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DEEP COVER IN THE UK WITH SHAY DOYLE

- [Intro] [00:00] Welcome to the Crime Redefined Podcast, produced by Zero Cliff Media. Coming to you from the US Bank Tower, high above downtown Los Angeles. In our podcast we drill deep into forensics and criminal investigation from the viewpoint of the defense, as well as explore the intersection of the media and the justice system.
- Dion:** [00:21] Thanks for joining us on Crime Redefined. We hope everyone is well and enjoying our podcast. Today's guest is a man of mystery. In fact, Mehul, we don't even know his real name.
- Mehul:** [00:32] Yes, we are interviewing a man who goes by the name of Shay Doyle, and the reason he does not use his real name is because he was a high-profile law enforcement agent in the UK who worked deep deep undercover in and around Manchester for a number of years. So, you can only imagine how dangerous that mission was.
- Shay's got a new book coming out entitled "Deep Cover: How I Took Down Britain's most Dangerous Gangsters."
- Dion:** [01:01] Shay wrote this book along with Scott Hesketh, and he was an investigative journalist, TV and radio producer. Scott has written for all the biggies, publications such as The Times, Daily Mail, The Guardian and Vice. He writes about intense topics such as prisons, terrorism, murders, and organized crime.
- Mehul:** [01:20] Yes, and as such, the pairing of Scott and Shay works wonderfully in this book. This is definitely a book that does not disappoint. It's just such a very detailed description of what it takes to work deep undercover in the highest stakes policing, you know, just in the most dangerous of situations.
- Dion:** [01:42] Absolutely, and I'm not going to give anything away, but even more importantly, it sheds light in Shay's book on the high price that undercover agents pay in terms of their health and well being. These are some things that we just don't think about.
- Shay went through hell for sure. And hopefully this book, it helps in his healing.
- Mehul:** [02:01] Well, Dion, let's now go on an adventure into the UK's most dangerous neighborhoods and the gangsters that operate there.
- Dion:** [02:09] Shay, thank you so much for joining us on Crime Redefined today.

Shay: [02:13] Yeah, hi great to be here guys. Thank you very much for having me.

Dion: [02:17] You're welcome. Hey, Mehul and I really enjoyed reading your new book and are excited to talk to you about your incredible, incredible story.

Shay: [02:26] Great, no, great to speak to you. Thanks very much for having me.

Mehul: [02:30] Yeah, so, Shay to kind of get warmed up here, for some of the readers who may not be familiar with some of the UK terminology and slang, or even like police speak, let's start with having you define a few words if you don't mind?

Shay: [02:44] Yeah, let's do it.

Mehul: [02:45] Okay, so when you are conducting an investigation, what is the plot?

Shay: [02:51] So, the plot, when I was working undercover, the plot would be the area of the location where I was operating. So I would refer to it in reports or in debriefs as -- when I was on the plot. So, for example, one of the areas I infiltrated was a place called Moss Side in Manchester, and I would refer to it as "the plot."

Mehul: [03:13] Okay. And what does it mean if somebody is a grasser?

Shay: [03:17] A grass, okay. A grass is an informant. Someone who has a relationship with the police and gives them information.

Mehul: [03:28] Okay. How about a straight-goer?

Shay: [03:31] So a straight-goer is somebody who is not a criminal, a non-criminal.

Dion: [03:35] And then one word that comes up a lot in your book, a punter?

Shay: [03:40] A punter? So a punter might be someone I'm doing a deal with. Some one I'm buying or selling and doing a deal with.

Dion: [03:47] Oh great. How long would you say this book has been in the works? And I'm curious, how did you connect with your co-author?

Shay: [03:56] It's complete chance. So, well I'll say complete chance, to be fair Scott who I wrote the book with, he's sort of a pretty established journalist here in the UK and he did some work where he was embedded with the gang unit in Greater Manchester, the Greater Manchester Police. And someone had told him that there was this mythical person who'd infiltrated Moss Side where the gang unit operated and had basically lived there as a gangster. And so he sort of made some inquiries and I ended at a do where he was. And he tapped me on the shoulder and said -- I believe you're the undercover guy that infiltrated Moss Side. And so I said, yeah, how do you know, kind of thing.

So we got chatting and he said, look, I think you've got a fantastic story, I think it would make a great book. And I kind of laughed him out of the building really, thinking, who's going to be interested in that? He said, look, let me sit down with you for a day, let me put some words together, let me take it to some publishers, let's see what comes back. What harm can it do?

And two weeks later we had a deal with Penguin. So there you go.

Dion: [05:02] Wow, so really you didn't really have any designs on or thoughts about doing a book, it was just him approaching you, and then sitting down getting a couple of stories on paper, and then that was that?

Shay: [05:15] Pretty much. I mean, you know, it never entered my head to write a book. And it caused me some sleepless nights at the start because, given the kind of work I was involved in [i didn't really want to put my]05:28 above the parapet, and sort of show myself, if you like. So it did cause me some sleepless nights, but I weighed it up, and all in all, I think I've made the right decision to get the story out there.

Dion: [05:41] Well, we think so, like we've said it's a great read. So we want to establish a little bit of background, tell us about your life growing up in Manchester and what your family dynamic was like and then how all of that prepared you to be an undercover officer?

Shay: [05:57] Yes, so I don't know what you guys know about Manchester in England, but it's got a reputation as such. It's an area that's historically been connected with a lot of gangs and street gangs and sort of organized criminality, it's got quite a presence around that. It's a real melting pot of diverse sort of back grounds, Irish background, you know, lots and lots of diversity.

And I grew up in an area that was a pretty rough part of town. I grew up in a second generation Irish family, My mom was one of nine. She had seven brothers, and all of them were on the periphery of criminality to varying degrees. My uncle was probably much more of an organized criminal, quite a serious sort of criminal, and then her brothers in varying degrees were involved in petty criminality, from shoplifting to you name it.

So I had a sort of upbringing around that sort of thing and criminality. My dad, hard working guy, but he'd been fetched up in the care system and had a tough childhood, so he had his own problems. So yeah, I had a pretty tough chaotic upbringing to a degree, but learned a lot and certainly gathered skills subconsciously, I think at the time that I took into my career later on when I was working undercover.

