Squaddie

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

The Special Air Service is one of the most prestigious of special forces units, if not the most prestigious. All other special forces units have been modelled on it or some of its practices. One key element is that membership is on merit as assessed by a secret and non-reviewable internal selection process. This has always been seen as a strength. But it has been observed that it may also account for the fact that no woman has ever been admitted to the unit.

The role of the SAS in peacetime has evolved, but the unit must always remain active. Physical drills, practice in specific situations, and participation wargames may be sufficient for most units, but not the SAS. We need to be involved, and increasingly that has meant activities out of uniform, or NIOs.

NIOs played a major role for the regiment in Northern Ireland, and many of the lessons learned there have been carried through to modern counter-terrorism activities. To a large extent this has involved what might be called “undercover” operations, but that implies long term infiltration. That has never been our thing. We get in, do the business, and get out. Long term stuff is for the spooks – intelligence personnel.

But in preparing for NIOs we have to be less conspicuous. We have to blend in. We cannot look like army. We need longer hair, beards, maybe even a pot belly if you can still maintain the fitness. Some of us have been asked to fill a role, and a request from your own team in the SAS is close to an order.

One of the issues that came up from time to time was the absence of women in the unit. It is not a policy that women can never be in the SAS, it is just that no woman has ever been selected. Some have tried. Obviously it would be hard for any woman to meet the same physical standards as men, but I have heard that at least one did. She was a physical training instructor and outside the army she had been an Olympic medallist in judo. She got through the physical tests but she failed the mental requirements. It is a pity.

In Northern Ireland women did need to be involved in NIOs to make them less suspicious. They used female police officers in limited undercover roles, but there were problems. The fact is that without the training together and the close working relationship and tight communications that come from that, using an outsider is not effective.

I came to the unit after the troubles of Northern Ireland were a distant memory. I was initially posted to Afghanistan, and it was there that I really learned to be a part of a team. When ready I was moved into NIOs in Britain and Europe in terrorist interception, mainly by tracking trade in arms and explosives. Then we started to talk about deep cover operations, and how I might best be involved.

I got the job basically because I was the smallest member of the squad. My ginger hair was quite long and I had a rather pathetic beard. Somebody suggested that I should dress as a woman to make surveillance look less suspicious.

These things start simply. The first job meant wearing a woman’s blouse and slacks with sneakers, and just sitting in the car with my Unit Commander (UC). As long as I did not get out nobody would guess I was not a woman. For that job and a few more, I wore a wig and makeup, and I was clearly a woman provided you do not look too closely. If I had to get out of the car my walk was a giveaway as the videos showed. I was told that if this disguise was serious I would need to work on it.

When we got back to Credenhill I decided I would give the UC a surprise. The wife of one of the unit worked in a hair and beauty salon in Hereford, and she agreed to help. Her name was Gail and she was highly skilled in master makeovers.

We had arranged for our squad to get together for a few drinks that evening at “the Bell”, a pub not far from the barracks. When the boys rolled in Kevin and I were sitting in a booth near to the bar. They called out to him: “Come on Kev, and bring your girlfriend over.”

I had been practising, so I was able to walk over to the bar in my heels without anybody seeing that anything strange was happening.

Sergeant Hadley said: “A pint for you Kev, and what are you drinking, Sweetheart.” And the UC was positively leering at me.

I said, in my usual voice: “Well, definitely not your cum, Sarge.”

The shock and amazement was better than Desert Storm. After the initial surprise and embarrassment had subsided there was much laughter and slapping of thighs.

The UC was initially disappointed that the object of his lust was his own corporal, but then he examined with curiosity. He asked: “Is that your own hair.”

“Yes and no sir,” I said. “Added extensions and colour highlights, but I am a natural redhead as you know sir.”

And your legs too, Corporal?”

“A full wax down sir,” I said. “A Brazilian as they call it. No worse than torture training. A bit of lotion. A nice short black dress as you see. Some makeup to hide my freckles. A bit of lipstick and nail polish. Then as you can see, locked and loaded and ready for action. You did say I needed to work on my undercover looks.”

