

THE DIVER

By Elaine



ILLUSTRATED BY CHAS

A 'NEW WOMAN' NOVEL

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THE DIVER

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Chapter 1 - Explosion

It was a dark moonless night as the six sections, each of eight men, transferred quietly and efficiently from the amphibian support craft HMS Bullfinch to the deck of HMS Sabre, a high-speed patrol boat.

Nearly fifty men of the Special Boat Service were starting a dangerous mission to get behind the Iraqi positions in Kuwait before the start of Operation Desert Storm. First they had to clear the mine infested waters that surrounded the Kuwait coastline, and for that they would transfer again to six small Zodiacs.

The captain of Sabre expertly brought them as close as he dared for the final approach to the hostile coastline.

In command was a tough Marine called Sergeant Brighton from Yorkshire, who fired out his orders quietly and efficiently in the dim light. Immediately on his signal, five divers from each Zodiac quietly submerged, leaving three in each inflatable as boat-handler, standby diver, and dive-master.

As expected, the descending divers found the sandy bottom at twenty-five meters, with each group of five men taking up a V formation. With one brave or possibly foolish man at the point, they all began to swim slowly towards the shore in the inky black waters. Above them the men in the Zodiacs paddled along, following the line of bubbles as they came to the surface.

Luckily the bottom was relatively flat as they slowly inched along in the rich, salty waters.

Suddenly, a great explosion sent up a fountain of water off the starboard bow of the port Zodiac. The boat-minder, Joe Spencer, immediately started the engine and then circled slowly around the still foaming water. A body floated to the surface face down, still covered in its black diving suit.

The dive-master, Ed Stewart, signaled Spencer to turn the boat to port, while, without being asked, the standby diver, Bill Truro, dropped overboard and swam as fast as he could for the bleeding body. The three men pulled the lifeless diver back on board the Zodiac.

As Spencer slowly turned the Zodiac to get back in formation, three more divers surfaced near to the position of the explosion.

“Derek's still fucking alive!” cried Stewart to Spencer, as he searched for vital signs of life and hovered over the prone body.

“He's been damned unlucky,” responded Spencer, who could see the blood oozing out of the man's suit near his waist. “He's caught some shrapnel in his stomach, and this doesn't look good.”

The three other divers climbed into the Zodiac with minimal assistance. Spencer circled for five minutes more, searching in vain for the fifth member of the diving team. He was assisted by the Iraqi searchlights looking for the cause of the explosion. There was some sporadic firing up the coast, and the yellow tracer could be seen hitting the water a few hundred yards away.

“There's no fucking sign of him,” said a desperate Spencer, becoming sadly aware that the man on point had caught the full force of the mine and there was nothing left to pick up. “We'd better head back for the Sabre before the Corp. here dies on us.”

No longer worried about any secrecy because the explosion had put paid to that. The Zodiac set off at 40 knots towards the approaching Sabre.

Stewart picked up the radio and hailed the Sabre. “Sabre this is Z1, we need an immediate air evacuation back to Invincible. Corporal Carruthers is very badly hurt.”

“The chopper's on its way,” said the radio operator on Sabre. “Don't try to transfer him to us, the chopper will pick him up straight from the Zodiac.”

Carruthers drifted in and out of consciousness, clutching the wound that seemed to be draining his life force away. He was in pain and drifted in and out of consciousness as the helicopter winched him up into the air.

He didn't remember much as they gently carried him across the flight deck of Invincible towards the waiting surgeon who would save his life. He didn't hear the Harrier jump jets refueling and taking off on raids on Southern Iraq.

Chapter 2 - A Brave Young Man

Growing up in a leafy Manchester suburb, Derek Carruthers had always been academically bright at school. He was studious because, being small and frail, he had always been hopeless at games such as rugby and soccer.

In consequence, he was always being ridiculed and tormented as the bigger boys tried to show that he was a bit of a wimp.

He was always a bit of a rebel, preferring to have long hair, and in hindsight that probably made the taunting worse.

It didn't take him long to realize that their taunts were having a negative effect on his confidence and he really needed to show that he did possess some skills that they didn't have.

While he might not have been good enough on the rough and tumble of the sports field, his love of swimming did enable him to shine.

Over his final years at school, he won many swimming and diving medals in inter-school championships. It might sound corny, but he was nicknamed The Fish by some of his classmates.