Mehul: [07:22] Well, Shay I see that you joined the military at the ripe young age of 16 and it seemed like a perfect fit for you. First of all, what year was that?

Shay: [07:31] 1994.

Mehul: [07:33] 1994, okay. So I mean, do you think that had you stayed in the military you could have had a fulfilling life long career?

Shay: [07:42] Yeah, I think to be honest with you, I think what worked against me in the military was joining so young, because I was 16 and I was a child. You know, I look back now, I think I was a bloody child, you know. And I think possibly if I'd joined a little bit maturer I would have had the full career in the military and maybe gone on to do some interesting things in the military. But, you join at 16, you do, you know, I did nearly eight years, you start to think that the grass is greener, you're going to give other things a go. I met a girl, and life changes, and you think you're missing something at home. And then unfortunately my dad committed suicide.

So, kind of, the hankering to be near the home and my mom and family became stronger than the military for me.

Dion: [08:24] Sure. You know, let's move in after the military and you started to get into do undercover work. Can you tell our listeners what is a level one undercover officer and what did you have to endure to become one?

Shay: [08:38] Yeah. So within the UK policing framework there's level two and level one undercover officers. So level two, as the number of sort of says, it's the level below level one obviously. And they will sort of do the character of a low level drug user and do small low level drug buys of user amounts of heroin, crack cocaine and that kind of stuff. And they will dress up as a street person who's addicted to crack or heroin. And they'll go out and it's a really dangerous job, and they go out into neighborhoods and they'll buy crack and heroin all day long. Then they'll go back, gather their evidence, go back the next day until there's lots and lots of subjects who need arresting for drug dealing. That's a typical level two operation. They may last a month, they may last six months.

So level one is the highest level of undercover work that you can do here in the UK. And it basically means that once you're qualified you can work for any UK police service, any foreign partner such as the FBI for example could utilize a Level one UC from the UK, European police forces as I did do.

And to get there it's quite a stringent testing selection procedure, takes around nine months from start to finish. And you start off doing psychological testing, psychometric testing, intelligence testing, various role plays. And it all culminates leading to a concentrated course at the end of it, where you are basically put through sleep deprivation, put into really sort of stressful environments and stressful situations to see how you cope and perform.

Sleep deprivation becomes key. I mean you really find out who people are when you strip them back with no sleep and put them in them stressful positions, and can they still think, can they still operate, are they safe to operate when that stress is hitting them? Because level one UCs will do operations sometimes that can last years, you can

go undercover for years. Very much like Donnie Brasco in New York, when he infiltrated the Mafia, I think he did six years. Sometimes it could be up to six, seven years sometimes.

So you have to have somebody that is completely self sufficient, self reliant, self motivated, isn't going to wilt at the first sign of stress, isn't going to sort of lay down and die, someone that's got that motivation to crack on and get the job done.

Mehul: [11:12] So you talked about one night during your training where the superiors kind of said, hey, we'll get you some beer and some pizza and you don't have to wake up till nine a.m. the next day. Can you kind of tell us why you thought something was up and then just briefly what happened after that?

Shay: [11:29] Yeah, they're slowly ramping up the sort of paranoia, they're trying to make you think that you're always being watched 24/7. Everything you do is being monitored, and every little thing that you say or do is going to come back and haunt you. And throw in the sleep deprivation, you start to believe it, you know, and I just had this feeling, you know, we may have had four or five days straight sleep deprivation by this point, get a beer, get a pizza and some of the people, some of the candidates dived straight in. And I was just like, this is just too good to be true. We're not here for fun and pizza, beers and pizza, we're here for a reason.

So I just thought, you know what, I'm going to get some sleep, grab it where you can. The military thing kicking in I think. The military thing certainly, when you could sleep in the military, you slept, you know, because you never know when you were going to need your energy reserves. So that was just my thinking.

Then sure enough, yeah, tomorrow morning's a late start, you know, have a beer. Sure enough, two o'clock in the morning, the door goes in and we're frog marched outside by guys in balaclavas and strips, and, told them we're back out on a task now. So yeah, it's all to mess with your mind and play with your resilience.

Mehul: [12:42] So it sounds like the golden ring then to get through all that was to join Omega. So how old were you at that point, and what exactly is Omega and why is that such a distinguished group of folks?

Shay: [12:53] So Omega was the level one undercover unit of Greater Manchester Police. And they were pretty much the sort of real founders and forbears of modern day undercover work in the UK. And they really sort of were the first people out there, along with the Met in London doing infiltrations into the football hooligans and stuff like that. And they had a really forward thinking guy who ran the unit at the time who said, look, this tactic is so successful, that we could use this against serious organized criminals and in counter terror operations.

So he set about redesigning the units to basically select officers who could come in, get through the selection procedure and become part of Omega. So it was a really sort of

prestigious thing to become a member of Omega. And when I did the selection course, there was about 400 people attempted it and three of us passed.

Dion: [13:59] And how old were you when you joined?

Shay: [14:01] I was 26.

Dion: [14:03] You see that was one of the reoccurring kind of like themes as I was reading this, was taking your age at the time to what you were doing. And I kept thinking, wow this guy is 24. Wow this guy is 25, 26 years old. And I'm just like, my head was really exploding trying to take that, marry those two thoughts together.

Shay: [14:24] Yeah. Yeah. I think if you were any older and maturer you wouldn't do it.
[laughter]

Dion: [14:29] Yeah, you'd know better. Sometimes being young and dumb pays off -- is that what you're saying?

Shay: [14:34] Yeah, absolutely.

Dion: [14:36] You know, you drew a really interesting comparison to the movie, "Training Day," when you were being inaugurated into the UC work. Can you explain why?

Shay: [14:44] Yeah. So, as I started going through the process the main head instructor, who was an ex parachute regiment soldier who was a veteran of the Falklands War, and he's identified me and basically thought, this lad's got a bit of talent for this work. He took it upon himself to take me under his wing. And I passed the selection, I passed the course, but that doesn't mean you're the finished article. That doesn't mean you're ready to throw into an operation. You know, there's a lot of work to be done and you've got to knock the edges off.

