



In the dust-choked aftermath of the suicide bombing, Sgt. Jeanine Madden stood amid the shattered remains of her platoon (AI image generated by NCO Journal staff)

The Drone Patrol, Part II: Blood for Peace

By Gerardo "Tony" Mena

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Part I

In the dust-choked aftermath of the suicide bombing, Sgt. Jeanine Madden stood amid the shattered remains of her platoon. The air was heavy, a mixture of dust, blood, and the stench of burning wreckage. She felt the weight of command now firmly on her shoulders. The handful of survivors now looked to her for direction in a landscape where the rules of engagement were as shattered as the broken bodies around them.

The drones hovered above her, their flight pattern erratic. Their systems quietly upgraded with data from the aftermath. Now, Sgt. Madden was their

Editor's Note

The **NCO Journal Creative Domain** launched with *The Drone Patrol*. Find a link to the original short story (and an alternative sequel) on the last page.

The Story So Far

In the desert, far from the United States, an attack destroys Sgt. Jeanine Madden's FOB. On patrol, she monitors the situation via her Miniature Optically Guided Drones and VR visor. A second attack leaves her as the highest-ranking survivor among a platoon that resists the idea of being led by a young woman.

only command center.

“Get it together, everyone!” she shouted, her voice cutting through the chaos. “We need to regroup and move out. The enemy is out there, and we’re not going to give them another chance to hit us.”

Yet her words didn’t have the impact she wanted or needed. The remaining Soldiers moved mechanically, going through the motions, their movements shallowed by the weight of loss and confusion. The friends and teammates they were just patrolling and joking with were now bits of pink mist hanging in the air.

Sgt. Madden, frustrated, turned away from her platoon and looked up toward the billowing smoke that was clawing its way into the sky. She muttered to herself, “This wasn’t supposed to happen. All we wanted was peace.”

The drones turned their scanners and cameras toward her in unison, like shiny black marbles, their red lights and sensors all pointed at her. They again fell into formation, moving with predatory efficiency and a new purpose. They began sweeping the area, looking for any threats or survivors. One lone drone broke off from the formation cloud and made its way toward Madden. It approached slowly, flying eerily straight and slow until it hovered near her face, the wash of the tiny rotors gently blowing her hair back.

Somehow, Madden could sense the drone was offering itself to her, not as just a machine, but as something more. Almost as if it were alive. The drone floated closer, inches from her face, as a long, thin mechanical arm with a sharp steel needle unfurled itself from the back, like a scorpion’s tail. Madden somehow knew her future, and the future of the survivors she was now responsible for, was connected to these drones. She felt this drone was not just asking her to join them but to join *with* them.

She nodded.

The drone darted quickly at her right eye, then her left, and forcefully inserted the needle into Madden’s irises, depositing a microchip into each optic nerve. Just as quickly as the drone did so, it withdrew and flew off to join its comrades in their sweeping formation of the landscape and wreckage.

Madden’s vision blurred, then cleared as the microchips fused onto her optic nerves. Data streams overlaid her eyesight, like when she wore the visor – but now she was in permanent, intimate contact with her drones. She saw through their eyes, their sensors feeding her real-time information. Every movement, heat signature, and sound was now beamed directly into her brain. She still had complete control of them,



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but now there was so much more.

They were as one. Theirs was a truly symbiotic relationship. And she was *Mother*. They would protect her from any threat. A relationship of pure trust. Together, they would bring order to the chaos.

“Get in formation,” she said, her eyes glowing a faint red from the fusion. “We need to patrol the village, establish a new temporary FOB, and plan our next steps.”

The authority in her voice was undeniable. She was sure of her role, her mission, and her new power.

As the platoon slowly began to form up, one soldier hesitated. Pfc. Andrew Hicks, barely out of his teens, stood rooted to the spot, his face pale and hands trembling. The sight of his fallen comrades had shaken him to his core.

“Sarge, I ... I can’t do this,” he stammered, his voice quivering. “What if they’re waiting for us? Out there. What if they’re planning another attack? What if the FOB still needs our help? Why are we even in this dumb ass-country?”

His voice rose to a yell. Madden turned to face him, her expression hardening.

“We don’t have the luxury of waiting, Hicks. The FOB is gone. It’s just us now. And we have a job to do.”

