Kenefick's job was to bring order to the Afghan personnel procedures and pay records. He was stranded in a house in Ganjigal and ultimately killed.

## **Doc Layton**

Hospital Man 3rd Class James Layton, AKA Doc, was a laid-back Navy Corpsman whose job as part of Team Monti was to provide basic medical care to the villagers and to tend wounded soldiers. Doc was stranded in a house in Ganjigal and ultimately killed.

## **Hafez**

The lead interpreter at Monti, Hafez is the best warning system they have, and he becomes the unofficial fifth member of Team Monti. Hafez is loyal to the U. S., but as of publication, he has still not found a way to get to America.

## **Dodd Ali**

Dodd Ali was Meyer's closest Afghan friend who died at Ganjigal.





## **Staff Sgt. Juan Rodriguez-Chavez**

Staff Sgt. Juan Rodriguez-Chavez, AKA Rod, drives the truck with Meyer in it during Ganjigal, helping rescue the wounded and search for Team Monti.

## **Gunny Johnson**

Gunny Johnson was the sniper sent to Ganjigal with Team Monti in Meyer's place. He was stranded in a house in Ganjigal and ultimately killed.

## **Major Kevin Williams**

Lt. Johnson's boss at Camp Joyce, Major Williams is injured at Ganjigal, but he urges his men to keep fighting.

## **Col. Daniel Yoo**

Col. Daniel Yoo visits Meyer at Combat Outpost Monti shortly after Ganjigal, and he leads a mission to rescue an ambushed convoy at Dab Khar.

## **Bing West**

The co-author of "Into the Fire", Bing West is the journalist that Meyer talks to about Ganjigal against orders. Later, he convinces Bing to help him write a book about the battle at Ganjigal.



## Objects/Places

### Columbia, KY

Columbia, KY is the small town where Dakota Meyer was raised.

### Parris Island, SC

Dakota is sent to boot camp at Parris Island, SC.

### Afghanistan

Afghanistan is the main setting of "Into the Fire" as this is where Dakota is stationed with Team Monti and where the Battle of Ganjigal takes place.

### Camp Joyce

Camp Joyce, ten miles south of Combat Outpost Monti, is the forward operating base and headquarters for U. S. Army Battalion 1-32 which is tasked with preventing enemy infiltration from Pakistan. This is where Major Kevin Williams, Lt. Johnson's superior, is stationed. Camp Joyce is also headquarters for the Afghan battalion that Team Monti advises.

### Combat Outpost Monti

Meyer and his team are stationed at Combat Outpost Monti, ten miles north of Camp Joyce, and they run patrols to local villages from Monti.

### Hill 1911

Hill 1911 is where Sgt. 1st Class Dennis Jeffords and PFC Lage set up a checkpoint at a notorious ambush point. They call Dakota for help when they are engaged, and Lt. Johnson is irritated when Dakota convinces him to assist.

### Dangham

Dangham is a remote district near Monti where Meyer and Kenefick are sent to prevent a raiding party before the Afghan presidential election. They change the voting location the night before the election, so the insurgents bomb the empty building where the voting was originally planned, allowing Meyer and Kenefick to leave with a full ballot box.



## **Ganjigal**

Ganjigal is a mountain village two miles north of Joyce where Team Monti is sent to provide security for a key leader engagement without Meyer who promises to rescue them if things go badly. Because the mission was poorly planned and poorly equipped, many soldiers are killed, especially as the calls for assistance are delayed. Team Monti dies at Ganjigal, and this battle encompasses the main focus of the novel.

## **Dab Khar**

Dab Khar is a favorite ambush site where Meyer joins Col. Yoo to rescue an ambushed convoy.

## **Fort Thomas, KY**

Meyer is sent to PTSD therapy at Fort Thomas, KY for eight weeks in late 2009 and early 2010.

## **Medal of Honor**

Meyer receives a Medal of Honor for his bravery at Ganjigal, but Capt. Swenson's nomination is lost. Meyer claims that only when Swenson receives his award will fairness and accountability have prevailed after Ganjigal.