“I am impressed, Brady,” he said. “I want to get some photographs of you. And you have my permission to report to the CO in the morning, with that hair. I think that we can put this look to some use.”

The following morning, I was called into the CO’s office early. I was dressed in fatigues with my hair loose and no makeup, but I still thought that I looked pretty good. I thought I looked like a girl in fatigues with no makeup.

“We are looking to post you to CRW counter-terrorism,” he said. “They are in the middle of an armed surveillance operation in Manchester. Up until now, we have not been able to supply them with a female operative.”

“So I would not stay with my current squad, sir?”

“No, Corporal,” he said, handing me an envelope with formal orders. “We are all soldiers. We go where we are told, and follow instructions. I have called your friend Gail and booked you in all afternoon . We still have to smooth off some of those rough edges. You report to the location in these orders at 19:00 tonight.”

“I should pack my kit then, Boss?”

“You won’t be needing anything, Brady,” he said. “We’ll see you fully equipped and dressed for the job. You’ll be in civvies from this afternoon, until relieved from this op. Do you understand.”

I stood and snapped off a formal salute with my affirmation. Before returning my hand to my side I flicked my hair. He laughed, and so did I. I was pleased for the job on offer as it likely meant that I would avoid the dreaded AFT (Annual Fitness Test) that was coming up in a few weeks. Armed surveillance is hard and stressful, but not as bad as the AFT.

I had time to get together with my team and say some goodbyes before I reported to the salon in Hereford at 12:00.

“This is not just a hairdo,” said Gail. “I have been asked to give you a crash course in womanhood, and I have only 4 hours to do it before you are being picked up for the 3-hour drive north.”

“Well, we had better get started,” I said, totally unprepared for the task in front of me.

Even when the car arrived I had to practice getting in and out of it 17 times before I had it right, and I spent the whole trip working on my hand movements and chatting away in the higher voice that she had tried to coax me into. The two squaddies sitting in the front of the car must have thought me completely mad. But I am not sure that either of them thought that I was a guy. That was the objective Gail and I had agreed upon.

“Thanks for the ride, boys,” I said in my first genuine attempt at a feminine voice. I adjusted my skirt after the long drive, and checked my face in the compact Gail had supplied, with other essential feminine kit in the handbag supplied. I have no doubt they suspected nothing.

After hours on the road we pulled into an industrial building on the outskirts of the city. The roller door closed behind us and I walked across the concrete floor in my sensible but noisy heels, to the brightly lit office.

Nobody was in uniform but I knew immediately that they were SAS, although not from my section. It is a look in the eyes. Cool confidence and cold-blooded determination. I hoped that they could see it in me too, under the mascara.

“Well this is a surprise,” said the man seated in prime position at the desk, evidently the CO. “This is going to make it easier for you Ahmed.”

The man he addressed stood up and looked at me. He was evidently Middle Eastern, and looked to be like some Afghans I had met on service there. He was tall and good looking. He had that SAS look in his eyes. He simply said: “Name, rank and number?”

I came to attention and snapped it out: “Brady, Corporal, 455396.” It was all I was prepared to say at that point.

“Is that how you talk?” he asked, clearly disappointed. He had realised, and others in the room too.

I delivered the same information in my new female voice. It needed work, but I had learned well. He looked pleased.

“Your name was Mary, but you have adopted the name Miriam since you married Ahmed here and converted to Islam,” said the CO from behind the desk. “You raise less attention as a married couple, when you move into Halstead Street. It is a Muslim community in a working-class area of the city. Ahmed has been working with some of our targets and commuting in, but now we have a semi in the street which we believe is the heart of a major terrorist cell. We have support nearby, but this is a two-man armed surveillance op. Understood?”

“Yes sir,” I said, staying with the female voice.

“Ahmed will brief you on your full background,” said the CO. “You will be together for a while so you will have time to build a story and keep it consistent. Understood? And you too Sergeant?”

Both Ahmed and myself affirmed simultaneously.