So this guy, Christie Vincent as we call him in the book, he grabbed me and he spotted my potential and he really really gave me everything he knew. And he was rough with me, he was tough to me, he sort of really tried to break me down, but I knew it was because he wanted me to be the best at it. And he felt I could, and it really sort of resonated me that line in training day where Denzel Washington says to, is it Ethan Hawke -- "it takes a wolf to catch a wolf." And that's exactly what he did to me.

Dion: [15:46] I love that.

Shay: [15:47] He made me more of a criminal than the criminals.

Dion: [15:51] Well let's talk about when you first put this all into play in your first plot. So who was Mikey O'Brien? What went into creating him and what was his ultimate mission?

Shay: [16:02] So Mikey O'Brien was my alter ego. That was the name of the legend I had when I worked in Moss Side. So we'll just talk about my side. So Moss Side is an area of

Manchester that has suffered disproportionately with firearms and gang related violence, numerous murders, numerous unsolved murders, gangs firing automatic weapons in the street. You know, I'm sure you guys see a lot of this over in the USA.

And it's an area that historically was known as Gunchester. It was a real Wild West, if you like, it was the last sort of Wild West. It was probably one of the the worst, roughest gang afflicted places in the UK. And it's predominantly a black area, and I'm a white guy. So nobody really wanted to do the job because of the dangers and the risks. And it was put around all the undercover sort of network in the UK -- we're looking for somebody to infiltrate Moss Side and the gangs down there. And either they didn't want it, they felt it was too too risky, too dangerous, because when we work undercover, we're not armed, you know, we're not armed over here.

So nobody really wanted it. And then there was, what kind of profile do we need? Do we need a black guy because a lot of the gangs historically were black, albeit don't get me wrong, they weren't exclusively black, there was white guys mixed in with the black guys, but historically predominantly black guys. And nobody wanted it. So it was seen as the poisoned chalice of undercover work.

They approached me because I did pretty well on the course, I sort of came top of the course, I'd done some work when I first arrived with Christie where I'd sort of excelled and put some people away and shown that I was the real deal. And they said, would you be interested in doing it? Would you do it? We think you can do it, if anyone can pull it off, we think it would be you.

So being the young and dumb as we said before, thinking that well it's bounced off me and nothing can hurt me, and I wanted to prove myself and arrogance or whatever, the arrogance of youth or whatever it may be, I decided yeah, I'm going to be the man that does this.

Mehul: [18:23] You know one thing you said that stuck out, for us in the US, the fact that you're doing this deep undercover work in the most dangerous area and you don't have a gun just kind of blows our mind.

Dion: [18:36] Mehul, you stole my question.

Mehul: [18:38] Yeah, sorry, about that.

Dion: [18:40] Crazy, when I read that.

Mehul: [18:42] So you described later in other operations that there is a firearms unit that can come in in certain situations, but I mean what is the criteria to actually have armed officers work on something?

Shay: [18:54] Well undercover, you just don't carry firearms in the UK, it's as simple as that. It's just not within our legislative framework, it's not what we do. Obviously in England we do have access, we do have firearms units that can come in and deal with those

issues, but they just would not have been aware that I was working undercover there. So in the UK you are very much alone. You have a phone and direct line to your cover officer who looks after your welfare while you're undercover, and he is your direct line to any cavalry that may be coming. But by the time they've come it would all be done and over with.

Mehul: [19:30] But just a quick question, I mean if you're portraying a villain, would it look out of place to not have a gun?

Shay: [19:37] No, because I think the culture here in the UK is very different from the US. A lot of our criminals here who carry firearms, yes, you will get some that carry a firearm daily and routinely, but generally what they'll do here is they'll have firearms put down and they will only go and pick them up if they're going to go and use them, and then they'll put them back down. Because they don't want to get caught with a firearm because it's a mandatory five year sentence.

Dion: [20:03] I noticed that was kind of a reoccurring theme. In fact it's going to kind of lead into my next comment. Is the scene, the part where you go into the house, you're in first and you encounter the criminal in the bed with the, I think it was a Benelli 12 gauge or something, and you've got no... The guys with the guns are on the outside, you're charging in and you got to close the distance on him so he doesn't get it out. But he wasn't he like a place where they held guns for criminals?

Shay: [20:33] Yeah, that was it. He was the store man. So he was basically a patsy, and they would store firearms there. I mean that was after I was undercover. But yeah, I kind of peeled the duvet back and there he was with a Benelli pump action shotgun and a Glock pistol. So I just jumped on him, instinctively really. And, yeah I later found a Scorpion submachine gun and a Tariq 9mil in the wardrobe, as you do.

Dion: [21:06] You know, it's kind of a nice little segue to my next question, how did you get around some of the hurdles of undercover work, like not committing any crimes or not using drugs as as part of your cover? I noticed you had some of the I guess workarounds were really clever.

Shay: [21:22] Yeah, I mean, first of all I suppose the level of criminal I was playing, Mikey O'Brien was a professional armed robber. I wasn't a sort of a down and out criminal, I was a criminal with access to resources, money, nice cars, and somebody like that, you won't necessarily push around to take drugs. They would have the sort of presence to say I ain't doing that line of cocaine, I ain't doing it. So that that was something I always had in my mind. But equally just to stop getting asked to do it...

Dion: [21:55] All the time, right?

Shay: [21:56] -- I had a female undercover officer who worked alongside me as my girlfriend, and we used to say that we were trying for IVF to have a baby and that I needed to stay clean, and all that kind of stuff, and I'd done it in the past and been on steroids and

been on coke and what not. And it's actually quite surprising, when you give that sort of human story to a lot of criminals, they'll start to protect you -- hey, they're trying for a baby. They've actually got a real human side to them, and so it just wasn't really an issue for me, drugs.

Dion: [22:28] I also thought that there was, Mehul and I thought it was interesting, a high level of fitness involved with criminals. Everybody was into Thai boxing and fitness and working out. That was really interesting.

Shay: [22:39] Well, certainly, at the level I was, a lot of the gang members, a lot of the serious organized criminal guys, your physical capability is your prowess really. Because if you're going to go on the road and do a bank robbery, or do a cash in transit robbery, you need to be fit and that's what I was purporting I was, a cash in transit robber, a serious armed robber. So that definitely is a thing here in the UK, that your more organized criminals, they take pride in their appearance and they're gym rats.