# Themes

## Lack of Military Support

One of the most important themes in this novel is the lack of military support received by the troops in Ganjigal, and this theme permeates the chapters describing the battle. After Dakota realizes that his team is not pulling back despite enemy fire, Meyer tells Rod that the men need to get out of there, calling for permission to enter the village; however, when Valdez finally answers, he denies the request which makes no sense. Meyer is ready to go anyway, but Rod insists they wait a bit longer, lest they be sent home for disobeying direct orders. Meanwhile at Joyce, Capt. Aaron Harting, the senior officer on duty, asks question after question about the situation. As the attack continues, the patrols are in deep trouble, and Fabayo is infuriated by the lack of support. Team Monti takes cover in a house while the enemy guns down the Askars, and Swenson fears he will not make it out since he will soon be surrounded. As Major Williams calls for air support, Swenson moves his men to prevent being encircled, but they are soon pinned down as dushmen close in from both sides of the wash. Joyce TOC still will not clear missions so Swenson sends it polar, accepting full responsibility for his decision, yet TOC responds with a request for impossible details about the situation in Ganjigal. With his men being gunned down, Kaplan radios that the situation is critical. Two months earlier, high command issued a directive forbidding artillery near a structure likely to contain civilians, shifting high command from the battlefield to the staff; unfortunately, TOC cannot see friendly troops dying, and they worry more about protecting their ranks than protecting the troops. Twenty minutes into the fight, Swenson calls for helicopter support and is told that it will arrive in fifteen minutes. Lt. Johnson comes across the radio to announce that Team Monti is pinned down in a house, and Kennefick passes his location on the grid across the network. When there is no response to Meyer's request for Kennefick to repeat their position, "That broke it for me. I had promised my team I would be there. As far as I was concerned, my command element wasn't in command" (page 105).

Meyer assumed Team Monti was on its way out of Ganjigal until he heard those calls. Hearing Meyer's radio message, Valadez radios for him to stay put, but Meyer responds that they are going in, accepting that it will be his fault for disobeying orders if the situation is under control. Two Humvees full of Askars follow Meyer and Rod on the trail to the wash, but they have to turn back for a different truck when Meyer's gun jams. As Valadez directs them to the village, they pick up five frantic Askars and drop them off behind cover, knowing there are at least fifty more Askars trapped in the valley, along with Team Monti, so Meyer believes it is time to make a move. Over the radio, Valadez argues with the platoon leader that they need to wait for clearance from Joyce TOC, and Swenson's continual requests for air support are denied because a mission north of Ganjigal is a higher priority. When Fabayo tells Lt. Johnson to fall back, Lt. Johnson insists he needs smoke, but since there is no smoke, Swenson calls for white phosphorous rounds. An hour into the fight, Team Monti is trapped in a house, the Askars have no cover, and the U. S. and Afghan commanders are pinned down; also,



Meyer and Rod have not yet reached the wash, while the reaction platoon does not react and Joyce TOC is paralyzed. Angered by the requests for locations, Swenson requests a massive artillery barrage, yet TOC still refuses to fire at Ganjigal. Joyce TOC finally directs the Dog Platoon to move to the valley, but they are not given a location. When Major Williams requests an Afghan quick-reaction force, the Afghan Humvees leave Camp Joyce without any American support. When Lt. Johnson asks for smoke, he is told that the fire mission is too close to the village, and Joyce TOC forbids more artillery support, showing a lack of awareness on the behalf of those trapped in the valley. The villagers provide fire from their homes, allowing the enemy to cut off the Command Group, causing the far ambush to become a near ambush, and the Command Group falls back to avoid being surrounded. Team Monti is still trapped in a house as Joyce TOC finally orders the Army platoon to move forward, and the platoon lines up behind Meyer and Rod and begin moving forward as Meyer hears Lt. Johnson say they are under fire and surrounded. As the insurgents demand surrender, Swenson dismisses the taunt as crazy talk and lobs a grenade at the dushmen. Major Williams is hit by enemy fire but radios that he is alright and tells Fabayo to keep going. Moving through the wounded soldiers, Meyer prepares for the medevac that Swenson ordered. He sees a group of Americans staggering down the wash, but there is no way to get there; Rod notes that the situation looks dire.