When his dad paid for some scuba diving lessons, Derek realized that he wanted to make a career out of his love of the water. His goal was to get a job in the North Sea as a diver earning thousands of pounds a week.

That was the main reason why Derek had enlisted with the Royal Marines. Maybe it was because he had to prove his manhood in one of the toughest regiments in the World, if not to those bullies at school but to himself.

Hopefully after a few years in the Marines, he'd have the skills and training he needed that would enable him to get a job earning big money in oil exploration.

"But Dad, they'll train me in diving and swimming," he told his surprised father. He wanted to explain why he had signed for them instead of going to work in the local council offices over the summer as they'd agreed.

"Derek, you're university material, you can achieve good money in industry," he replied in exasperation.

He failed to convince him. Derek knew his father was wasting his breath because, like his mum, once his mind was made up that was it. His father just caved in.

While most of the other guys in senior school paired off with the girls, he'd never had a regular girlfriend. He'd always felt shy and clumsy around them, and the girls that seemed to take an interest in him never received any encouragement.

For some reason, Derek genuinely seemed to prefer the company of other young men, or least those like him that seemed to thrive on adversity. However, he never considered himself to be gay, and those boys that had made advances were instantly repulsed too.

Just three months after passing all eight of his O level school examinations, Derek was sitting in a Royal Marines bus heading for his basic training at Lypstone Barracks. He was wondering whether he was going to fail or endure to prove his manhood.

To his surprise, he soon found himself adapting to the raw life of a recruit. Instead of confronting problems head on, Derek used his head to tackle them with a bit of thought. Unlike the past, the drill staff were always on the lookout for recruits who could show some initiative rather than just brute strength and ignorance.

He suddenly found out that being small and light was an unexpected advantage in unarmed combat, and he was able to throw guys twice his weight with ease once he learned the essentials. When Derek learned that he could do that, his confidence soared and increased daily.

Within weeks, he feared none of the other recruits, and it didn't take him long to take charge naturally on training assignments. Derek would end up telling all the bigger guys how to overcome obstacles and hazards.

The drill staff noticed it first, of course, and he was able to finish basic training with top marks, much to his dad's surprise.

His final interview with Captain Morrison of the Marines training program gave him further cause for optimism.

"When I first saw you, Carruthers, I thought you'd be lucky to survive a few days, and you'd be going home to your Mummy's apron strings," he said almost sarcastically as Derek stood at ease. "However, I'm pleased to say that you've proved me wrong. And all my Drill Sergeants, too."

"Thank you, sir," Derek said, smiling as he was handed his certificate for being top recruit. His Royal Marine cap badge would be handed out a few days later at the parade.

"Have you thought about what you'd like to do?" Morrison asked with a typical public school accent.

"I've always been interested in diving and swimming, sir," he replied enthusiastically. "So something in that area would be good."

Morrison looked at his training records. "So I see," he remarked, leafing through his records. "Top marks in the pool... Have you thought about the SBS, Carruthers? They could use a man like you."

"I've never even heard of them, sir. What are they?" Derek asked.

"I'm surprised you've never heard of the SBS. Don't they teach you anything nowadays in school?" Morrison asked sharply, but there was no menace in his question.

"No sir," Derek replied honestly, wishing his nose would stop being itchy as he stood with his legs apart and his hands behind his back at ease.

"The SBS is short for the Special Boat Service," Morrison proudly explained.

"I'm sorry, sir, that still means nothing to me," Derek replied.

"Well, let me explain," said Morrison. "The SBS was formed during the Second World War to attack enemy shipping and coastlines. They used specially trained men

versed in underwater diving and combat. Of course, then it was staffed jointly by the Marines and the Navy, but nowadays it's mainly just us Marines," he explained.

Seeing some recognition and interest on Derek's face, he continued. "The public hears a lot about the SAS, but our lads in the SBS are a much tougher group. They do all the interesting and difficult jobs."

"Such as?" Derek asked, knowing a sir on the end wasn't needed. Morrison was in a different world, he could tell.

"Well, in 1943 Colonel Blondie Hasler led nine men in five two-man kayaks thirty miles up a river in France, mostly underwater, and sank nine German warships with magnetic limpet mines. Hasler and only one of his men escaped unhurt overland, through enemy territory to Spain," Morrison explained.

"In the fifties," he continued, "another squad recaptured a large supertanker hijacked by twenty armed terrorists in the North Sea."

