

A mother would prefer to see her convert son in a UK prison than fighting beside a Somali jihadist group, writes Richard Kerbaj

THE mother of a Muslim convert who has joined the terrorist group al-Shabaab after travelling to Somalia says she would rather see him jailed in Britain than killed on a foreign battlefield.

Sally Evans, whose son Thomas went to Somalia in 2011, said her greatest fear is that he will slaughter innocent people by becoming a suicide bomber.

The mother of two from High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire has told police about her son's activities and is keeping them informed of the content of his telephone calls home. She said she had done so in the hope that the information might help to prevent other impressionable young men from doing the same.

"I did tell the police what happened because I have nothing to hide," she said.

"I would rather have Thomas alive behind bars than dead in the middle of nowhere because he wouldn't just die innocently but die doing something that he shouldn't be doing.

"And if he took other lives, how do you live with this? If he was a suicide bomber, how would I live with that?"

Thomas, 24, is one of about 50 British jihadists who are estimated to have travelled to Somalia to fight alongside al-Shabaab. Hundreds of jihadists from the UK have also travelled to Syria.

Evans said her son, who converted to Islam in 2010



Jail my boy or he'll become a bomber

when he was 19, became more radical when he left the local mosque and began attending an Islamic prayer centre "which was run from a room behind a shop".

She had initially welcomed his conversion, hoping it would bring an end to his teenage troublemaking and would alleviate his depression after his split from a long-term girlfriend.

The change of character was dramatic. Thomas, who adopted the Islamic name Abdul Hakim, abandoned his

interest in hip-hop music, refused to watch television and would not eat from the pots and pans used to cook meals for his family in case they were "contaminated" with non-halal food.

He grew a beard, shaved his head and even began brushing his teeth with a tooth twig, traditionally used in Africa to prevent decay.

When his efforts to convert his mother and younger brother to Islam failed, he warned them that they would go to hell. "He would say, 'I

want you to convert to Islam otherwise you will burn in hell' and 'I want us to meet in paradise so I want you to convert' and 'If you converted, you'd understand what I was doing'," Evans said.

He rarely brought his Muslim friends back to the family's neat semi-detached home but Evans does recall meeting Donald Stewart-Whyte, another convert.

Stewart-Whyte had been arrested by police in 2006 in connection with the so-called liquid bomb plot to blow up planes but was cleared of any terrorism offences.

In February 2011 Thomas booked a plane ticket to Kenya but was stopped by anti-terrorism police at Heathrow.

Four months later he travelled to Egypt, telling his family that he would be studying Arabic. "When he went to the airport and he wasn't stopped [by police], I thought they mustn't be worried about him because they let him go and that put my mind at ease," said Evans.

In an email to his brother Micheal in June 2011, Thomas claimed he was attending the Al-Ibaanah Arabic centre in Cairo and casually inquired about his cats Tigger and Felix.

"Hey how you doing?" he wrote. "I spoke to Mum on the phone and said I would send the address [sic] of where I am studying. How everything going there? Mum ok? Tigger and Felix? Love you. xxx"

Weeks later Evans received

a visit from police officers who told her that Thomas had made an unsuccessful attempt to enter Kenya but she was forced to wait until the following January before she could confront him when he made a telephone call home.

According to a police note of her report about the call's content, Evans asked her son: "What are you going to do? Are you going to be a suicide bomber?" He replied: "If asked, I would, Inshallah [God willing]."

The note continues with Evans asking: "Will I ever see you again?" He replies: "No."

Evans has since received occasional calls from her son, each bringing the joy that he remains alive along with the

misery that he is fighting for a terrorist group.

In August 2012 he informed his mother he had been shot in the leg and had been taken to a "field hospital" for treatment.

He asked Evans to send him money but she refused. "I said: I can't because if I do I would be seen as supporting terrorism," she said. "He accepted that."

The police, who seized Thomas's computer but found it was so encrypted they were unable to retrieve any information, have admitted there is little they can do to help.

"I wish they had a magic wand to bring him back," said Evans.