Meyer tells Rod that he is ready, so Rod drives the truck downhill, stopping when they see Hafez who informs Meyer that Lt. Johnson sent him out of the house planning to follow, but Hafez does not see Team Monti after fleeing the house. Hafez joined the Command Group, threatening to shoot any who surrendered, but since he cannot lead them back in, they continue into the valley. Meyer hears Kenefick asking for a medevac over the radio, but the transmission breaks up before he finishes transmitting his location. Wedged in tight with no room to maneuver and no cover, the Command Group tries to get out of the wash, so Rod drives the vehicle to provide cover, allowing them to escape the wash. Moving into the village, Meyer exchanges fire with the dushmen, noting that the multitude of corpses on the ground is surreal. When the Army Humvee behind Meyer and Rod turns around for a truck that rolled over, they are left alone and exposed, but Meyer is not afraid or angry as bullets fly past him; he knows he is dead, and there is nothing he can do about it. Meyer and Rod plan to drive east until they find Team Monti or are obliterated. Five Askars run for the truck and are shot down, but the shooter does not aim at Meyer or his truck. When Valdez announces over the radio that Meyer is being swarmed, Meyer fires into the enemy as Rod drives over a man. Though a medevac approaches, the Askars in the wash are frozen, and Meyer knows they will all die if they do not fight back. Rod tries to avoid fire, but Meyer takes a shot above his elbow without any serious damage. At 8 A.M. with no idea where to go and no sight of Team Monti, Meyer is out of ideas. When the helicopters finally arrive, they cannot do enough to help, so Meyer informs them that four Marines are missing in the village. Rod and Meyer laugh hysterically as the situation worsens, and as the helicopters expend their munitions and leave, Meyer runs out of ammo and requires a new gun. Rod stops to pick up a wounded Askar who took three rounds, but the Askar dies before Meyer can pick him up.



Rod and Meyer return to the wash for more ammo, and since Meyer still worries about his team, Hafez asks around and learns Team Monti did not make it out; they are still in Ganjigal, foreshadowing Meyer's decision to return to the village. As Hafez, Meyer and Rod drive back to the wash, Meyer wants to ignore the wounded Askars, but being an advisor comes with responsibility so he applies a tourniquet to the man's wounds and puts him in the Ranger behind them which serves as an ambulance. As they return to the casualty collection point, they collect Askars, but the incoming fire does not cease. The helicopters return to search for Team Monti, and meanwhile, Meyer is irritated to find many Askars he trained hiding on the ground, too afraid to return fire. When Meyer finds the boy of Dodd Ali, his closest Afghan friend, he is distraught, but as an Afghan man taps him on the shoulder, pointing a gun at his head and ordering him to drop his weapon, Meyer cannot believe how badly he screwed up. Pretending to surrender, he throws a grenade at the dushman, but when it does not explode, Meyer jumps on him and smashes his face with a rock. Meyer removes Dodd Ali's armor and drags him back to the truck. Swenson yells that they need to get out of here, but he helps Meyer get the corpse into the truck. Driving away, they laugh like maniacs as bullets whiz past them. With their truck too ruined to continue, they return to the shelter of the rough trace. Meyer does not see any U. S. soldiers or commanders from Joyce at the casualty collection point. Approaching Major Williams and 1st Sgt. Garza, he insists that it is time for the advisers to take charge and rescue his team. Garza yells about going back in but is stopped because he needs medical attention, yet when Major Williams comments that they lost today before leaving the battlefield, Meyer is furious because his day is not over yet. Fabayo, Rod and Swenson leave for reinforcements, but since Hafez went with them, Meyer cannot organize his Askars since he has no translator. As a quick-reaction platoon covers the vehicles, Swenson calls Joyce TOC to explain that a platoon is moving into the valley. They pick Meyer up, but Meyer laments that they lose focus on his lost team because there are so many wounded to collect. He piles the dead and tries to tend to the wounded as enemy fire persists. The pilots cannot drop bombs since they do not know the location of the missing team, plus fire missions are still denied as TOC asks endless questions. Enemy fire slackens by 10:30 as the pilots run crazy risks to find Team Monti, avoiding return fire since they don't know where the team is. Over the course of the day, Meyer and his companions evacuate over thirty dead and wounded. When Meyer sees groups of Monti Askars, he knows that his team must be nearby. After several false alarms, Meyer and Rod argue testily, and when Swenson claims reinforcements are coming, Meyer objects "That's bullshit! The Army's not coming. They haven't come all day and you know it" (page 154). Though they are all physically and emotionally exhausted, Meyer wants to move into the village, and Swenson finally agrees. While Joyce TOC has known about the missing team for hours, word eventually reaches a three-star general hundreds of miles away, and he declares a personal recovery, so Special Ops Commands dispatches Apache attack helicopters and Air Force helicopters with pararescue jumpers.