Derek stood and listened to Morrison recount several more stories of bravery in actions all over the world.

They all had a lot in common, unarmed and armed combat combined with diving skills in difficult situations.

That made his mind up.

"How do I get into the SBS, sir?" Derek asked seriously.

"I can get you an interview to the next selection panel," Morrison said proudly. "Another eighteen months of good service and you'd qualify."

"How is it that I could qualify?" Derek asked. "I'm not exactly big and strong."

"Well, recruits for the SBS should be small and compact just like you," Morrison explained.

"Big men just don't make the grade," he continued. "All potential SBS recruits have to pass out from basic training in the top ten percent and in the top five percent in knife and unarmed combat. You qualify on all counts, Carruthers."

"Thank you, sir," Derek said.

Then he asked, "How does the SBS training compare to what I've just done, sir?" He was internally pleased that he might go forward for SBS training. Morrison smiled and then sat back as Derek stood before him in his best uniform, itching and with sweat trickling down his face.

"You don't get any extra pay, if that's what you're thinking," Morrison said quickly, dispelling any ideas of sudden riches that might be earned in defense of Queen and country in such an elite fighting force.

"But..."

"But, sir?" Derek asked.

"But you can expect more rapid promotion, and you'll work with a great bunch of guys," Morrison said with a glint in his eye.

“Of course, he continued, “it's more dangerous than in the Marines. But then you don't get any guard duty at any embassies or other square bashing ceremonials either.”

Then Morrison added what Derek wanted to hear: “You do have extra training, in all manner of boats, diving, airborne assault, and handling all kinds of special weapons, including mines and explosives.”

That made his mind up. “When I'm able, I'd like to join the SBS, sir.”

“You sure you want to, Carruthers?”

‘That’s a stupid question,’ Derek thought. He said aloud, “Yes sir.”

“Very well, I'll make the recommendation on your record. All you have to do is get through the next eighteen months in Her Majesty’s service. Attention! Dismissed!” Morrison barked, saluting as Derek was marched out by two happy and, it seemed, quite proud Drill Sergeants.

With that goal in mind, Derek applied himself at first as a Commando based at Arbroath in Scotland, where he gained his lance corporal's stripe.

After another long nine months in the ranks of the Marines at Portsmouth, Derek eventually joined the fourth squadron of the SBS in Poole, a small coastal town in Southern England.

Quickly Derek showed his promise when he received a second stripe to reach the rank of corporal in the space of just two years of service. It was just before Operation Desert Storm started against the Iraqi invaders of Kuwait.

The Royal Marines along with the Americans were scheduled to make a diversionary landing on the beaches just south of Kuwait City, while the main coalition forces pushed into Iraq from Saudi Arabia. As part of the attack, the SBS were to go in and clear any mines before the main assault craft entered the coastal waters.

When Jim touched that mine, Derek nearly bought the farm too.

Chapter 3 - Recovery

“He's not really fit to answer any questions yet,” whispered the Surgeon who had operated on Derek for several hours on board the biggest warship in the Royal Navy. “He won't remember much about what happened anyway and probably for the previous twenty-four hours, if my experience is any guide.”

“Is he conscious yet?” Asked Captain MacTaggart softly. MacTaggart was Derek's Commanding Officer.

“Yes, but he's still a little deaf from the blast. And you may find it difficult to question him. His speech is slurred because he also lost some teeth, and his lips were gashed,” explained the man who had just saved Derek's life. “And please don't tire him too much.”

“I'll only speak to him for a few minutes, if that's okay. I wouldn't want to do anything that'll delay his recovery or harm him in any way,” said MacTaggart. “Does he need to know what's happened to him?”

“No, but I suppose he'll need to know sooner or later what's happened. Remember: please keep it short. He needs rest,” the Surgeon warned.

The two men stood by the bottom of his bed talking, and Derek, sensing something, opened a groggy eye. He'd half expected to see the nurse who had just made up his bed in preparation for the CO's visit. He had no idea how long it been since that night off the coast of Kuwait.

When he saw it was MacTaggart, Derek almost jumped to attention in bed. Instead he only lisped out, “Corporal Carruthers, 7843796, sir.”

“Well, Sergeant, you certainly seem to have caught quite a package,” MacTaggart mouthed slowly so Derek could understand. “You'll soon be at home after another week here at the NATO base in Saudi.”

Derek nodded. Then his mouth dropped as he asked, “Sergeant, sir?”