Dion: [23:16] You know what, can you take us to Cambridge? Here in the States, we think of like this glamorous kind of university town, but tell us about Mikey Bulger and why he was sent to Cambridge?

Shay: [23:28] So yeah, I was Mikey Bulger over in Cambridge. So, basically I needed to get out of Manchester, it was close, it was my home city, I was getting compromised all the time there. I'd taken out some really good level players in Moss Side, but it was getting sort of silly me staying there.

So a job was put to me to do in Cambridge. And again, we think of Cambridge as this university town, this pretty place, and that's how I thought about it to be honest. And then I drove down there thinking this is going to be great. And they took me to the local, as you call them over there projects, the housing estate and it was pretty grim. Everyone was smoking crack, everybody was a thief, everybody was a burglar. There was prostitutes, there was guys up from London taking over houses and selling crack cocaine. It was a pretty rough place.

And so I set myself up there as a hijacker, a lorry hijacker who was involved in buying stolen property. And so I basically integrated myself into the criminal community and ended up buying over £300,000 worth of stolen property from vehicles, motorbikes, jewelry, televisions, you name it. And I spent about 13 months there undercover.

Dion: [24:41] Yeah, you were running a brisk business there.

Shay: [24:43] Oh, yeah, I mean if it had been a real business, I'd have been a rich man.

Dion: [24:47] Could have retired, right?

Shay: [24:49] Absolutely, yeah, I'd be in the Bahamas now. So yeah, it went really well the operation. But it sounds really glamorous doesn't it? People think about undercover and

the movies and that, but you know what it's really lonely work. It's very anxiety inducing. It can play with your psyche, you start to get paranoid. Are people have they caught you? Do they think you're a cop? And when you start doing it, I was doing it for years at a time, I wasn't doing it for a week here, a week there. I was doing it for years at a time. So it can play with your psyche, and that's eventually what it did with me.

Dion: [25:30] It's astonishing that you were able to keep all of that straight for so long, it really goes to your strength. But before we move on, I got to say I laughed out loud about the CIA laptop being stolen.

Shay: [25:42] Yes, yes.

Dion: [25:44] I mean, you can't make that up.

Shay: [25:46] No, I know exactly, you couldn't make it up could you? But, yeah they owe me one, the American government owe me one.

Dion: [25:52] Haha. Play that card if you ever have problems getting into customs, right.

Shay: [25:55] Absolutely.

Mehul: [25:58] Alright Shay, let's talk about I guess maybe the main villain of the book, Dale Cregan, the one eyed killer. You actually crossed paths with him very early I guess in your career and in his career. Tell us about how you did first cross paths with him and what stuck out to you about Cregan that you knew he would be trouble later on?

Shay: [26:19] So, before I went undercover, I did a couple of years in uniform as a cop doing normal sort of response duties, and then I very quickly got asked to join an organized crime unit, which was plain clothes work do surveillance and stuff like that.

So Cregan and some of his associates were very young at that point, younger than myself, and they were an up and coming crime group and they were very much involved in burglaries and low level drug dealing. But they were violent, they were involved in violent robberies of vehicles and stuff like that, sort of increasing levels of violence used in their offending.

And so they came on my radar. Me and a colleague set up an operation to target them. So as part of that, you want to get to know what their routines are, who they associate with, what vehicles they use. So I really sort of took a really close look and put them under the microscope. So I got to know pretty much about them and their personalities and ways. Lots of criminals you can engage with and they're quite gregarious and they manage you as we manage them, and you can even have a laugh with some of them. But Cregan and some of his crew, they just weren't of that ilk, they had a real nasty, malevolent streak to them. And I knew early in my career that they would grow and become much bigger, which is what they did.

Dion: [27:47] You know, you laid some great ground work for this, foundation for this. Can you tell us about the turbulent times in Gangland UK that ultimately led to the murder of the two female officers by Dale Cregan?

Shay: [27:58] Yeah, so, Cregan sort of aligned himself to an East Manchester crime family, like a really established crime family and they were in a dispute with another crime family. And both equally as violent as each other. Both access to guns and both sides had committed serious acts of violence on numerous occasions, involved in drug dealing, loan sharking, you name it. And that had gone on for many, many years.

It culminated in a dispute in a pub. A bit of a fight kicks off, words over nothing really. And then, yeah, someone decides, the opposite side to Cregan have got to go. So the opposite side are in a pub one night, Cregan pulls up in a stolen car with a couple of his guys, he has a balaclava on, walks into the pub and shoots the son of the head of the group dead in the pub, and shoots three others as well. They live, and the son of the head of the organized crime group dies.

So then now we've got a situation where you've got a very violent man whose son's just been murdered seeking revenge. Or at least Cregan thought he was seeking revenge. Lots and lots of threats. Lots of now police, we've got a serious situation on our hands here that we need to manage. We really do not want these people going out shooting willy nilly.

Mehul: [29:22] And the father and son, that's the Shorts?

Shay: [29:25] The Short family, yes, that's correct. Yeah, the Short family. So then, I think it's about two or three weeks after he kills Mark Short, the son, David Short the father's in his back garden and Cregan and one of his friends turn up at his back garden and shoot him dead and throw a grenade at him, in his back garden and kill him.

Dion: [29:45] Geez.

Shay: [29:47] And it was the first time in the UK that grenades had been used in anger, if you like, outside Northern Ireland. So we've now got a really serious situation.

Mehul: [29:58] Then there was a lot of scrutiny on Cregan obviously, because now you have this escalating gang war, what were some of the tactics used to get at Cregan? And then if you could just tell us at least briefly about the ambush of the two female officers?

Shay: [30:12] Yeah, yeah. So because I'd been involved with investigating his crime group earlier in my career, I was pulled in. And the police were using every covert tactic you can think of, bugs in houses, you name it, they were they were doing it. And I got pulled in and none of it was working. He was a criminal who had access to cash, resources, criminal associates all over the country. So he's a very difficult person to pin down, plus he was very disciplined about his use of the phone and things like that. So

he was proving quite a difficult person to to house and capture. Plus he had access to firearms and grenades and willing to use them with not a great deal to lose now.