“Well, Ahmed moved your stuff in there today, with the rest of us helping to set things up. So, he has gone to collect his wife, and you had better drive to your new home right now. Things start in earnest tomorrow. Good luck, lads.” When he said the last word, the CO looked at me curiously, as if still not quite believing that I was male.

We climbed into the modest car that was to be Ahmed’s and we drove off.

“You might be pleased to hear, that as a Muslim wife, public displays of affection between us, are not only not expected, they are frowned upon,” he said.

“Maybe in your culture, but not ours,” I replied. “A fiery Irish girl like me would be all over her man.” But when he glanced to see me grinning, he laughed.

“Actually, I am not Muslim either,” he said. “But I know the religion and I will teach you the basics. We tried a squaddie in a burka before, but it did not work. We want you to be without a veil. Just show modesty and interest in the religion. Western women married to Muslims make the best terrorists, so maybe you will be targeted too.”

“So you are in contact with real terrorists right now?” I was starting to get excited about the prospect of some real action for the first time since I was back overseas.

“I will give you a rundown,” he said.

We arrived at the semi-detached brick house in Halstead Street well after 22:00 but we had the sense of eyes upon us as he carried my suitcase in. As he had explained, everybody in the entire street was a suspect, with our neighbour the West and one across the road, being confirmed targets.

Inside there was a jumble of cardboard boxes. He said: “You have plenty to keep you occupied while I am at work tomorrow. No just unpacking, but setting up for viewing across the road, and drilling through the party wall over there. But I have unpacked the bedroom.”

We went upstairs. The room was small and faced away from the street for privacy. It had a large double bed.

“I think that this is a joke,” he said. “My squad would have us sleeping together. I am not sure where I should sleep.”

“Bullshit,” I said. “We will share it. It is no worse than sharing a foxhole. Provided you keep your hands off my tits.” As if to show him I slipped of my top to reveal that underneath I was wearing a custom body shaper, which a bosom, a bottom and smooth groin area.

“We got your measurements and the dresser and closets have got a range of clothes for you, including used clothes,” he said. “They did a great job in basically just a few hours today.”

I looked through what was there. I still had a lot to learn. There were no pyjamas – just a few delicate nighties. I said: “I think I am beginning to understand the sense of humour of your crew.”

I prepared to go to bed. He made us hot chocolate and brought it up.

“Is that really your hair?” he asked.

“Sort of,” I said. “My roots but most of the rest has been added.”

“It’s very beautiful,” he said. He was genuinely admiring of it, and that made me feel good. It was a smile that was still on my face when I went to sleep.

I made a point of seeing him off at the doorway in the morning. He said no public affection but I felt I needed to show something to anyone who was watching. I put both hands on his chest and looked him in the eyes. He was surprised, but returned the look. For just a moment it seemed that we have created a special husband and wife thing. It was strange.

He left, and I went to work. I checked the weapons. There was a large cache concealed in the wardrobe upstairs, but there were also pistols concealed in each room and at the front door for easy access. I checked the scopes and cameras for visuals across the road, directional microphones and recording gear, minicameras for each room of our house, for each room on the house either side, and several for each of the 5 houses across the road that could be seen from our house. Everything would feed back to a desktop PC in the living room, a laptop which moved around the house with me, and back to HQ.

I had work to do in the attic drilling through for cameras across the street, and through the walls on both sides. To mask it all I was also putting up shelves in the kitchen.

Just after midday the doorbell rang. I took off my work-gloves and opened the door to four women. Three were dark, two of them wearing hijab, and the fourth was blonde. They introduced themselves as my neighbours, and they had brought with them lunch and mint tea. I invited them in, as I had already concealed most of my work and was able to hide anything else by moving boxes.

“We’ll need to eat in the kitchen,” I said.

“Are you Muslim,” one said. “It would not matter if you were not, but I am just asking.”

“I was a Muslim convert before I met Ahmed,” I said, following our story. “But I do not wear the hijab except to the mosque. I am sorry, but I don’t like to stand out.”

“I feel the same”, said the blonde woman, whose name was Juliette. There seemed general acceptance of this more liberal approach. But the prayer before the meal was entirely genuine. I responded as Ahmed had instructed, so that it was clear that we were devout Muslim women sharing a meal, thanks be to God.

