

A Specialty Service

My Life Behind the Gun

2006, the Year We Made a Company

An explosion ripped through the wall tossing shrapnel into the room as smoke filled the air. Everyone scrambles to get to their feet and prepare to fight. Outside we can hear voices. Something in Somali I think. I really should learn the language. One of the others yelled, “RPG.” I ducked as a rocket-propelled grenade came through the window and traveled out of the newly made hole onto the opposing forces on the other side. Friendly fire can be a good thing. Using the newly created chaos, we escaped the building and separated. But not by any plan or with any goal. I found myself in an unfriendly city, in a time of war, in a place where I don’t speak the language.

My name is Jack Pressler. I work as a security specialist in less than secure areas. Ok, I’m a mercenary. I can hear it now, “*it’s a shame the RPG missed.*” I am not that kind of mercenary. I don’t take on clients such as drug cartels and oppressive governments, and many have asked. I only work for clients that I feel I could care about. About a week ago I was offered a lucrative job guarding relief supplies being transferred from a port to a couple of villages in Somalia. In December Ethiopia sent troops into Somalia attacking and helping the government win back the capital. The ongoing war has made any humanitarian aid to be considered suicide. So, when I was asked by a group that wanted to help anyway how could I say no. No, really was there a way I could have said no. I would really like to know.

I made it to a building with four walls and everything. I found a door and used it. The building was mostly empty with some old crates and cigarette butts. Using one crate like a chair and a larger one as a table I emptied my ammo out and counted rounds. The good news was I have three full magazines of ammo. The bad news was it was for an AK47 and not the M4 carbine the client issued me. In a rush, I must have grabbed the wrong bag. I have one magazine for my Barretta M9, half a magazine for the M4, two flash-bang grenades, and a boot knife. Outside I could hear some sporadic gunfire. The gunfire turned toward my hideout. A woman was pinned down behind a long-dead shell of a car. I returned fire with the last of my M4’s ammo hoping to cover the woman. She made it into the building and immediately pointed her AK47 at me. I pointed my M4 back forgetting I was out of ammo. We sat there pointing rifles at each other.

She was beautiful. Maybe 6ft 3” with ebony skin and long braids that seem to be either frosted gray or silver. Somehow a runway model grabbed a rifle and joined the fight here in Somalia. She said something in Somali. I still regret not learning some simple phrases like, “*I don’t understand you.*” She looked over my shoulder then back to me. She was wearing desert camo with a headscarf wrapped around her head. She then spoke in Arabic which is another language I don’t speak. She had small cuts in her arms and spots of blood on her pants. She noticed me looking at her legs and said something in French. We were 0 for 3 in languages I understand.

After about ten minutes that fell like ten hours, I decided to speak. I had hesitated in speaking because I didn’t want to give away my nationality. Some sides in this conflict don’t like Americans. I said, “*if you understand me I think we are screwed here.*” She furrowed her brows. I took a chance and first showed her the five radio batteries I had and the radio with a large bullet hole. She said, “*you’re an American.*” She said it in what sounded like a slight Boston accent. I replied, “*and so are you from the sound of it.*” She gave a slight smile then a hard frown. She said, “*what are you doing here whitey. Some sort of mercenary or paid thug.*” For some reason that escapes me, I said, “*isn’t that the same thing*” and just like that we were pointing guns at each other, and yes, my rifle was still empty.

Another couple of minutes went by before we spoke again. Finally, she asked, “*who are you and what are you doing here?*” I said, “*my name is Jack.*” I fought the urge to say, “*but you don’t know me.*” I did say how I was with a relief organization guarding food and medicine being delivered to some hard-hit villages. She lowered her rifle and said, “*I think, no I know I was sent out to find you. I work for WHO as an interpreter, but I also help out where ever I can.*” I asked, “*you work for who?*” she said, “*yes WHO.*” I replied, “*why are you asking me I don’t know who you work for.*” She said, “*yes I work for WHO.*” I say, “*why are you asking me, how would I know?*” She said just a little bit angrily and just a bit mockingly, “*The World Health Organization aka WHO.*” I said, “*yeah I know I just wanted to see how long that could go on.*”