So I was dragged in and said, look we can't get this guy, we need to sort of go the old fashioned way and get out on the ground and get information off people who may know. A lot of the cops were coming back with their tail between their legs really. I think it takes a certain kind of cop to swim in them circles and get information, and I had a reputation as one who could do that, along with a couple of others.

So they put us together and we got out on the ground and basically did what we do, and started making waves and putting doors in, locking up some of his gangster friends and shaking them down for information. But it wasn't all sort of enforcement work. We would pay people, we were adept at trying to make friends with people, finding out what their Achilles heel was to get the information. And all we were trying to do effectively was bring the manhunt to a safe closure really, get him in custody with no more killing.

And the night before he killed the two cops, I get a phone call from an informant, and I'm told that he's in the area, which I report back. I come back into work and I end up sort of monitoring phones overnight to see if I can get more information about where he might be to house him, so we can get firearms unit down there. I think about that morning, no further information comes.

I go out that morning and I put a door in, I put a door through and conduct a warrant 300 meters away from where he actually was, and sort of shake down one of his drug dealer gangster friends and leave there empty handed. He won't tell me where he is. And the words he said to me was -- even if I knew where he was, I wouldn't tell you because I'm more scared of him than you. So that's what he said to me that morning, which always resonates with me, stayed with me really.

And then literally a few hours later I get a phone call off my boss, Cregan's handed himself in at Hyde Police Station. He's just killed two female officers, and as we know, he fired numerous rounds at them and threw a grenade at them. And then he drove a car down...

The night before -- sorry, just going back a bit -- he kept a family hostage with children in bed, in this family, he kept them hostage in there overnight until he decided he was going to do, obviously kill the two cops. Lured them on with a phone call saying there'd been a window put through at the address. Killed the two girls unfortunately. And then I got tasked to go and deal with him in the immediate aftermath.

So myself and my colleagues race there and I had to sort of forensically bag his hands after he murdered the two girls, just to make sure that you know, we kept any blood or gunshot residue, stuff like that. I had to carry out an emergency interview about the vehicle he'd arrived in. We suspected it could be booby trapped with a grenade or anything like that. And yeah, unfortunately someone had to do it, and it was me and

my colleagues.

Mehul: [33:44] Yeah, so that leads me to my next question. In this case specifically, how in the hell were you able to keep your composure and compartmentalize what you were doing?

Shay: [33:56] I think, at the end of the day, I'd been a soldier and I'd been a cop all my life, so I think I'd become quite adept at compartmentalizing things, up until that point anyway. I don't know, you're just almost on autopilot, I was a professional cop. You know, it wasn't the first time I'd seen gunshot wounds, it wasn't the first time I've seen blood or bodies. Unfortunately, the career choices I'd made, these things were pretty standard and normal. Not that the killing two cops is normal, that isn't. But, I just was able to switch off that part of my brain and deal with it as a professional police officer, which is what the situation needed.

Mehul: [34:44] And then I assume that requirement of becoming hardened to this stuff, I would assume that that would affect your personal life on some level?

Shay: [34:52] Yeah, well, certainly after Cregan my mental health started to suffer. But it wasn't just the Cregan and the murder of the two cops. It was everything I've done, really. Some of the treatment I've had from management as well massively impacted my mental health. And I wasn't particularly looked after very well by the police after the undercover work. And just slowly, it was a slow dripping tap with me, and my mental health started to really sort of decline.

Being a cop, being an ex soldier, you don't sort of put your hand up and say, I think I need help. What you do is you throw yourself deeper into work, which is what I did.

Dion: [35:32] You know, that's a great statement for us to pivot on. How did it all go wrong? Why do you think so many people in the department had it in for you? At least that's how it reads.

Shay: [35:40] Yeah. I think it was just a clash because there was a huge clash of personalities in there. You had management of the undercover unit who had no experience around undercover work. And so when I would...

I was pretty experienced by that point dealing with undercover work and the intricacies of it. They had not been been in that world. They hadn't been in operative. They hadn't even been around it as a detective, on the management side of it. They were new into that world.

And when I would tell them no, that's wrong, you shouldn't do that -- I think it maybe come cross as maybe an arrogant or something. But it certainly wasn't meant that way. It was because I knew better. I had more experience.

Unfortunately, some management see that as an asset and some see it as a threat. And unfortunately, I think I was seen as a threat.

Mehul: [36:31] Well, Shay, something that happened towards the end of your career, the last few years of your career, was the infamous bombing at the Ariana Grande concert in 2017. Can you tell us a little bit about that, and what role you had in the investigation?

Shay: [36:50] So, obviously, Salman Abedi was the bomber, Libyan bomber, and he took it upon himself to bomb a children's concert, of the Ariana Grande concert, which was largely attended by young people and children, really. Pretty evil act. Pretty heinous evil act. And I wasn't involved in the night, but in the immediate aftermath, I was a detective sergeant, now, in the Serious Organized Crime Unit, and we were all made available to the Northwest Counterterrorism Unit.

And I initially led a search for CCTV of the bomber's approach to the arena, and we were able to locate some of him getting out of a taxi and things like that. And then I was working pretty much 18 hour days doing -- it was all hands to the pump, really. It was all hands to the pump. Everyone mucking in, children dead, and just the horrific incident that had gone on. Everybody just wanted to do everything they could and the best they could to find out what had gone on, and just just absolutely abhorrent.

And then I was part of the team that we went through, we went and located two guys that were connected to the bomber. Ended up back in my old stomping ground in Moss Side where I worked undercover, and we went through the door and arrested a couple of guys there who were connected to the bomber.

Dion: [38:13] It sounds like all roads lead back to that plot, as you say.

Shay: [38:20] Yeah, it haunted me, and still does to a degree.

Dion: [38:25] And then it was fascinating to read that you were actually working the memorial site as well, the days after the bombing, correct?

Shay: [38:31] Yeah. The memorial was a really sort of emotional a place called St. Ann's Square in the center of Manchester. It was like a sea of flowers of well wishers and people grieving. And every night people would come down there and just grieve, and having show of respect and pay silent for those that had lost their lives.

