

Why The Woman Who Tracked Down Bin Laden Was Denied Promotion By Her CIA Bosses



A picture of the real-life CIA agent at the heart of Zero Dark Thirty – director Kathryn Bigelow's new film about the hunt for Osama Bin Laden – has emerged this week. But the young and determined agent named `Maya', who is played by actress Jessica Chastain, has been described by colleagues as combative and difficult.

Tim Walker | The Independent | The Interview People

`She's not Miss Congeniality, but that's not going to find Osama bin Laden,' one of her former CIA colleagues told The Washington Post. `Do you know how many CIA officers are jerks?' said another. `If that was a disqualifier, the whole National Clandestine Service would be gone.'

The woman, who remains undercover and is in her 30s, was reportedly passed over for promotion this year, and clashed with colleagues about who should take credit for tracking down the al-Qa'ida leader to the compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, where he was killed by US Special Forces in May 2011, in the 12.30am raid that gives Ms Bigelow's film its title.

A CIA operative since before 9/11, she was stationed in Islamabad in the years before the raid, where she worked to uncover the network of couriers that would eventually lead to Bin Laden.

Though hundreds of people were involved in the decade-long search, the Post's CIA sources acknowledge that `Maya's' contribution was crucial. Following the raid, she was awarded the CIA's Distinguished Intelligence Medal, and given a cash bonus. But she riled colleagues by responding to the award with a group email, accusing others in the agency of having obstructed her in her work. Those colleagues were further irked by the amount of attention she has received. The woman also appears, as `Jen', in No Easy Day, a book about the raid by former Navy SEAL Matt Bissonnette, who took part in the mission.

Zero Dark Thirty is Ms Bigelow's follow-up to her Oscar-winning Iraq war film The Hurt Locker (2008), and is expected to feature heavily during the 2013 awards season.

When Bin Laden was killed, the director was working on a project about the attempts to find him. Screenwriter Mark Boal tore up the script and started again, and the film began shooting in spring this year. It opens in US cinemas this week, delayed to avoid accusations that it would give an electoral boost to President Obama, who ordered the raid.

The film has caused controversy nonetheless: Ms Bigelow and Mr Boal met with officials from the White House, the Pentagon and the CIA — including the woman on whom `Maya' is based. Mr Boal, who is also a journalist, was given a CIA tour of the `vault' where the raid was planned, and the mock-up Bin Laden compound where it was rehearsed.

Last year, the Republican chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee called for an investigation into whether the Obama administration had allowed the film-makers access to classified information, a charge that Mr Boal and Ms Bigelow deny. However, an internal CIA inquiry is under way into the contact its operatives have had with the film-makers and other outsiders concerning the Bin Laden raid.