“Didn't anybody tell you? We've given you an extra stripe. Congratulations, Sergeant.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Derek, who tried to salute but his arm was tied to the side of the bed to hold the saline drip tube going into it.

“Do you remember anything about the blast, Sergeant?” MacTaggart asked, sitting down beside Derek's bed and carefully placing his cap on Derek's bedside locker.

Derek shook his head and tried hard to remain conscious. As his eyes flickered back towards sleep, Derek could see the surgeon looking at his Commanding Officer with concern.

“Has anyone told you what happened to you?” Asked MacTaggart with a little more urgency.

Derek just shook his head no again.

“I thought not. I hope you can remember that you were clearing mines along the Kuwait coastline, in about twenty meters of water,” MacTaggart explained. “As far as we can make out, Private Bottomley triggered one somehow, and the poor chap died instantly.”

A tear dropped down Derek's eye at how that was explained in such a matter-of-fact way. Jim was his best mate in the unit, and he was going to miss him. Come to that, so would Jim's family.

“When the mine detonated, you must have been about twenty meters or less from it. Johnston on the other side of Bottomley seems to have been lagging behind, out of line, so he suffered very little damage. Only slight deafness.”

“What happened to me, sir?” Derek lisped, spitting out saliva between the huge gap in his front teeth.

“The blast tore you mouthpiece off, and that took your top two teeth with it, I'm afraid. Your eardrums were blown out, and that's why you're still rather deaf. Though they're healing nicely now, and it shouldn't give you any future trouble,” MacTaggart answered.

“Why do I hurt so much?” Derek asked.

“You were twisted into a pretzel, tearing ligaments in all your joints. You should recover from that, though. But it will no doubt cause some serious arthritis in old age,” the surgeon answered.

Derek, despite his tiredness, could sense they were holding something back.

“How did I survive, sir, without my mask and mouthpiece?” Derek asked, curious to know the answer.

“Ironically, it was the shrapnel from the mine that saved you. It seems that one piece cut your weight belt and entered your stomach. With your lead weight gone, you just floated up to the surface unconscious, bleeding from your stomach wound. How you escaped without the bends is beyond me,” MacTaggart said.

“I was lucky, sir,” Derek said, suddenly believing it. “I'm lucky to be alive.”

“Now, there was one other major wound,” MacTaggart said suddenly as he changed tone and tensed up.

“Where, sir?”

His mouth opened but nothing came out, so he coughed to clear his throat. “I'm afraid you were hit by another piece of shrapnel,” said MacTaggart, who licked his lips nervously and then hesitated a moment. “It passed, um... It passed between your legs... But higher up.”

At first Derek didn't understand what MacTaggart was trying to tell him. Had he lost a leg? He stuttered out, “I don't feel any pain, was I badly wounded in the leg, sir?”

“No, Sergeant. The shrapnel went between your legs... I'm afraid you've lost your manhood,” MacTaggart said, rushing on.

“Completely?” Derek asked, feeling numb rather than shocked. He was surprised that he didn't feel any pain down there.

MacTaggart looked over at the window in an uncomfortable manner. He avoided a direct answer and then replied, "I'm sure the surgeons and physicians will be able to do something to help you."

"It doesn't matter, sir. I'm still alive," Derek said, slipping back into sleep rather than facing the reality of the situation. He would leave that for another day.

"I'll let you rest now, but I'll come back with some of the men and see you when you're a little stronger." With that, MacTaggart stepped backwards and spoke to the surgeon as Derek drifted off to sleep, strangely tranquil despite his dreadful injuries.

Early the next day, Derek was just coming to terms with what had happened for the first time, when MacTaggart and Sergeant Brighton appeared suddenly at his bedside. Derek was already awake and feeling a little sore, but he was quite comfortable. The nurses had been looking after him, but now and then he could see them whispering in his direction in the corridor outside.

"Do you feel like telling me what you remember of the incident now, Sergeant?" MacTaggart asked, looking down at him.

"I'm sorry, sir, I don't remember anything after I left for the mission," Derek replied truthfully.

"Can you tell me what you do remember about the mission?" MacTaggart asked.

"Six sections were to go in Zodiacs to a line four kilometers off the coast sir. Then we would begin our sweep to open up a clear channel as close in as we could go." Derek felt reasonably happy that he could recall that much.

"How deep did you expect the water to be?" Asked MacTaggart.