But I was acutely aware that this was a real...

Dion: [38:53] Another opportunity?

Shay: [38:54] A secondary area to hit. If I was a terrorist, I'd be thinking, a great place to hit, you've got a large concentration of people. So of course we had firearms and big police presence down there. But I would mingle with the crowd as the other officers covertly, just to look for anything out of the ordinary and make sure that people were safe.

Dion: [39:10] Wow. Shay, what reforms do you think need to be put in place in the UK police system so that others don't have to go through what you did?

Shay: [39:21] They have to go and see and do things that most people don't see once in a lifetime. Sometimes two, three times a week. More, sometimes.

And I think management, they've got to become more knowledgeable about mental health. I think it's also going to be a culture that says it's okay to put your hands up and say, I'm struggling at the moment.

Because there's a real fear in the police. If you do that, your career is over. You're not going to let you handle a firearm in firearms again or a specialist department. They're not going to let you work undercover.

If I'd have put my hand up undercover and said, I'm really struggling, I would have been --

Dion: [39:54] That's it.

Shay: [39:54] Finished that day.

Dion: [39:55] Yeah.

Shay: [39:56] I think we need to understand that just because someone is going through a period of stress or struggling with their mental health doesn't necessarily mean their useful life is finished.

Dion: [40:05] Right.

Shay: [40:08] I think certainly in America and Canada that the police forces are way ahead of the UK, and we could learn a massive amount from them.

Dion: [40:15] I would've thought it would've been the other way around, for some reason. I thought that the UK would be out in front of the States as far as having police procedures in place.

Shay: [40:23] Absolutely not. And I think certainly in the UK at the moment, there's lots of scrutiny as there is in the USA. There's lots of scrutiny around policing, and a real disconnect between the public and the police. Bit more so than I've ever seen in my lifetime, I would say.

And I think you've probably been suffering that over in the over in the US, I think, to a degree.

But yeah, I think we need to get back to people-centered management in the police. It's always been... It's been very much about processes, procedures, and disciplinary. I think we need to get back to managing cops as people, and managers need to sort of treat people as individuals.

And I think that would achieve, you get more of that individual in the workplace, but also, you know, they may have changed the culture where they feel they can put their hand up and say, you know what, I'm struggling, I'm struggling.

Dion: [41:14] Yeah. You're just not a tool in the toolbox that you're actually as a real human being behind this work.

Shay: [41:19] Yeah. Absolutely, absolutely.

Unfortunately, I kind of have a bit of a cynical view now that, you know, I was a number, I was a tool, as you just said. And I just don't think that should be the case. I think cops are like human beings, like anybody else, and they see and do things -- destruction, death -- on an almost daily and weekly basis, and we should look after them. That's my view.

Mehul: [41:45] Absolutely.

Well, Shay, how helpful was writing this book for you to sort of process your trauma, and how are you doing today?

Shay: [41:54] Yeah. Do you know what, Ryan, the book really gave me focus. It gave me something to concentrate on. I was lost after the cops because I'd spent my life either as a soldier or a cop. And you know, 25 years of it, I didn't know what else to do. You know, I haven't got any other skills. I was really, really lost, and that really hurt my head for a while.

And then the idea of the book came along and I really threw myself into the book. And I realized that if I can get a platform to talk about mental health, particularly in emergency services and the police, then maybe I can impact change and effect change.

And it was really sort of cathartic writing the book with my co-writer. Looking at really where things had gone wrong, identifying where I could have maybe done some of the things differently, but also looking at where the police got things wrong.

So yeah, my book isn't about bashing the police. I enjoyed the police. I loved my job at the time. But yeah, we all get things wrong, and I'd love to think that there could be learning from my book.

Dion: [42:59] You know what, it doesn't read that way, at least not for us, that you were bashing. And I think that it was just kind of a statement of fact of what you went through.

But if some point in the future, if they decide, hey, they want to write some kind of a manual for dealing with this, the book is there. That's what I would follow. There's your format of what you need to address, and do something where you're three months on or three months off.

I didn't get a sense there was any decompression time for you, to be able to just relax, put your feet up, and then move on to the next? It just seems like you were always burning at a 9.5 out of 10.

Shay: [43:32] Yeah, absolutely. But equally, that was also my fault, because I wanted to operate at that level. I was always seeking the next big job. And cops will. When you're a highly motivated individual, you will seek the next biggest thing, the next most high risk operation you can get involved in.

Sometimes you need someone, you know, with more knowledge, seniority to say, let's just sit this one out. And that not be a punishment. That'd be looking after you.

Dion: [44:00] Would you have listened if someone came? Like, I know there's a number of --

Shay: [44:03] Without a doubt I would have kicked back from it. But I would have kicked back from it, but with hindsight and with maturity, having gone through what I've gone through. I think it's almost, if we build that into -- this is how we operate -- you're not always going to be operating at full tilt. Sometimes you got to take a back seat because it will give you longevity, and it will help your mental health, and your family are important as well as the operations and the jobs. I think that would take the sting out of the tail if you were telling people -- you're going to set this one out.

Mehul: [44:41] Well, Shay, in terms of some of your ex-colleagues that you're still in touch with, how prevalent are issues with PTSD for some of those folks?

Shay: [44:49] Yeah. I think it's something that a lot of cops or ex cops unfortunately hide, and lie to themselves about as I did. I lied to myself that I was unwell. I always say I was the last person to know I was unwell. And unfortunately, I think that's probably the case with a lot of people. They struggle behind closed doors. And that's what I want my book to do, maybe give people the strength to say, you know what, it's okay to go and get a bit of help. Don't get to the point he was, you know, because I lost my job, I lost my house, you know? I had to start again.

But yeah, I do have colleagues who suffer from PTSD from what they've done, and they openly talk about it. And not just the work, some of the treatment they've had that's caused PTSD.

A friend of mine who's an ex undercover officer from Omega, he's very open about it. He's wrote a book himself, actually. and he's very open about his struggles with his mental health and PTSD.

So there are some of us standing up now to talk about it. So I hope it encourages the conversation within the policing in the UK.

Dion: [45:58] Absolutely. And then speaking of that, on your book, how do you hope this book... What do you hope it will do for other people?