Helicopters believe they have located Team Monti by 11 A.M., but Swenson forbids Meyer from searching the compound, angering Meyer to follow orders from a man who does not know his team. When a pilot announces that he has spotted five bodies, Meyer ignores Swenson's protests and rushes from the truck to find the corpses of Gunny Johnson, an Afghan interpreter, Lt. Johnson, Doc Layton and Staff Sgt. Kenefick; he



cannot believe it ended like this, with his entire team wiped out. Because Meyer helped tend to the Askars' dead and wounded, the Askars help him carry his dead team. Meyer feels deflated when it is finally over after six hours, but Hafez tells him they have gone to a better place and advises him not to cry as the Askars will see it as weakness. Meyer is too exhausted to cry or even be angry. As they leave the valley with the corpses of Team Monti, several villagers point and laugh, but Hafez stops Meyer from drawing his weapon. At Camp Joyce, Meyer tells Major Williams that they are all dead. Though others offer to help put the bodies in bags, Meyer insists on doing it because he would want his team to do it for him. He cleans and bags the bodies, marking their names at their heads, and draping the U. S. flag over each bag, he prays and drives his team to the helipad. In the Epilogue, Bing West notes that Ganjigal was an extraordinary battle in terms of ferocity, valor, treachery and bungling, resulting in 13 fatalities, two investigations, two reprimands for dereliction of duty, one Medal of Honor and one lost nomination.

## **Guilt and Failure**

Following his failure to save Team Monti in Ganjigal, Meyer is haunted by his guilt. When a pilot announces that he has spotted five bodies, Meyer ignores Swenson's protests and rushes from the truck to find the corpses of Gunny Johnson, an Afghan interpreter, Lt. Johnson, Doc Layton and Staff Sgt. Kenefick; he cannot believe it ended like this, with his entire team wiped out. Because Meyer helped tend to the Askars' dead and wounded, the Askars help him carry his dead team. Meyer feels deflated when it is finally over after six hours, but Hafez tells him they have gone to a better place and advises him not to cry as the Askars will see it as weakness. Meyer is too exhausted to cry or even be angry. As they leave the valley with the corpses of Team Monti, several villagers point and laugh, but Hafez stops Meyer from drawing his weapon. At Camp Joyce, Meyer tells Major Williams that they are all dead. Though others offer to help put the bodies in bags, Meyer insists on doing it because he would want his team to do it for him. He cleans and bags the bodies, marking their names at their heads, and draping the U. S. flag over each bag, he prays and drives his team to the helipad. Meyer rejects the psychologist's help and refuses to talk to his dad after the helicopter leaves to take his brother home. He washes the blood off him and watches the sun set on a roof with Hafez and several Askars. The next day at Monti, the guys are upset about how TOC failed the soldiers in Ganjigal. Meyer insists on packing up his brothers' belongings, and he is devastated when he finds that Annie, his dog, has been shot since dogs are no longer allowed on base. For the first few days, Meyer tries to keep busy to avoid thinking, but he is standoffish with others since he does not want new friends. After Ganjigal, Meyer feels he is losing the battle.

When a journalist visits Monti in October, he asks to talk to Meyer, asking if Meyer was really left alone at Ganjigal, and Meyer feels relieved to tell the truth about how they were disappointed with the lack of aid. When Meyer is forced to talk to a psychologist, he is told that his behavior at Ganjigal was reckless, so he is sent home in December 2009. A few months later, Gen. Scaporrotti issues a press statement claiming that his command made progress in eastern Afghanistan, but Meyer disagrees; he saw no