Derek thought it strange that MacTaggart should quiz him over something that was common knowledge.

"About twenty-five metros, I remember you telling us during the briefing, sir," Derek replied.

"Good. Go on."

"You also said that we should be as quiet as possible, though we wouldn't expect any opposition," he replied, suddenly remembering part of his briefing.

"And did you meet any opposition?"

"I don't know, sir, I just don't remember. I do remember working out our gas mixture, but I don't remember actually filling the gas bottles."

"What gas mixture did you plan on using, Derek?" Brighton asked, joining in the questioning.

“Since our maximum depth was supposed to be twenty-five metros, I planned for thirty meters to allow a margin of safety. That's three atmospheres gauge, four absolute.”

“Quite right,” smiled Brighton. He had taught Derek all that.

“Allowing for two atmospheres partial pressure of oxygen at a total pressure of four atmospheres, that meant we could use a mixture of fifty percent oxygen, fifty percent nitrogen. I could get that by mixing air and oxygen in a ratio of three to five,” Derek continued, happy at least that he had remembered that part.

“You don't seem to have suffered in your calculating ability. That's quite right, but you don't remember filling the bottles with that gas mixture?” Asked MacTaggart.

“No sir, I don't,” Derek replied.

“Would you have had the bends, coming up from twenty meters after half an hour using that gas mixture, do you think?” Asked MacTaggart, who seemed to be quizzing Derek harder than normal for some reason.

“No sir, because part of my calculation in using that mixture was to avoid any risk of the bends. That might happen if we had to abort in the face of enemy action and to avoid any decompression at the end of the operation,” Derek said confidently.

“Good man! Now how did you dispose your section below water?”

“I left privates Spencer, Truro, and Stewart as boat crew, and took down with me Bottomley, Johnston, Smith, and Lance Corporal Pick. Bottomley was on point duty and Johnston and I were next. Smith and Pick were to swim outer flank. I don't know if that's how it worked out, though, sir.”

“Did you swim in line abreast?” Asked Brighton.

“I don't know how we actually swam, but I had planned to swim in a V with Bottomley leading. The men were to keep visual contact but spread out as far as possible.”

“Why weren't you on point?” Asked Brighton.

“I should have been on point, but Bottomley was in the right place and we were beginning to fall behind,” replied Derek, who shivered suddenly realizing that he should have died instead of Bottomley.

“You planned it well. And what you say is corroborated by the others. Johnston, your opposite on the right flank beyond Bottomley, was a little out of position, and that's what probably saved him,” commented Brighton.

“How do you feel now?” asked MacTaggart, suddenly showing concern when Derek moved and winced with a stab of pain in his stomach.

“A little better today, sir. It's easier to concentrate on what you're saying. I guess I've got a one way ticket back to blighty now, sir.”

“You certainly do, and we'll get you back to blighty as soon as you're fit to travel. But you'll have several more months in hospital back there.”

“I won't be discharged from the service, will I, sir?” Derek asked anxiously. He knew that he would get back in action again after he healed up.

“I shouldn't think so, but you might be invalided out of the SBS into the regular Marines,” MacTaggart said.

That left Derek feeling deflated.

“I shouldn't like that, sir,” Derek replied with tears welling up in his eyes.

“Cheer up, Derek, I'm sure it won't come to that,” said Brighton. But Derek could see it in his eyes that his active service career in the SBS was almost over.

Chapter 4 - Back to Blighty

Derek was airlifted from Saudi back to Pompey, as the Marines call their base in the UK at Portsmouth. There he was transferred to a naval hospital. His ears healed quickly, and, with a little surgery on his eardrums, his hearing was restored. Fortunately, there was no serious damage to the inner and middle ear.

His stomach wounds looked worse than they seemed at first. His thick diving suit and weight belt had absorbed much of the energy from the shrapnel, and he was quickly stitched up, leaving a five inch scar just below his navel. Although all his leg joints suffered, the orthopedic surgeon concentrated on his right knee only. Though the cartilage and ligaments were torn, he felt that they would heal better with physiotherapy alone, rather than with surgery. In thirty years time the surgeon told Derek that he might have severe arthritis. Derek carried a small scar on his right knee where the surgeon had entered to repair his cruciate ligament.

A few days after his return to the UK, an ophthalmic surgeon examined his eyes. His observations had Derek more scared than any other thing that had happened.