Shay: [46:05] Do you know what, I really, really hope that people read it as sort of the public who don't really understand police, or just think, you know, the police give out parking tickets and are there to annoy people. Kind of read it and go -- do you know what? There's actually some people out there putting themselves on the line to keep you safe in the life you have, without you even knowing it sometimes. And thank God we've got them.

And I hope that some people take that from it. Because you know, the police get a bashing sometimes. We will pick up on the one thing that they do wrong, but we never see the 99 other things they've done right. And certainly the operational. The operational end cops I work with day to day, in the main, were good people wanting to do right by people.

And I think that's right, the world across. I think that's generally the kind of person that wants to join the cops.

Mehul: [46:58] Well, Shay, obviously in the coming months you'll be busy promoting your book, but what else is next for you?

Shay: [47:05] The book, I'm working on a fiction book, so I'm currently sort of getting my head in the in the laptop writing that, and sort of seeing where I can take that.

Mehul: [47:17] You've got the writing bug, it sounds like?

Shay: [47:19] Yeah, definitely, definitely without doubt, I've got the writing bug. And I've got so much some sort of real life material buzzing around my head that I feel that could be great fiction, sort of realistic fiction.

And there's talk of maybe the book being turned into a drama or something like that.

Dion: [47:38] Definitely. That'd be awesome.

Shay: [47:40] Yeah, so I'm hoping if that does happen, I could be involved in the production side of that, and advising around it. And pretty much, I'm open to offers. But my big passion is mental health, and guiding young kids away from the stakes like I grew up on. Rough areas, taking, trying to get them away from guns and gangs and stuff like that, and knife crime, which we're struggling with here in the UK.

A big passion of mine was boxing growing up. I was very much into boxing, and a friend of mine is a professional boxer and we would love to get like a gym going where we could try and get kids away from environments where we grew up.

Dion: [48:16] Excellent. That's great.

Shay: [48:18] So that would be my passion, really.

- Mehul:** [48:20] And just out of curiosity, do you do any mentoring of people who are still in the police department or youngsters just starting out?
- Shay:** [48:28] Well, funny enough, and it's funny you should say this, because I offered to go back to a police force to speak. I offered my time for free to speak. And they didn't want me to come in.
- Dion:** [48:37] You got to be kidding. Wow. The abuse continues. So to this day, they're still still on it, huh?
- Shay:** [48:45] Yeah, yeah. They didn't want me to come in. I think they think I'm a police basher or I hate the police and the organization. But they couldn't be more wrong. I've got so much respect for the boys and girls that go out and put themselves at risk and on the ground every day. But I'd love to stand there and say to them, look, just look after yourself as well, because, you know, don't end up like me. Don't be Shay.
- Mehul:** [49:07] Well, Shay, what a pleasure speaking with you today. We appreciate your time. And we wish you good luck with this book. I mean, we can't recommend it enough.
- Dion:** [49:16] Fantastic interview. Really appreciate your time.
- Shay:** [49:19] Honestly, guys, thank you so much for having me on, and it's been a pleasure. Thank you.
- Mehul:** [49:25] A couple of housekeeping points, Dion, before we get into our discussion. First, during the interview, we asked Shay about his thoughts on needed police reforms in the UK. And unfortunately, there was a bit of a technical glitch at the beginning of his answer. But not all was lost, as we still got to hear a lot of his thoughts, so I just cut out the first part of the answer and we've got everything else.
- Dion:** [49:45] I guess that's to be expected. It was an international interview, and these things happen.
- Mehul:** [49:49] This is just a hazard of this business. The other thing, Dion, was you had dropped the CIA laptop story from the book. But the thing is, I don't think that our listeners had a frame of reference what you guys were talking about. Could you just break that down?
- Dion:** [50:03] Sure. I really thought this was funny when I read the book. But basically, Shay and his team went undercover in Cambridge, and they're tasked to buy stolen goods, and one of the items that he bought was a CIA laptop that was stolen from an agent that was stationed there. So he was able to buy this laptop, see who the owner was and then return it, and luckily, hopefully, no information was leaked out on it. But this is why he says in our interview with him that the US Government owes him one.
- Mehul:** [50:34] Yeah. [laughs] No doubt. That could have been a real disaster. And an embarrassment for the CIA agent of course.

There's a lot of great little stories like that in the book. Just to give you a couple of my thoughts. One thing that I was impressed about is how detailed the setup is for these undercover operations. In other words, what Shay would describe as a legend.

So in other words, what is his back story? Well, you've got to give him a criminal record that if people were to look it up, they could see it. You've got to give him a new ID. You got to get his fingerprints out of the system, or swap them with someone else. Not only that, but he goes into great detail in the book about how...

Well, part of his backstory was that he had relatives in Ireland and he hung out in a certain area. So what did he do? He went and lived there for a while. And he went to the pubs and he kind of got a feel for it so that he could talk intelligently about it if he was ever pressed. And just things like, you know, he and his partner, they didn't just get right into busting people, they went to the local pubs, they put out a certain air about themselves. They rode about in their Mercedes. They had a certain attitude. So this is weeks and weeks and weeks of you know getting their rep out there before they actually really did any police work, per se.

And another interesting point, I think, in the book, and actually Shay hit on this, is that it's just like any other business isn't it, that sometimes the people who are in charge haven't done the actual work. And that was really frustrating to see Shay get all of this experience and be such an asset, and then the higher ups who didn't understand the work he was doing, not taking his advice.

I mean, I've actually seen this in crime labs. I've worked in crime labs where the person in charge of the lab was not a scientist. So how does that work?

Just one more thought Dion, and then I'll throw it to you. It was interesting in his book how addictive this undercover work can be. Yes, it's dangerous. Yes, it's lonely. But what a thrill. What a rush, particularly for a guy like Shay that excels in that. Why wouldn't you want to go on to the next case, onto the higher stakes? Much like an addict would.

And he describes in the book that undercover agents did have to check in with psychiatrists quarterly, or something like that, but it was basically a sham. And as Shay said in the interview, there was none of this -- someone sitting down with him and...

Dion: [53:12] That was the part that cost him, I think, mentally and physically. This is the part that really took a toll on him.

