

- **Lucy Vallender had a sex change in 2010 and converted to Islam last year**
- **Says she had been a TA private in Gloucestershire but gave up after a year**
- **'I tried to do macho things but I was trying to be someone I wasn't,' she says**
- **Met already married Murad online but he didn't know she was once a man**
- **They wed in April on first meeting and have met twice for sex since, she says**
- **But her local mosque have barred her after she refused to pray with men**

By Martin Robinson



New life: Lucy Vallender 28, was formerly a male TA soldier, pictured clutching her beret, but she has since had a sex change and converted to Islam

A former trained soldier has swapped her Territorial Army beret for a veil and become Britain's first transgender Muslim woman.

Lucy Vallender used to be called Laurens and says she is finally 'true to herself' after a sex change three years ago.

The 28-year-old is now married to a Muslim man she met on an online dating site, but he did not know she was once a man when they wed.

She now wears a full veil outside her Swindon home to show the world she is married.

The former labourer said 'she used to love firing guns' and claims she drank regularly with the other squaddies as a TA private, but Lucy knew at 14 she wanted to become a woman.

'I tried to do macho things you know to stop how I was thinking, but it didn't work because I was trying to be someone I wasn't,' she said.

'I felt differently to others - I was attracted to men.

'But I suppressed my feelings and tried to live like most people my age.

'I'd go out clubbing with friends and drink a lot of alcohol.

'I had girlfriends too, but it would never get physical and always fizzled out after a couple of months.

'Joining the TA was my final attempt at trying to fit in to that kind of life but I couldn't handle it anymore and left after about a year.

'I felt like I was in the wrong body. To carry on living as a male was living a lie.'



Row: Miss Vallender says her local mosque has victimised her because they asked her to worship with men, not women



Religious: Lucy wears a black veil, prays five times a day and never drinks and has also become the second wife of a Muslim man she met online

After quitting the TA the 28-year-old started dressing as a woman and had relationships with men.

She also grew her hair and had hormone therapy before her life-changing operation.

Lucy moved from her family home in Cirencester and plucked up the courage to see her doctor in about becoming a woman.

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Miss Vallender told her GP she was 'in the wrong body' and three years ago had her sex change.

'I was so nervous and at first I could hardly form the words, but I told him I wanted to be a woman and he said 'ok' - that was that,' she said.

She then went back to work as a Ministry of Defence kitchen porter.



Past: Lucy Vallender (L), as a young boy, with her brother Soren (R) - he says he knew from a young age that he wanted to be a woman

In another major life change, she then converted to Islam because it promoted peace last September.



Sweet: Lucy as baby Laurens, and she says her family took it hard when she said she wanted to be a woman

'I had thought about it for a while but it is such a taboo I thought,' she said.

'But I did it because it is a nice religion - so peaceful.

'I felt good and I had something to believe in.

'I felt happy and relieved at last - the happiest I've ever felt in my life.'

Her conversion to Islam followed last Autumn and then she married Murad at a small ceremony at his home in London.

'I love him, he's kind and soft spoken,' she said.

'I've seen him twice since the wedding . When I do we have sex.

'I didn't tell him I was transsexual but he must have suspected it as he he's seen my scars.'

But she has run into trouble with her local mosque in Swindon, Wiltshire, as they would not let her pray with the other women.

Miss Vallender says she has been victimised by worhippers, who she says have asked her personal, and banned her because she is a transexual, and she wants to 'get justice' for transgender and Muslim people.

'They say I am the first transgender Muslim but I bet there are more - they are just frightened,' she said.



Trained: Lucy was a private in the TA, and still has her beret, but admits attempts to be macho 'did not feel right'



Worship: Lucy wears a full veil as she is the second wife of a man she met online, but prays at home after she fell out with her mosque

'The way they treated me was disgusting.

'They asked me questions about my bra cup size, asked about my Adam's apple, about my period and asked to see my birth certificate.

'They said I had to pray with the men so I left and pray at home instead.

'I hope people will change their attitudes and other people like me will realise they are free to just be themselves.'



Disagreement: The Broad Street mosque in Swindon, which Lucy Vallender claims stopped her worshipping with women, so she left





Happy: Transgender Muslim Lucy Vallender says she is now 'true to herself' after her change of gender and religion

Lucy says she signed up to the TA arm of the Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment in 2006 at the age of 21 to try and make himself more manly.

But it only made her more depressed.

'I always felt different and felt like I was in the wrong body.

'I told my mum and she was shocked to say the least.

'It just was not the done thing so I just put it to the back of my head and try and forget about it.'

A spokesman for Swindon Mosque said: 'Everybody is welcome, as long as they behave according to Islam.'