progress, and Dangham is now Taliban territory. As Meyer leaves Afghanistan, another effort is made to win over Ganjigal, and over a hundred U. S. soldiers are sent to hand out Korans and prayer rugs. Meyer hopes that someone stopped to pray for his dead team. Dakota feels like he has landed on the moon when he gets home in December. His family is happy to see him, but he feels exposed without cover and guns; he feels like the enemy is waiting to attack, yet he is unprepared to protect anyone. Though he does not really go crazy, the fact that he did not get his friends home as promised gnaws at him. At the end of 2009, Dakota is sent to Fort Thomas, KY for eight weeks of therapy for post-traumatic stress disorder, and he is eager to be cleared because his reenlistment date is quickly approaching and he does not want a desk job. He tries not to judge the others in his therapy group of ten, but few of them have even seen a shot fired, and they seem to be motivated by the monthly allowance drawn from attending the program. After the clinic, Dakota decides not to reenlist because he knows he will end up behind a desk, but it hurts because he loves the Marine Corps. Dakota is irritated when he reads the Ganjigal investigations which are released in 2010 as no one is held accountable since everyone did something wrong; still, Dakota holds himself accountable because he told his team that he would come, but he pulled back because of pressure. Dakota drinks too often, laughing about how badly he screwed up, and he does not know or care about what is in front of him. In the spring of 2010, he hits his lowest point when he has a bit too much to drink and starts thinking about how empty his life is and how he failed his team when it mattered most. He pulls over, texts his friends that he cannot do this anymore and puts a Glock to his head, but luckily, the chamber is empty. Dakota knows who unloaded his pistol, but they never discuss it. He knows Team Monti would be disappointed, and though there is no sudden change of direction in his life, he knows that quitting is not right.

In August 2011, President Obama calls Dakota to inform him that he has signed Dakota's citation for a Medal of Honor. Dakota flies to Washington, D.C. where he has a beer with the president and admits he does not know what to do with his life. Obama tells him to never stop learning, but Dakota realizes he is being told to be careful because he is expected to represent those who went before him with dignity. Dakota does not smile during the ceremony because "my country was recognizing me for being a failure and for the worst day of my life" (page 190). After a ceremony at Ground Zero in New York, ironworkers sneak Dakota up a work elevator, and he tries to make sense of his feelings as he looks at the most beautiful country in the world where it all started and caused people he knew to fight and die because they believed it was right. Using a silver market, he writes on a girder: "for those who gave all" (page 192). Dakota's belief that he was awarded for his greatest failure is seen in his statement "you either get them out alive, or you die trying. If you didn't die trying, you didn't try hard enough" (page 204). Dakota believes he accepted the award for his failure, and though he saved many, he focuses on the fact that he did not save his brothers. His nature led him to charge into the fire, and he would have been killed in the valley if he was not so expert with weapons. Nature and nurture drove Dakota into the fire, serving as a testimony to the invincibility of the American soldier.





## Dakota's Eagerness to Fight

Throughout the novel, Dakota constantly mentions his eagerness to fight, creating irony when he is prohibited from entering Ganjigal. This theme shows his bravery and determination. Meyer is the only grunt on Team Monti, there to train the Afghan soldiers they are on their way to meet, but while the others are looking to do their jobs and go home, Meyer is looking for a fight, foreshadowing the fact that he finds one. Arriving at Combat Outpost Monti, Meyer is eager to settle in and begin combat patrols. A few days later, Kenefick and Meyer hear several loud pops as they leave the head so they dive into the bunker so Meyer can grab his gear and return fire to the lone dushman. Emotionless, refusing to think about the fact that he is aiming at a human being, Meyer fires until the enemy dies, and Lt. Johnson notes that they feel safer with their sniper on the job that Meyer spent four years training for. After joining the Marines, Dakota soon decided that he wanted to become a sniper, so he trained accordingly and was eventually assigned to a team of advisors in Afghanistan. During patrols to the villages near Monti, Dakota fires thousands of rounds in response to the dushmen's rounds, but he rarely hits his unseen enemy. He convinces Lt. Johnson to park where previous patrols took fire, but Lt. Johnson complains about allowing Dakota to talk him into insane things as he orders his team to leave the death trap.

Dakota gets another chance to impress Lt. Johnson in early August when a mortar shell explodes near them on their way to a key leader engagement. Dakota grabs a few Askars to flank the enemy before Lt. Johnson can object, but Lt. Rhula of the Afghan force has to call off the local police. Bored due to the lack of action, Sgt. 1st Class Dennis Jeffords and PFC Lage decide to place their checkpoint at Hill 1911, a dangerous ambush point, and stay until they take fire, so they ask Dakota to be their back-up, but Lt. Johnson tells him to forget it. When Jeffords contacts Dakota on the radio to tell him that they are engaged, Dakota wakes Lt. Johnson and convinces him to deploy two truckloads of Askars to attack the dushmen who disappear within an hour. Lt. Johnson is angry because the event goes against standard procedures, and he yells at Dakota for finagling him into this crap again. Before the Afghan presidential election in late August 2009, Lt. Johnson sends Meyer and Kenefick to guard the polls at Dangham, forcing them to work together since they do not get along. As Meyer scouts the area, he notices a man dressed as a shepherd firing rounds from an AK, so Dakota fires back and throws grenades, and this incident lessens the tension between Meyer and Kenefick, teaching them to work together. Kenefick and Meyer disagree with the locals' decision to announce the poll location in advance, so they change the location the night before, and insurgents attack the original location one minute after voting begins. Kenefick and Meyer return to Monti with a full ballot box and complete camaraderie between them.