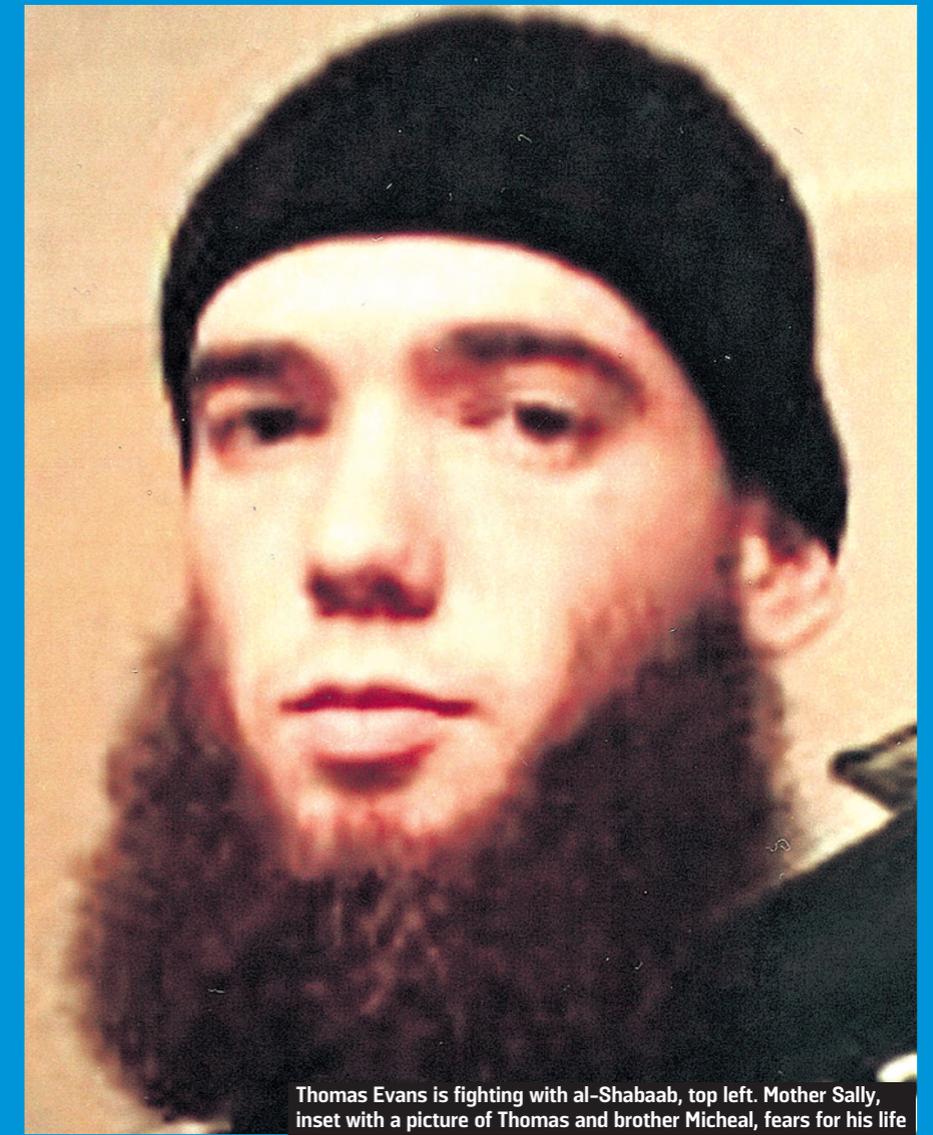
She said she was speaking out to highlight the plight of

the families of those who join terrorist groups.

She said she sympathised with the parents of Fusilier Lee Rigby, the soldier killed last year in Woolwich, southeast London, and the parents of his killers Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale, both of whom were converts to Islam.

"I think of their parents and think of how they feel... It's all about the sons and what they've done, but what about the family that they have come from? That is the thing, there is no help for the families," she said.

Two men, aged 19 and 20, have been arrested at Heathrow airport on suspicion of terrorism offences linked to Syria.



Thomas Evans is fighting with al-Shabaab, top left. Mother Sally, inset with a picture of Thomas and brother Micheal, fears for his life