“You seem to have escaped damage to the retina and optic nerve, but you have cavitation bubbles in each of your lenses,” he said, looking through his viewer into Derek's eyes.

“What does that mean?” Derek asked. “In simple layman's language, please.”

“The mine explosion has caused bubbles to form in the lenses of both your eyes, just like the cavitation pits you see on the blades of high-speed boat propellers. They're caused by bubbles.”

“What will that do to my vision?” Derek asked, concerned that there wasn't much call for blind North Sea divers.

“Oh, there will be no effect for many years,” he said. “But ultimately the lenses will start to crystallize, and then you'll start to go blind.”

“Blind? Oh, God, no!” Derek cried. “I don't think I could handle that.”

“Oh, I'm sorry Sergeant. This won't happen for another twenty years or so. And it's nothing to fear, because we just do a small operation and replace the damaged lenses with clear plastic ones,” he explained. Derek's relief became obvious as the doctor continued, “Who knows what they might be able to do in twenty years time? I don't know, but it will surely be something better.”

A dental surgeon had fashioned a small plate to replace his two missing front teeth in a few days, while the third broken tooth was expertly repaired. It was funny not to feel the huge gap in the front of his mouth any more, though he hated the thought of wearing dentures for the rest of his life.

Derek began to dwell on his other major injury that he had somehow pushed to the back of his mind. He examined the dressings between his legs. Each time they were changed, the nurses screened off the area with a drape.

It all felt numb down below, and he could barely feel what they were doing as they cleaned the suture lines. In some frustration, Derek asked, "Why can't I see my injury?"

"It's not very pretty, Sergeant," they would say. He never really pushed the point. After the nurses had gone, Derek saw that he wore what was like a large plastic panty. Inside that was an absorbent cotton material and dressings. Taped to his thigh was a catheter that carried his urine to a bag attached to the side of his bed.

Derek was determined, though, to see what the damage was. One night, a few days after arriving back in the UK, he decided that he would steal a look. It took him some uncomfortable minutes before he had lowered the panty and started to undo the dressings. Layer after layer was unraveled before he reached his crotch. He stared at the single plastic tube that emerged out of his groin, where his penis and scrotum had once been. There was nothing left of what identified him as a male.

In the dim light, he could see that his groin was badly bruised. The stitches were looking black and menacing. His view confirmed that it was all gone. He was a eunuch now, and there was nothing that he could do that would ever change that. He methodically and carefully replaced all the dressings and lay back, stunned at the change of his body. He took his sleeping pills and slowly drifted off to sleep.

The next day he was up walking about painfully on crutches with the assistance of Zoe, his Physiotherapist. It was good to get up on his feet again, and she patiently helped him sit in a lounge chair in the warm sunshine.

"Well done, Sergeant," she said. "Doesn't it feel better to be up and about again?"

"Yes it does, but I'm feeling a little sad about what's happened," Derek replied from the comfort of the upright chair. He then unkindly said, "It's not as though I can walk to the toilet with this bag attached..."

"Oh, that'll come," she said enthusiastically. "You've healed up really well."

Little did he know that the medical and surgical staff were worrying about a satisfactory outcome for his genital injury. After some blood tests, they decided that Derek should start taking some androgens to balance the loss of his testes. However, they and Derek had to face the reality that he had permanently lost all sexual function.

As they watched him read the newspapers, Doctor Hermione Goldberg was puzzled at the lack of any reaction to his traumatic injuries.

"Any normal male would be ready to shoot himself, but not him. He just sits there and reads the newspaper." The paper was a raunchy paper with all sorts of sexy nude women inside. He didn't seem to notice; a point that wasn't missed by the tall, blonde Doctor Goldberg.

"I haven't raised the question of his sexuality yet in my interviews. And by the way that he's looking at that newspaper we must tackle that first," said Doctor Goldberg to her colleague Doctor Jane Roberts.

Hermione Goldberg had taken her advanced psychiatric training at St. Ambrose hospital, in London, which housed the world-famous sexology clinic headed by Dr. Carl Hamburg. As a Major in the Territorial Army Medical Corps, she had been called

up as part of the Gulf Force medical service. In her civilian life she had dealt with sexual dysfunction in a wide variety of forms from, impotent men and women through to transsexuals who really wanted impotence.

“In my opinion, Carruthers doesn't seem to mind what's happened. That's a real cause for concern,” she told Doctor Roberts. “Come and listen to this interview that I made earlier today.”