Monti is attacked by rockets a few weeks later, and as Meyer pumps out rounds, his gun jams, so he and Lt. Johnson return to the watch tower for another gun while Doc shoots back. Meyer carries a wounded Askar to the medical center for Doc to tend his wounds as Lt. Johnson yells at the Askars to return fire. As Meyer returns to the tower, a rocket explodes into a tree, and he thinks Lt. Johnson has been hit until the lieutenant appears.



A rocket hits a bunker, and it is several minutes before Doc and Kennefick assure Meyer and Johnson that they are safe. Attack helicopters arrive ten minutes later, ending enemy fire, and Lt. Johnson and Meyer meet up with Doc and Kennefick. As a grunt, Meyer is resigned to potential death, but the rest of his team now understands that they may not make it home alive. Though they are all too embarrassed to talk about their feelings, they all realize it is real and it is just the four of them as Doc says "we'll be there for each other" (page 72) which is the only thing that makes any sense to Dakota. When Team Monti is sent to Ganjigal, Dakota is distraught when he learns that Gunny Johnson will take his place with Team Monti, but he promises to rescue his team if things go badly; he feels guilty when he fails to make good on his promise.

Meyer finally gets another chance when Col. Daniel Yoo visits him and receives an alert that an Army convoy was ambushed north of Monti in Dab Khar. They rush to Dab Khar to find vehicles wrecked and jammed in. Walking in on foot, Meyer is confused that the Army Humvee is not returning fire, but the men insist they do not fight because they are in logistics. Meyer feels good to save a young Afghan kid from death; though the kid may eventually join the Taliban, Meyer cannot hold that against him. He is furious to find the Army allowed an Afghan to bleed out mere feet from their truck because they were afraid of him, so he demands water for the wounded. After the battle ends, the captain in charge of the logistics company suggests that Meyer may be too high-strung, so psychologists keep an eye on him as the weeks creep by. Shots from enemy snipers taunt Meyer, and when two bullets crack past an open door in October, Meyer hops into the turret without thinking and returns fire until the sniper ceases shooting. A few days later, a farmer complains about his dead chickens, and when a civil affairs officer awards him \$200 for the loss, Meyer is irritated that they pay extortion when a sniper on the man's farm tried to kill them; he feels he is losing the battle after Ganjigal. Eventually, Meyer is sent home, and he decides not to reenlist, though his letter in Capt. Swenson's defense shows that he never loses his desire to fight for what he believes is right.



# Style

## Perspective

"Into the Fire: A Firsthand Account of the Most Extraordinary Battle in the Afghan War" is told from the perspective of the author, narrator and main character, Dakota Meyer. This is imperative as Meyer witnessed the unusual events that occurred at Ganjigal. After briefly summarizing his youth, Meyer turns his focus to his military career, beginning with his training up until his assignment to a four-man team of advisers at Combat Outpost Monti in Afghanistan. Meyer spends a great deal of time explaining the events that transpired in this small mountain village, honestly showing how military failures and a poorly planned mission resulted in many casualties. Meyer's qualifications to report on this story comes from the fact that he is a survivor of the battle, and he details both his frustration at the orders forbidding him from entering Ganjigal to aid his team as well as his guilt at his failure to save Team Monti.

The book is intended for anyone to read but particularly for those who are interested in the U. S. military and the War on Terror. The book provides a terrifying glimpse of the horrendous events that unfold through Meyer's eyes. Meyer's extremely detailed account honestly assesses the military errors that result in the tragic deaths of many Askars and American soldiers. Near the end of the book, Meyer makes a case for Capt. William Swenson to receive the Medal of Honor for his role at Ganjigal. Though Meyer received the Medal of Honor, he feels that he was awarded for his greatest failure and the worst day of his life.