She said to me, “*whitey just keep messing with me like that and I won’t tell you a secret.*” I jokingly said, “*that your gun is empty?*” She spun around and said, “*how do you know that.*” Instead of answering I picked up my rifle and showed her the empty magazine. Then we both laughed. She said her name was, “*Tima Cocks but most people call me TC, so they won’t mispronounce my name.*” She went on to say her father is a doctor with WHO and was here working the crisis. Her mother was sick, so she stayed back in Boston. She said, “*we were waiting for some relief supplies. I volunteered to come look for them and the people bringing them but all I found was a bombed-out warehouse.*” It would seem right after I left they were able to aim lower and strike inside with an RPG. Anyone that stayed behind was dead. She said, “*I think your right we are screwed,*” I said, “*no I think we may have met for a reason.*” I went to the large crate picked up the three AK 47 magazines and handed them to her. I said to her, “*I grabbed the wrong bag in the chaos.*” Then I added, “*now we are only nearly screwed.*”

She had a colt 1911 on her hip she gave me and with her AK fully loaded we planned. My team hadn’t picked up the supplies yet, so they may still be available. We would go pick up the supplies and any wayward teammates we found. Then go back to the village where her father was. The gunfire outside had stopped, and the gunmen had moved on to targets who may have something worth stealing. As the sun was setting, we made our way out of the building and down an alley. Along the way, we found members of my team dead. Some shot, others with their throats slit. I found a functional radio on one body. I used it to call out, “*boxcar this is skull cap over.*” Nothing. I tried again and still nothing. Boxcar is a code used to call out for anyone on the radio.

About ten minutes later we heard over the radio, “*skull cap this is carrot top. Come in skull cap. This is carrot top.*” Carrot top is a guy named David, and no he doesn’t have red hair. When we first met, he was trying to use a prop to make a joke. I don’t remember what it was just that it wasn’t funny to anyone. We met in the ninth grade back at Springfield High school in Springfield township in northeast Ohio. We followed each other into football, baseball, and the

Army. David drove a truck in Georgia for four years while I became a professional starrer. I worked as a guard in many different places practicing the stare.

He said, “*after everything went pear-shaped I went back to the ship to regroup. I knew you would find a way over.*” I said, “*supplies still there over?*” he replied, “*yes I am unharmed. Yes, they are still here over.*” I said to him, “*pack a truck with as much of the medical supplies you can and be prepared to go as soon as we get there over.*” He replied, “*we over?*” When we made it back to the ship, we found David by a large armored car. He took one look at TC and just kept on looking. He looked at me then back to her. She said to him, “*keep staring, and I’ll cut those eyes out of your head.*” David looked back to me. He said a truck wasn’t available, but the UN was willing to let us use one of their armored transports. The truck was loaded and ready to run. I asked, “*anyone else here and willing to.*” David interrupted me, “*no. No one else made it.*” We came to Somalia with sixty men, and now it was just the two of us. After the last time, I tried to drive one of these things we both decided David would drive. I grabbed an AK 47, a couple of magazines for my Berretta and a bag of AK magazines. David whispered to me, “*is the scary model coming with us?*” I whispered back, “*she is the only one that knows where we are going.*” TC took the gun turret on top. She directed David from it using a built-in intercom.

Somehow, we made it out of town with the medical supplies. About an hour away from TC’s father we ran into a hunting party of a sort. One old Land Rover and two jeeps. All three had makeshift gun turrets on the top. The two Jeeps struck from both sides while the Land Rover tried to block the road. Using the 50 caliber machine guns in the turret, TC shredded the Land Rover. Then David plowed through the remains. The two Jeeps first broke off then tried to strike from behind. I popped a hatch on top and using a portable rocket launcher struck the lead Jeep. The hit spun the Jeep into the second ending the chase.

At the village, we found her father and a contingent of UN troops. We unloaded the truck. After some introductions, we made plans to leave and go back to the ship. TC said we would be welcome to stay. I said to her, “*we signed a contract with them, so we have to follow*

their protocols. One is that after the delivery we are to report back.” David looked around at the village trying not to look directly at TC. He said, *“no I am going to stay here and help. This looks like the place I need to be.”* This was to be David’s last time in the field. TC said to him, *“stay, go, it doesn’t mean shit to me. Just don’t think you are going to get a little something.”* When he eventually came home, he went back to Kent State and became a lawyer. His newly married wife TC helped him out with the big words.

Three years after Somalia I met up with David and TC back in Ohio in a diner in Stow. David suggested that we form a company that dealt with security issues that most other agencies wouldn’t touch. Such things as Security for African relief or personal security for people who the system deemed unimportant. I had just come into a large amount of cash on another job. I could retire or do this. I said, *“yes as long as TC is a part of this. I want someone I can trust.”* David asked, *“why not me?”* I replied, *“trust a lawyer?”*