

The world's fastest interview — 140 characters max per answer. The action author on Afghanistan, going undercover, and being married five times

**Witter:** What's happening?

**AM:** About to go into a meeting with ForceSelect, a company that finds jobs for service leavers. I'm a trustee.

**Witter:** You've called post-traumatic stress disorder an excuse to quit the army. Isn't that a bit unsympathetic?

**AM:** I'm enormously sympathetic — two friends committed suicide as a result of it. But there are people who use it as an excuse for a pension.

**Witter:** Should we — can we — get out of Afghanistan?

**AM:** When the job's done. We're getting there. Troops are gradually changing from a combat role to training/mentoring Afghan forces.

**Witter:** You now back the Tories, after deserting Labour. Do they have a better handle on defence policy?

**AM:** I've had meetings with Cameron and Fox and they "get it". It's not just a question of money, it's using what money there is to best effect.

**Witter:** You say literacy levels are a problem in the army. What was your secret to selling so many books?

**AM:** I joined at 16 with a reading age of 11 and spent 18 years in their education system. It produces well-educated soldiers — and citizens.

**Witter:** At what point should soldiers be allowed to write memoirs?

**AM:** Whenever they have something

interesting to say. The MoD encourages them to go through its publishing system, like me.

**Witter:** You make a big noise about not being photographed. Isn't that about mystique and selling books?

**AM:** I did three years undercover in various places, working with Special Branch officers still serving today. Showing my face puts them at risk.

**Witter:** Has your uber-macho status helped you attract women?

**AM:** Not interested. Have been married five times, so am sticking with the wife I've got!

**Witter:** Five? Bit expensive/reckless.

**AM:** Both. Can't afford to do it again, and don't want to. (I hope my wife reads this...)

**Witter:** On a lighter note, can you remember the first time you killed someone?

**AM:** I was 19, shitting myself. It was him or me, and I got there first. Of course I didn't say how scared I'd been. Just tried to be uber-macho.

**Witter:** What would have happened to you if you'd never enlisted?

**AM:** I'd probably be in prison. I had a spell in juvenile detention at 16 and joined the army to get away from all that. Best thing I ever did ■

**Interview:** Mark Edmonds

[www.forceselect.com](http://www.forceselect.com)



## To be or not to be

Is it ok to attend church to get a school place?

Now term is in full swing, I wonder how many parents are dreading their Sunday mornings. These are the mums and dads who suddenly got religion when they realised it was the only way of getting little Johnny into the faith school that was the best in the area. Should they be damned?

Absolutely. Their behaviour constitutes abuse of the school-place system. Plus it involves the wilful deception of the vicar. A thunderbolt should



strike their 4x4 as they pull into the school car park.

Yet the motive is a noble one: to secure the best education for one's child. And these "converts" will help to swell the dwindling congregation.

I'm not going to suggest certain vicars are tempted to collude. But the fact that such parents are going to church could mean they'll be saved from the evil that motivated them to go in the first place.

St Paul writes about "praying without ceasing".



It's been interpreted as meaning religious rituals can create the faith they express. A few of those parents may end up absolved, if not by society, at least by God ■

**Robert Rowland Smith**

Do you have a conundrum for our philosopher?

Email [rsmith@sunday-times.co.uk](mailto:rsmith@sunday-times.co.uk)

To read Robert Rowland Smith's blog visit [www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/tbontbblog](http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/tbontbblog)

## Exposed Cheryl Cole

Hot stuff from a very early age

Cheryl Cole's introduction to showbiz didn't begin with her success as a member of Girls Aloud on Popstars: The Rivals. In the 1990s, Cheryl warmed the cockles of the nation's hearts by appearing in a couple of British Gas ads, and as a nine-year-old she attended a two-week summer school at London's Royal Ballet. Sadly, things didn't



work out. Cheryl recalls how she 'wanted to go home straight away. Everybody was p and proper and was a Geordie in a council estate. I was the odd one out'. Although she turned her back on ballet the singer didn't seem particularly bothered. 'I didn't want to have to stand in a certain way a life and only eat salad.' So the