

Islamic State 'Beatle' claims his British Army Cadet training came in 'useful' when fighting in Syria

From various newspapers.



[A British Islamic State "Beatle"](#) on trial in the US boasted to an FBI agent how he had once been enrolled in the UK Army Cadets and used the "useful" skills he learned later fighting in Syria.

El Shafee Elsheikh, 33, of west London, told FBI Special Agent John Chiappone during interrogations in custody in Syria how he and fellow Beatle Alexandra Kotey had been in the youth cadets, a court in Virginia heard on Friday. *Whenever I hear older (than me) people saying "bring back national service" to deal with troublesome youth, I think, do we really want criminal thugs with proper weapons training?*

Elsheikh said the map and compass training in particular came in handy during his battles fighting the UK-allied Syrian Democratic Forces and the Syrian army. "It was very useful for

the Islamic State," he said.

He was also familiar with the phonetic alphabet commonly used in the military for radio communications, and knew call signs.

The court also heard how fellow Beatle, Alexandra Kotey, who was captured alongside Elsheikh in 2018, had been in the UK Air Cadets, where he "learned how to fly an unpropelled glider" – a "Bulldog" as Kotey called it.

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Elsheikh's defence team has claimed he was not a member of the notorious cell and that it is a case of mistaken identity.

The court in Alexandria had been told by Italian hostage Federico Motka earlier in the day how a masked member of the cell had told prisoners of his time in the cadets. He is accused of brutally torturing the Western hostages, including Americans James Foley, Peter Kassig, Steven Sotloff, and Kayla Mueller, as well as British aid workers David Haines and Alan Henning.

Mr Motka said of the treatment: "It was like he had military knowledge." *I don't think they teach torture in the cadets.*

[Motka was seized in 2013](#) along with a British hostage while doing aid work on the border of Turkey and Syria. In the Spring of 2014 he was taken to a prison he called 'The Quarry' where it became apparent that a woman was being held in the room next room

Motka told the federal court in Alexandria, Virginia, that

they began to swap notes secretly by leaving a small message in a place in the bathroom where they could hide it, and from that he learned the woman's name was Kayla Mueller. The 26-year-old, from Prescott, Arizona, had been doing humanitarian work near Aleppo when she was abducted while leaving a hospital.

Motka described how The Beatle they knew as George brought Mueller into the cell with around 17 male hostages and she 'read out a statement about who she was'. Motka said: 'She was stoic. She just held herself really well to the point where one of the Beatles said: 'She's braver than any of you lot'.

Her captors . . . even asked her to reassure another hostage who was 'really scared'. They brought Mueller into the room with Louisa Akavi, a New Zealand Red Cross nurse, because she was struggling to cope with being imprisoned.

He told the jury: 'Louisa came across as really scared. Someone who was relatively new to the game – it's a game of survival. She wasn't doing well which is the reason they brought Kayla in as well. Kayla was brought in to help calm her down'.

While Motka was released, Mueller's fate was far worse and she was offered as a sex slave to former ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi who repeatedly abused her.

Her death was confirmed in 2015 and al-Baghdadi was killed in a US Special Forces raid in 2019.

Akavi's identity was only revealed in 2019, more than five years after her kidnap, and it is unclear if she is still alive. Akavi was taken hostage by Isis in 2013, but her captivity was kept secret for five years before the Red Cross went public in an appeal for information, despite requests from the [New Zealand Government](#) to keep her plight secret. The Government feared that any publicity might put Akavi's life at risk.

Akavi's ultimate fate remains a mystery, and while the Red Cross believed she may still be alive, either in continued captivity or in a refugee camp somewhere, hope has faded the longer there is no news.

Akavi had been nursing on the frontline in Syria when her Red Cross convoy was ambushed, and she was taken hostage. There were initial attempts by her captors to negotiate a ransom for millions of dollars, but one was never paid.

Akavi had previously worked on the frontline in Iraq and elsewhere, and survived a hospital massacre in Chechnya that saw fellow nurses killed.

In a statement at the time of her name being released, Red Cross said Akavi had dedicated her life to those affected by war and violence. An experienced nurse and midwife, Akavi had worked with the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement since 1987 when she was deployed to Malaysia to help Vietnamese refugees. Syria was her 17th field mission.

She is known to have shared a prison with Americans Steven Sotloff, James Foley and others, whose brutal decapitations by their Isis executioners struck terror around the world.