The pair headed for her office where she loaded the tape into her machine and they listened intently.

“Tape Five, Patient Sergeant Derek Carruthers,” her recorded voice said out of the speaker as the tape mechanism started working.

“Today I want to be specific about the injuries to your private parts,” she said, beginning the interview focusing on the major issue as she saw it.

“The injuries really don't trouble me, ma'am,” he replied, wondering what she would ask next.

“How do you mean, the injuries don't trouble you?” she asked, probing and not fully understanding.

“Well, I thought it would really hurt, but it doesn't,” Derek replied.

Major Goldberg paused the tape and then said, “See what I mean? Any normal young man would be doubling up with concerns over the loss of his manhood.”

She allowed the tape to continue.

“The pain relief is good here,” the Major continued, trying to give him an explanation.

“I thought... I mean, I thought I would be in real pain,” stuttered Carruthers. “But I'm not.”

“I wonder, did you ever have a girlfriend?” asked the Major.

“No, Major. I always felt uncomfortable where women were concerned.”

“Are you feeling shy now?”

“No, not really,” he replied. “I feel quite relaxed with you, ma'am.”

The Major stopped the tape and spoke again to Dr Roberts. “I decided to take the bull by the horns and confront him about his new reality. And it didn't really upset him.”

“I see,” said Doctor Roberts. “Let's hear that then.”

Playing the tape, the two listened again.

"You know, of course, you can never father children now," she commented.

"Yes, I'm aware of that. Thanks for reminding me," Derek replied.

"I didn't mean to imply that you were less of a man. Just that you cannot be a father to your own kids." She tried to rescue the position.

"I know what you meant, but I never saw myself having kids anyway," he replied.

"Why not?"

"Oh, I never thought I would get involved with a girl for that to happen," he replied. "I've never even tried to have a relationship with a girl."

"Have you ever had sex?" She asked another enquiring question.

"I've never had sex at all, ma'am," he said, feeling embarrassed. "I've never even kissed a girl, and as for boys, well let's just say that I'm not gay."

"You mean you've never had any homosexual encounters either?" she asked.

"No, never, ma'am," he replied.

"Did you ever masturbate?" she asked, unsure whether that would trouble him.

"No, I've only done it once or twice, but it was always difficult to get an erection. Mostly it didn't lead to anything."

"Lead to anything?" she asked.

"You know... an ejaculation," he replied.

"Have you ever ejaculated?" she asked.

"I guess I don't have any sex drive. I've always felt my private parts were more of a nuisance than anything else," he replied, ignoring the question.

Doctor Goldberg stopped the tape again. It was Doctor Roberts who spoke first.

"He's a strange young man: no sex drive, no interest in sex with either gender, no masturbation either. Perhaps he doesn't really mind losing his genitals after all?"

"It seems that way, doesn't it?" Doctor Goldberg replied. "I really think he'll learn to cope without a penis. All we need to do is give him low doses of androgens to ward off any hormone deficiency. Too much and he might become suicidal."

"Is there any more on the tape?" Asked Roberts.

"Yes," said Goldberg, pressing the buttons to restart it.

"As I said earlier, most young men would be distressed to have your injuries and would be praying for something to help them. They would regard it as the worst of any of the other injuries you received," said Major Goldberg. Roberts listened intently.

She noted his innocent, almost childlike, negative reaction and then asked a further simple question, "Do you really mean to say you feel better off like this?"

"Yes, I think I do, ma'am," replied Carruthers. "It's much more comfortable, less obstructed, as it were."

"You do know that you'll always have to sit to pee. Doesn't that worry you?"

"It might be a little embarrassing, ma'am," he confessed. "Particularly on duty with other men around."

"Yes, I can see how it might be embarrassing," she agreed and then added for light relief, "for a man I imagine it would be very embarrassing, but then I don't think about it because I've always had to pee sitting down."

"I'm sorry, ma'am," he replied smiling. "I wasn't thinking."

"That's all right, Sergeant," she tried to sound conciliatory. "There's no need to feel embarrassed. I'm sure that you'll find a way to avoid any potential embarrassing situations like those."

"I hope so, ma'am," he said, wondering how the men would react when they saw a sergeant having to squat like a woman.

"I'm going to speak to some of my colleagues in London about you. I'll see you tomorrow at the same time," said Doctor Goldberg.