That was mission accomplished, as I proudly reported to Ahmed when he got home.

“I did not think to ask if you could cook,” he said. “Just in case I have brought us kebabs.”

“I can cook bacon and eggs and I make a great devilled sausage, but pork is off now, I suppose,” I said. “I had better get a Middle Eastern cookbook.” So, I did.

A few days later, on Friday night, Ahmed took me to the mosque for evening prayers. It was segregated between men and women, and I already knew the key women, but I was able to learn who the men were from their wives.

I felt that I was doing a great job in passing as a woman. I was so new to this and I had always regarded myself as being masculine, so the fact that I was able to pass as female among all these women seemed almost unbelievable. I put it down to the fact that I was really beginning to inhabit this character. From the moment I had walked out of the salon in Hereford earlier in the week, I had been living, breathing and dreaming, as a woman. That matters.

On Saturday, on a supposed drive in the country we were debriefed. I continued to speak in my female voice – I said it was for practice, but really, I did not want to break the spell.

“This is going really well,” said the CO. “I think you understand why the female thing was so important now Brady, half of the potential terrorists are women, and we had no penetration until now. The fact is that we looked at working with police or intelligence services, but this is an SAS operation and we wanted to keep it within the regiment. That means you.”

“Thank you, sir,” I said. “I won’t let the regiment down.”

Everybody else in the team had been analysing the intel from all of the sources I had tapped into, as well as material that Ahmed had collected from listening devices in cars and from the workplace where he and many others in the street, worked. It was a precision engineering shop. Ahmed worked in drafting, where the work he did was undertaken by a real draughtsman and sent through to mask his inabilities in this area.

The fact is that the modern terrorist needs to avoid emails or telephone exchanges. Everything must be face to face in secure environments. Our overall strategy was to compromise those environments.

Ahmed and I had the same approach. We were professionals. We kept our probes and monitoring equipment clear and operational. We kept our weapons cleaned. We planned escape routes and fortified retreat scenarios. We discussed expansion of the reach of our surveillance through the use of an available attic above an elderly Pakistani couple a few blocks down. We built on our cover story.

And we got on. At the heart of every fighting unit is the willingness to put your life at risk for the person beside you. You become close during combat. And by combat, I do not just mean when the bullets are flying, but in the tense times before battle. That is what armed surveillance is. Watching and being ready to step into a firefight at any time. We are as tense as a coiled spring, although we may not show it. We cannot show it – we need to encourage one another with humour and gestures of comfort and support. Two people living as Ahmed and I were living, we became close.

To complicate matters, he was clearly attracted to the female me. The only time I ever used my male voice was to snap him out of some kind of loving gaze he would fix upon me.

But stranger still, his thoughts about me seemed to draw a similar response from me. I thought that it was a product of being immersed – maybe too immersed - in the character I was playing. I was his wife and I should have feelings for him. People can detect pretence. People at the mosque, or in the homes of our neighbours, or the work picnic, they all thought that Ahmed and I were a loving couple because of the way we looked at one another. Even without public intimacy that was contrary to Muslim standards of modesty, people know.

So, it was an effective performance. An act. But it seemed to be becoming real. Then suddenly it was real.

It was a cold night and we were in bed together back to back. Initially we were just conserving heat with some contact, but after a while he rolled over onto his back. I could feel him touching my hair. He asked me: “Are you awake?” When I said I was, he said: “I’ve been wanting to bury my face in your hair since the moment I first met you.”

“Go on then,” I said. “Provided you put your arms around me and get me warm.” So, he did. I had no tits, so he just played with my tummy. Which was nice. I hadn’t had any real intimate contact with anyone since before I had last gone overseas, because you cannot count rent-a-fucks with a few barrack chasers as being truly intimate. This was.

Somehow it did not seem gay. I know that sounds strange, but I was living as this guy’s wife. It was like extending the role – making it real. In all undercover operations we are told to get into the character of who we are supposed to be.