## Tone

Dakota Meyer's war memoir is written using a morose, argumentative and disappointed tone as he details the events that transpired at Ganjigal and his guilt over the deaths of his teammates. Written as a memory, "Into the Fire" provides honest, astute details concerning the military failures at Ganjigal. Throughout the novel, Meyer's guilt for failing to save Team Monti is evident, especially when he claims that "You either get them out alive, or you die trying. If you didn't die trying, you didn't try hard enough" (page 204). He also shows his frustration at the lack of support that the trapped troops received.

Meyer argues against how the battle was handled, but he also provides evidence to support his believe that Capt. William Swenson should receive the Medal of Honor for his efforts during the battle. Most readers will quickly agree with Meyer's assessment of Swensons's merit. The details of the battle at Ganjigal are appalling and distressing as the reader is forced to acknowledge that the deaths suffered were senseless and easily avoidable. Meyer is brutally honest about the military's failures and his own during the mission, leaving readers aghast at how events transpired. Readers should also finish this book with feelings of privilege and gratitude to the soldiers who gave their lives,



even as they may feel anger at the establishment that allowed them to die when they could have been saved.

## Structure

"Into the Fire: A Firsthand Account of the Most Extraordinary Battle in the Afghan War" consists of 205 pages, and it is comprised of eighteen chapters, an introduction, postscript and epilogue. The chapters average around 10 pages in length, and they are very detailed. The narrative is told chronologically with the exception of the Introduction which begins *en media res* before reverting to Dakota's youth in the first chapter. His story proceeds to his time training in the military and on to his assignment in Afghanistan.

"Into the Fire: A Firsthand Account of the Most Extraordinary Battle in the Afghan War" by Dakota Meyer and Bing West is a fascinating true story of Dakota Meyer's military life, focusing on the tragedies that occurred at Ganjigal in the fall of 2009. When Team Monti is sent into Ganjigal with a substitute sniper, Dakota promises to find his team if things go awry, but when Taliban insurgents ambush the village, Dakota's commanding officers forbid him from entering Ganjigal until it is too late, leaving him with extreme guilt over his friends' deaths. "Into the Fire" is a heart-rending, tragic account of only one battle in the War on Terror which leaves readers wondering about how many similar mistakes resulted in the deaths of American soldiers. The purpose of this book is to share an honest account of the events that transpired at Ganjigal, and to make a case for Capt. Swenson to receive the Medal of Honor. Meyer criticizes the military's response during Ganjigal, proving that the deaths were avoidable even as he shows his own guilt for failing to save the rest of Team Monti. Overall, this book is incredibly enjoyable but very sad and distressing to see the unnecessary loss of American military men.



## Quotes

"The others were looking to do their jobs and return home; I was looking for a fight."  
Introduction: Along the Afghan-Pakistan Border, page 5

"I aim the gun. I'm a sniper; shooting is technique. No emotion. Sometimes you do think about it. That tiny figure in the distance is a human being. He may be a great guy, or he may be one of those animals who will beat his sister to death for having a boyfriend not arranged by the family. You are not there to judge. My only job is to bring him down before he gets to cover." Introduction: Along the Afghan-Pakistan Border, page 13

"Despite my falling short fairly often, he always seemed to think I was someone worth having in the family. If you can feel that from your family, nothing can touch you."  
Chapter 1: Finish the Game, page 16

"Ko, if you don't stand up for your family, you'll never have anything worthwhile in life."  
Uncle Mark, Chapter 1: Finish the Game, page 21

"None of my family came right out and said it, but my desire to be a Marine grunt in combat naturally did concern them. I'm sure there's not one family in America that doesn't have worries when a son or daughter goes off to war." Chapter 2: The Marine Years, page 27

"We don't judge each other based on the number of kills. How many enemy you shoot depends on luck- on whether you're assigned to a hot or a cold battlefield. The most respected snipers are those who plan the most thorough mission." Sgt. Skinta, Chapter 2: The Marine Years, pages 32-33

"The Afghans have a saying: you can rent an Afghan but you can never buy one. Meaning they are going to support whoever gives them the most 'rent,' or money."  
Chapter 3: Monti, page 46

"After a while, it all becomes you, your buddies, and your Afghan friends. Other worlds fade away, even the other advisors ten miles down the road at Joyce. You stay alive because of what you do each day, sometimes each hour. It's just you and your small band, operating beyond the bounds of civilization. You even think you control your own destiny." Chapter 4: Advising, page 58

"I left Dangam with a healthy respect for the skill of the rocket gunners and their cold hearts, willing to kill their own relatives. They didn't do so this day, but they'd tried."  
Chapter 5: Coming Together, page 67