"Yes, ma'am," he said, slowly rising to walk out of the room.

"Can you manage?" she asked.

"Yes, my knee's just a little stiff, and it takes a few steps to wear off," he replied, though he was fighting back tears as he felt the pain from his knees and hips.

After listening to the tape, Doctor Roberts commented, "I think you should contact that old boss of yours in London."

"Yes, I was thinking that too. In a few weeks time, I think Carruthers would benefit from a visit to London," said Doctor Goldberg. "Jane, thanks for your time."

"Don't mention it, Hermione. Carruthers is a fascinating case," she replied. Then she got up and put on her raincoat. "Keep me posted on his progress."

"Yes, I will," agreed Doctor Goldberg, picking up the phone. "I'll just give Carl a ring to set things up."

"As soon as he's fit enough, have him transferred to the Combined Services Hospital here in London," said Hamburg over the phone. He then added, "You can then refer him to me at St Ambrose for further examination."

"Thanks, Carl, I'll do just that," she said, heartened by his positive reply.

"He sounds an interesting case," Hamburg said.

"Oh he is, he is," agreed the Major.

Chapter 5 - Officer Material

Four weeks later, in the SBS barracks in Poole, Dorset, Captain MacTaggart, and his CO Colonel Thomson were busy reviewing the positions of the men under their command following their return from the Gulf.

“Sergeant Brighton's coming to the end of his usefulness in the SBS, sir. I've been thinking that we should transfer him to regular duties,” said MacTaggart, looking through Brighton's file.

“As always, I trust your judgment, MacTaggart,” said Colonel Thomson. “Who would you want in his place?”

“Before Desert Storm I would've said Carruthers without hesitation,” replied MacTaggart, after taking a sip of his hot, strong tea. “But now I'm not so sure. Though he showed great potential before, he nearly copped it in the Gulf.”

“Yes, that was a pity,” responded the Colonel, nodding his head slowly.

“The man should have died like his friend Bottomley. His injuries were quite severe,” commented MacTaggart. “It might have been the kindest thing that could have happened to him.”

“I heard he lost his manhood,” said the Colonel. “What a blasted awful thing to happen to a chap.”

“Yes, his actions were rewarded with his third stripe, but it'll be months before he's fit for active duty,” said MacTaggart, unhappy that such a brilliant career might be cut short. Then he added, “...if ever.”

“Maybe we can find him a desk job. He has the background knowledge to plan and process assignments. It would be a pity to lose that expertise,” said the Colonel, who remembered Carruthers during a training exercise off the coast of Norway storming an oil rig. “That exercise in Norway was first class, and he was a credit to you and Brighton that day.”

“Thank you, sir,” replied MacTaggart, feeling pleased. “In the circumstances, I'll have to recommend Corporal Pick to replace Brighton. He doesn't have the same flair, but he's very thorough and very reliable.”

“How about putting Carruthers into officer training school when he's fully recovered?” asked Colonel Thomson suddenly. “We could still use his expertise then, even if he didn't go on active duty.”

“I think that's an excellent idea, sir,” replied MacTaggart as he shuffled his papers and personnel folders. “I think that would demonstrate to Carruthers that we rate him highly, and it might speed up his recovery. Besides, he's a good organizer, takes initiative, and the men have always respected his judgment.”

“Right, then,” said Colonel Thomson. “I'll put him forward, and I'll expect you to let him know he isn't finished in the SBS or the Marines yet. Not by a long way.”

Both men laughed at the Colonel's attempt at a joke and relaxed back in their chairs.

“I know he'll appreciate that, sir,” responded MacTaggart. “I'll pay him a visit tomorrow. And it might also solve the problem of what to do if his injuries ever preclude him from entering active service again.”

Unlike other parts of the British military, the SBS is a strange organization, with its own unique way of doing things. In part that was due to the necessity to get things done quickly and efficiently in time of war, and in part to make sure that the top brass were able to keep the men as an efficient fighting unit with little or no distractions.

Part of that uniqueness is that, although the officers plan the operations, it's only the men and Non Commissioned Officers that actually get their hands dirty.

Of course, that gives the men far more freedom of action than any other service. It encourages initiative in often complex and highly hazardous situations. They are free to select and use any weapon they see fit for any particular task, from a long attack knife to special machine guns. They regard themselves as the elite with their base, not in Pompey itself alongside the other Marines and Navy types, but a few miles along the coast.