Mehul: [53:17] Yeah, that's right. He didn't have a mentor who sat him down and said, listen man, you're great at this, but you got to have longevity, you don't want to burn out -- on and on and on.

Well, Dion, give me some of your thoughts.

Dion: [53:30] I'll try to work in reverse, the last one first.

So one of the things that was really frustrating and extremely disappointing was that he had no support. He was kind of on an island doing all this work, and you'd think that he would be supported at every turn for all of the different busts that he made, high profile busts that he made over the course of the years. And it just seemed like there was so much jealousy.

And he obviously had some support and some some key people that we're helping him along the way, but it was just amazing how much kind of like, backstabbing and stuff, and how they would really go out of their way to try to take him down. And it just seemed like it was pure spite and jealousy. Because how can you have someone so successful, and then do nothing to support them and then try to just crush them at the same time?

What do you think about that?

Mehul: [54:23] Very true. You know, people sometimes resent you if you are good at your job or knowledgeable, and they just don't want to have the pride to listen to what you have to say. It's particularly unfortunately it happens in this kind of business, where really, lives are at stake if you're not doing the right strategy and operations, or don't have the right resources. I mean, he describes an example where he had really gotten in good with this villain and he wanted to make a nice drug buy to kind of show him that he was a man, and they wouldn't front him the cash to do it, which could have put him in danger.

Dion: [55:00] It's really amazing that he's had as much success that he did with little or no support at the time. And then as far as his legend goes, it was amazing. Sometimes, while I was reading the book, I thought Shay, his character, was a real person, the way that he talked to him, and then later on when he was talking some of the -- I know we'll touch on this in a bit -- some of the mental illness, he was kind of like having like, what would Shay do? And he wanted to go back to that person. Because he knew he'd be strong. That was kind of a little bit sad, I felt sorry for him at the same time, but that's just kind of where he was, and that goes back to that he had little or no support with these kind of check ups they did for your for your mental status along the way.

I thought that was really hard to listen to, and really telling.

So let me ask you this, how excited would you be to see this as a feature film or a series made from Shay's book?

Mehul: [55:58] Oh gosh, I'd be all over it. I think I said this earlier. To me it was like watching an action adventure film. Listen, sometimes reading could be boring, let's face it. This was not. So I would love to see this on the big screen.

Dion: [56:14] "Page turner" is overused, but for me this was a page turner. I mean, I was

really hooked on every event that was taking place. And what's interesting is the way that he just matter of factly we would state some of this stuff. And I had to keep asking myself, there's no way, I thought I was reading fiction by some of the stories that he tells.

Mehul: [56:34] Yeah. The book has really, really good pacing. I mean, Shay described that he's going to write a fiction book next, and it makes perfect sense because like you say, how could this be real, when you when you read it.

Other things that are shocking in the book is this whole business about how the cops in the UK don't necessarily carry guns unless there's some big special event. He was talking about one undercover operation where he picked up this villain, and they were riding in a van I think, and he was thinking in his mind, he was concerned about, oh, does this guy have a gun, or whatever? And my thoughts were, well, of course as dangerous. But I was just thinking, well you have a gun too, and what's the big issue? But I didn't realize right away when I was reading this book that he didn't have a gun with him.

And I mean, how different is that just from the US culture, not only of policing, but of the criminals. I mean, it seems like in the US, the criminals aren't fit, they're not muscular, they're not athletic, but they all just wave a gun around.

Dion: [57:35] There's a couple of thoughts on that. One is that they don't use the guns. But I was shocked to hear how much hand grenades were used. I mean that was crazy.

Mehul: [57:45] That's taking it to the next level.

Dion: [57:46] Like, yeah, okay, guns are illegal, but we're just going to either chop you up or we're going to throw a hand grenade at you, and I was surprised at how frequent hand grenades were throughout his book with some of the gangsters that were involved.

Mehul: [57:58] Yeah, that's pretty heavy.

Dion: [57:59] And then there was one particular scene, I got a couple of points to make on that, in this book where he's going in to bust this guy, and Shay and his partner are the first one through the door, and the guys with the guns were not undercover and clearly defined, like you see those in the crime scene like a big FBI or police on the back, so they were outside, and they had the guns, but they weren't going through. And Shay and his partner were going through, and they end up meeting someone who's laying in bed with I think it was a Glock and a 12 gauge pump. And neither one of them had guns.

And I find that this was absolutely insane and takes just a huge pair of you know what, to go through that door knowing that the other people could be armed.

Mehul: [58:46] Fists? Huge fists?

Dion: [58:48] Yeah. [laughs] Huge pair of fists.

And there's a ton of ammunition and a 50 caliber, and yeah, they're just going through with their with fists. And I find this absolutely crazy. But also, and we talked about this after the interview, that there was almost like an unspoken rule that the proper villains don't carry guns, because they're afraid of what they can be put away for by carrying a gun. So that's where they were going to bust, was this new kind of industry that had popped up, where he had paid people that stored guns in their home for gangsters.

Mehul: [59:25] Yeah, it's funny how that seemed to actually be a deterrent, that penalty for the gangsters to be caught with a gun. And seems like there's some weird sort of etiquette in the UK about like, yeah, we're going to use them when push comes to shove, but we're not just waving them around like crazy, willy nilly, because it's just not worth it. So... Wow, I mean, what a different world.

Another reason that would be great to have this on the big screen to just kind of explore the cultural differences in policing and in crime, I guess.

Dion: [59:53] Absolutely. I mean, yeah, we won't carry a gun, but we'll throw a hand grenade at you.

Mehul: [59:58] Well, Shay's book, again is called Deep Cover, How I Took Down Britain's Most Dangerous Gangsters, and it will be available on March 3rd, 2022, it's published by E Berry Press which is a part of Penguin Randomhouse.

And just like anything else, your best bet at ordering the book would be to find it on Amazon.

Dion: [1:00:17] Shay is an incredible man with an incredible story, and this is a riveting book and a must read.

Thanks again to all of our Crime Redefined listeners. Looking forward to bringing you more great episodes like this one. And please be sure to follow us on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. If you're so inclined, please spread the word about us, and until next time.

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