"As a grunt, I was resigned about death. I don't go to church. To me, organized religions seem like bureaucracies. But I believed in God. Grunts see His acts on the battlefield. Guys beside you get shot or blown up. You don't. God has a plan that we won't understand until we cross to the other side. There's no sense obsessing about getting



tagged. Either a bullet has your name on it or it doesn't. No need for philosophizing."  
Chapter 6: Out of the Smoke, page 71

"Tell the TOC I'll send it polar. It's on me! Give them my initials. I'm making the decision, not them!" Capt. William Swenson, Chapter 9: Paralysis, page 101

"Twice I had heard Shadow say that air would be on station in fifteen minutes. Nothing had happened. How long do you do nothing while your friends are fighting for their lives?" Chapter 10: Lost, page 106

"If you give up, I'll shoot you. No one surrenders." Hafez, Chapter 11: Into the Fire, page 124

"I wanted to ignore the Askars, because somewhere, farther up the wash, my team was fighting to stay alive. I'd promised to get them, and Rod and I had the only gun truck willing and able to go in. I wanted to pretend I didn't see the bleeding. Besides, they were not far from the collection point, where they might get help or a ride out. We'd gone only another hundred meters when I saw an Afghan soldier huddled behind a rock. No other Askar was around. We were the advisors, which comes with a responsibility, like being parents. I had no choice." Chapter 12: Into the Wash, pages 138-139

"We lost today? I don't know about you, but my day isn't over yet." Dakota Meyer's thoughts, Chapter 13: Primal, page 148

"I didn't want to talk to my dad. What was I supposed to say? That my brothers were dead and I was alive?" Chapter 15: Dab Khar, page 161

"We weren't fighting a war; we were holding a few acres of dirt while the war swirled around outside our barbed wire. There were dushmen in every valley. Drink tea with the villagers? Pay forty dollars for a chicken? We were in Kunar to fight. Let's get it on."  
Chapter 16: Cheerleaders, page 176

"Everyone around me was excited about football, Christmas and other normal things; I was looking at the clapboard houses and the cars and thinking, man- so flimsy. They wouldn't give cover worth a shit in a firefight. It was an exposed feeling. And where were my machine guns? I found my old pistol and kept it around like a rabbit's foot, but I missed my 240s and my .50-cals something awful. It seems weird, I'm sure, but I really just wasn't buying it that there wasn't some enemy about to come over the green hills, and I felt so unprepared- I wouldn't be any good to protect anybody." Chapter 17: Old Haunts, pages 178-179

"I wasn't going to think about it. All I knew was that I was not going to let myself become a mental cripple for life. I was stronger than that. I would always regret not saving my guys, but, as for the people I killed, that is what gave me what little peace of mind I had. They were the enemy. That's what you do to the enemy. That part was not going to upset me. The people who started it are the guilty parties, and I was still figuring that was Mr. Bin Laden. Send him the bill. In fact, that bill was about on the way." Chapter 17: Old Haunts, pages 181-182



"I served in Iraq and Afghanistan, and I don't know the feeling. I'm not going to sit here and let you say my guys died for nothing." Dakota Meyer, Chapter 18: All In, page 188

"Swenson symbolized Ganjigal, and Ganjigal conveyed the wrong message: failure to support advisors, failure to provide artillery support, failure to deliver timely air support, et cetera." Postscript: Swenson, page 195

"I am sure the Army will eventually reach the right conclusion. Capt. William Swenson fully deserves the Medal of Honor for his gallant leadership and valor. Only when that happens will fairness and accountability have prevailed after Ganjigal." Postscript: Swenson, page 198

"You either get them out alive, or you die trying. If you didn't die trying, you didn't try hard enough." Dakota Meyer, Epilogue, page 204

# Topics for Discussion

Why does Dakota Meyer join the Marine Corps?

How does Dakota first feel about the team of advisers to which he is assigned at Monti, and how do these feelings change?

What is Dakota and his team's actual job description while posted at Monti?

What happens at Ganjigal? In what ways was Ganjigal a failure?

How does Dakota let his team down, and what happens as a result?

Why does Dakota feel that he receives a Medal of Honor for his failures? Why does he actually receive the award?

Compare and contrast Dakota Meyer and William Swenson. Why does Dakota receive a Medal of Honor while Swenson has not?