He wore pyjamas, but I could feel his erection against my bum. Instead of being disgusted I was excited. I had washed my hair that night and I knew it would be smelling of floral shampoo. It was turning him on – bigtime. That made me feel good. I am not sure why, but I felt special. I did not feel like a guy at all.

“Don’t cum in the bed,” I whispered. “I have to wash the sheets while you work all day.”

“I am sorry, Sweetie” he said (it was the first time he had called me that in private). “I can’t control it.” So, for some reason I just clamped my thighs onto his penis and he came between them, sending sticky semen all over the insides of my thighs from crotch to knee. But very little on the sheets.

“Well I hope you’re happy,” I said, as I knew I would have to get up and clean up in the bathroom with a washcloth. But the truth is I was happy. The feeling of his penis pulsing and spewing its hot stuff as brought on by me, was somehow exhilarating. It was as if I had some kind of-power.

Quite how that escalated to anal sex was an even bigger mystery, but I am pretty sure it was my doing. We had some large candles on the dining room table that I figured were about the same size as his penis, after I had come to know it. The candle and a little olive oil. It was just that I was wearing a particularly pretty dress and as I was not going out I was wearing an empty bra and a pair of frilly knickers. I just took the candle upstairs and watched the girl in the mirror pleasure herself.

It was not so pleasurable the first time, but it got better, and the first time Ahmed entered me I was ready, and shortly after that I was in heaven. I got erect myself and shot my load the same time he shot his. Of course, I was prepared with tissues on hand for both of us. I wash the sheets, as I said. We kissed like a first date – long slobbering kisses like teenagers.

Then we moved from fucking to making love, face to face, with a pillow under my hips. We would look at one we were love struck - whispering how good it felt. The first time he came in me like that he said “Allahu Akbar”, which he told me Muslims say. He said that they were seeking forgiveness for fornication, but that he preferred to think of it as praising God for the exquisite pleasure he granted to all humankind, in just that tiny moment.

The CO was getting impatient. We had been on the job for weeks now and he felt that we needed to poke the beast. His suggestion: “We’ll round up some secondary targets from further down the street. That should them talking and might convince them that we are not onto them.”

“That’s your call, sir.” Ahmed was clearly not convinced.

As it was it did work. The police came in to make arrests, and the whole street was out to shout them down, including us. Ahmed got some feedback, but it was the women who really started to open up. As I described it later, women tend to function in groups where men can be true lone wolves. If they trust, they will talk, and they appeared to trust me.

Ahmed and I had some concealed dossiers on everybody in the street, and with an understanding of what the women were saying, and who was missing her husband, when and for how long, we were able to settle on the key target individuals.

The fact is that despite the fact that Ahmed was supposed to be the real Muslim, and he had been embedded with this group (albeit at a distance until he moved into town), he had never been taken into confidence by the men. It was the women that sealed it, a fact that HQ were to come back to, at the end of all of this.

The key meeting place was across the road, and in a basement. This would be hard to get a listening device into. We had a plan, but we needed a diversion. In fact, two diversions. With the women of the street I organised a “Free Our Husbands” protest at the local police station to empty the houses, and the squad arranged a traffic accident at the end of the street to draw attention away from the house where the device was to be placed.

Listening devices can be detected if they transmit in real time, so often the best device is a recorder to be collected later. But new technology uses a smart recorder that can pick up trigger words and transmit then on scrambled frequencies, but otherwise sit in radio silence. It is way too technical for me, but we had the information we needed, and we were set for arrests on the very day of the planned terrorist attack in Birmingham.

At our outing the weekend before, Ahmed’s CO suggested that after the arrests we should not be demobilised. “After the last arrests threw up more cells, we are thinking that you should stay and collect information from any fallout. If they cannot trace it back to you, then it could be helpful.”

When we expressed uncertainty, he added: “It’s your call. We can pull you out if you want.”

Now, if you are SAS, there is only one response to that and he knew it. We follow orders. If you order us to stay, we stay. If you order us to pull out, we pull out. If you don’t give us an order, we do nothing – so we stay. This is not a democracy. Don’t ask us to vote.