“But, Sarge!” Hicks’ words grew louder, more desperate. “We’re going to get ourselves killed for nothing!”

Madden turned away from the platoon, a small smile spread across her face as the drones detected the defiance in Hicks’ tone. She knew she had to make him an example.

From a logistical perspective, Hicks didn’t offer much to the platoon. He was another set of eyes to stand watch, a young back able to carry heavy loads. But he didn’t have the smarts (book, street, or otherwise) to merit the platoon’s trust or leadership.

It might as well be him, Madden thought. In a swift, coordinated movement, four drones descended upon him in unison, their red eye scanners rotating into lasers and activating with a crisp hum.

It happened so fast that it didn’t even register to

the rest of the survivors. Nobody said a word because nobody could believe it. They watched in horror as the lasers quartered Hicks' trunk and limbs. He didn't make a sound, either. It was over so quickly that his brain didn't realize his body was no longer intact. He opened his mouth as if to say something, but then his eyes rolled back, and his head tumbled away from his body as his trunk and limbs all hit the ground.

Madden took solace in knowing he probably didn't feel a thing. His sacrifice would set the tone for the rest of the survivors, so they could accomplish their mission. There would be no more defiance. From the enemy or otherwise.

The drones, now streaked with blood, returned to their cloudlike formation and hovered menacingly above, their red lights casting an eerie glow over the scene.

Private Martinez, who had just witnessed the execution, stepped back, his face pale. "Sarge, what the hell just happened? The drones – they just killed Hicks!"

Madden turned back to face the platoon.

"This is how it has to be," she said, her voice cold and resolute. "We can't afford disobedience. The drones are here to enforce order, and if you step out of line, they will act. We will bring peace. We are here now. And this is our reality. We will not fail."

The remaining 10 soldiers nodded slowly, their faces etched with terror and resignation. They understood the rules had changed. That now they had the leader they needed to survive.

Part II

Over the following weeks, the drones and Madden campaigned relentlessly against anyone they determined was connected to hostile activities. Their definition of "enemy" expanded, their tactics grew ruthless, and their surveillance became omnipresent over the surrounding villages and, eventually, the entire province. They hunted down not only the insurgents but also their families, punishing all with ties to the resistance. The strategy was brutal yet effective, instilling a deep, pervasive fear throughout the region. And in that fear, a stillness grew.

As the weeks turned into months, Madden's fortress took shape. Built from the wreckage of battles, like trophies for all to see and remember. The drones, never needing to rest, tirelessly constructed walls from scavenged metal and concrete. The fortress stood as a symbol of Madden's growing legacy and relentless pursuit of peace at all costs.

Slowly, like a wound purged of infection, the region began to heal.

Eventually, the resistance crumbled under the unyielding pressure of Madden's dark angels in the sky. Leaders who had once vowed never to bow to foreign powers now came forward, broken and pleading for forgiveness, with what was left of their families and friends in tow. All groveling for mercy.

And Madden granted it. Her goal was never to wipe out the region's people but to unite them. To help them flourish and reach their potential.

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Now, she looked at the landscape from her throne room as the sun set. Red hues splashed against the green of the trees and the blues of the waters. Slowly growing on her once blood-soaked fortress walls were purple tulips, her favorite color. And somewhere nearby, children laughed and played in the creeping twilight.

Madden pondered the cost of peace. The ocean of blood it took to create safety and silence.

To never again hear a rocket scream into the night. Or to feel the punch of an explosion against her chest, then touch all her limbs to make sure they were still attached after a “close one.”

Was it worth it? she asked herself.



Now, she looked at the landscape from her throne room as the sun set. (AI image generated by NCO Journal staff)

The sun’s final rays slithered beyond the horizon as her drones fanned out behind her, casting ominous shadows into the creeping darkness. Their red lights flickered menacingly, ready to begin their patrol, malevolent red stars piercing the night sky. ■

Gerardo “Tony” Mena is part of the social media and web design team at Army University Press. He’s a decorated Iraqi Freedom veteran and was awarded a Navy Achievement Medal with a V for multiple acts of bravery while under fire. His creative writing has been published in multiple places including *The New York Times*, and now the *NCO Journal*.

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