The problem was that the raid was too successful. We watched it unfold on the news on TV. I made calls to some of the women asking what was going on. I knew that some of our targets were going to be picked up. What I did not know was that the raid also collected all of the men of the houses in our immediate vicinity, except Ahmed.

Now, the truth of it was that Ahmed was not involved. He tried to get involved, but he never achieved that level of trust. So, we could hardly be accused of giving information to the authorities that we did not have – right?

I was still asleep. I was barely aware of the thud, but Ahmed was way ahead of me. I could see his face in the darkness by the glow of a streetlight through the blinds. He half-whispered, half-shouted just one word: “Breach!”

We both knew what to do. We had pistols under each bedside table. He opened the door to see the top of the stairs and motion me to get the rifles and grenades. As I was the first shot came from his pistol. Two armed men had reached the top of the stairs. He had dropped one, and the other was still falling back down the stairs. Full gunfire erupted from below with bullets coming through the floor below.

I pulled over the bookcase. It was full and heavy. Full not because we read, but because books stacked tightly are as good as sand bags in stopping bullets. We both lay on the toppled bookcase as bullets came through the floor around us. We both had rifles now, and I had the sense to but a belt on over my nightie, so I could holster my weapon and reload. Ahmed’s belt was on the bed.

He put a hand on the top on my sights as he saw movement now that the shooting had stopped. We would wait for more than one to come up the stairs. One of them held their assault rifle above their head and sprayed some bullets in our general direction. We sat silently. Ahmed had his cell phone and was sending the distress codes.

They had turned the lights on downstairs, so their eyes would need time to get back to seeing us in the darkness. One called out: “I think we’ve got those bastards”. Heads then torsos appeared. One, two, three. Off the stairs now. No more coming. We opened fire on automatic and all three fell. Further shots came through the floor.

“Three,” I said.

“You think so?” asked Ahmed.

“I count three rifles,” I was sure. “Two AKs and a Steyr, best guess.”

Ahmed was impressed. More so when I handed him a grenade and started a count. Down the stairs they went not even reaching the bottom before they exploded. Six steps from the bottom is best for maximum injury. I handed him a flash grenade for follow up. I was intending to go now. He was with me.

Ahmed’s cellphone rang. He put it to his ear on my side, so I could hear too. The voice was his CO. Very calmly the only words were: “Two minutes out, coming in heavy.”

“Back door’” Ahmed suggested. “They came in the front. Don’t shoot the red hair or the red hat.” He took a red baseball cap which seemed to be lying on the floor for no reason and put it on his head.

“Are we waiting?” I asked.

“Do you want to wait?” he asked back.

“Fuck no,” I said. I stood up. I could see myself in the mirror. He was looking at me too. I had on a thin summer nightie, waisted with a utility belt with a pistol and knife and magazines, and my red hair was all over the place. Slippers did not seem appropriate, so I zipped on some calf length boots.

He stood beside me dressed in my nightie and webbing. He was wearing pyjamas and had his kit on too. He said: “Don’t we look the perfect couple, you and I.”

“Tonight, we will be the perfect couple,” I said. He counted, and we threw the flash grenades downstairs and shielded our eyes.

The flash grenade is one of the SAS’s most valuable weapons. It stuns and blinds a room full of people for just a few seconds, but that is enough to get down there and select the targets. We left nobody alive. The last to die was Juliette, the blonde woman I had met on my first day. She could not see it coming but was waving an AK around. I shot her between the eyes just as our relief team burst into the room.

Based on the video evidence we both received commendations and promotions. I became a Sergeant and Ahmed (not his real name) became staff sergeant. We paraded in fatigues, me with my hair in a bun, as I had no dress uniform that looked right on a woman.

I needed to keep the hair because we have an operation in Portugal in the summer, where I would be incognito for a suspected terrorist campaign on beach resorts. My partner will be dropping “Ahmed” for Alonzo, but I will be the Irish girl again. The good news is that the British Army will be paying for my breast implants. Alonzo is really looking forward to that.

The End

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