

Civvy street savvy

Andy McNab and General Sir Mike Jackson tell Editor Matthew D'Arcy that service leavers have a lot to offer civilian employers and must not fade away...

In a farewell address to the joint session of Congress in April 1951, General Douglas MacArthur famously remarked: "The world has turned over many times since I took the oath on the plain at West Point, and the hopes and dreams have long since vanished, but I still remember the refrain of one of the most popular barracks ballads of that day which proclaimed most proudly that old soldiers never die; they just fade away."

General Sir Mike Jackson and Andy McNab, arguably the most famous British soldiers of modern times, clearly have no intention of fading away.

General Jackson, whose military career spanned more than 40 years culminating as Chief of the General Staff, retired from the Army in 2006. Since then he has held positions with PA Consulting Group, Numis Securities and the Risk Advisory Group and has remained a prominent voice on defence matters in the media.

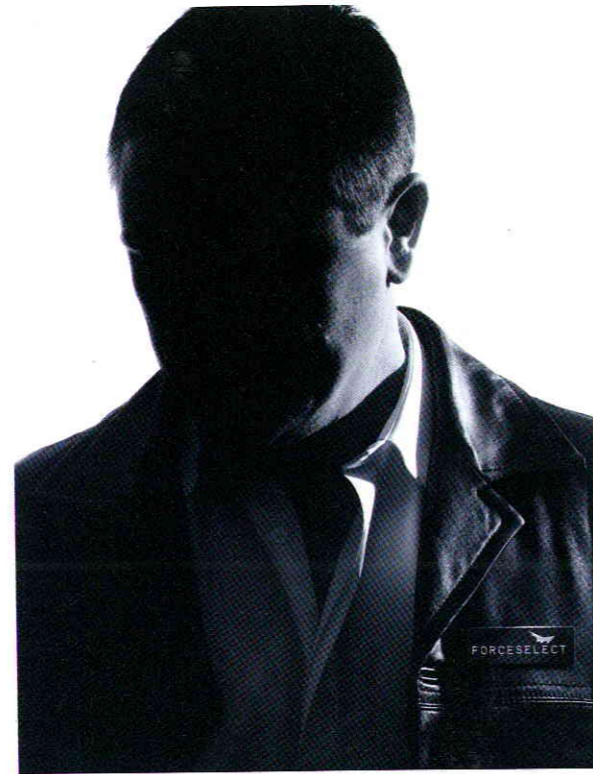
Former infantry and SAS soldier McNab has appeared as a commentator in the media for many years. Having spent 10 years in 22 Special Air Service, McNab became the Army's most highly decorated soldier and went on to author numerous books including Bravo Two Zero, the highest selling war book of all time. He is still active in defence as a patron of Help for Heroes and as an advisor to organisations like the MoD and FBI.

Most recently both General Jackson and McNab have joined with fellow former British Army soldiers as directors of ForceSelect, a relatively new recruitment, mentoring and charity trust organisation.

While the scores of soldiers, sailors and airmen who leave the armed forces every year may not all rise to the public prominence of General Jackson and McNab, the careers of servicemen and women should not be allowed to wither away at the close of military life.

Speaking to *DMJ*, both McNab and the General fervently emphasise that service leavers have a lot to offer employers in the civilian world.

"The personal qualities that somebody leaving the services brings with them are very attractive to a potential employer," says General Jackson. "They are team orientated, they are self-disciplined, they have a very good work ethic and they get there on time."



McNab advises soldiers to exploit military education, "because actually when you come out, you are going to get a better job"

McNab says that part of the problem is that members of the armed forces often don't recognise the attributes that make them stand out. "Most servicemen don't understand actually what qualities they've got, even really basic stuff of turning up on time," he says. "A platoon sergeant is not only responsible for the administration of say 20 or 30 guys, but all the other stuff as well, the emotional stuff, the dramas with families and finances. So their management skills are really good. And that's what they tend to forget."

He adds: "You know administration whether you are a CEO [of a company] or an NCO in charge of the stores, which in the military world tends to be millions of pounds of kit that really does have to be there on time, that really does have to be serviceable."

But not all service personnel have the skills of an NCO, or leave the forces having learned a trade or a specialism. For an infantry soldier, life in the forces equips the admirable qualities identified earlier, a clear advantage to be sure. But an infantry soldier may not have the transferable

experience of specialists like an army logistician, an RAF aircraft technician, or a Royal Navy information systems engineer, to name but a few of the many military career paths. So what can and is being done to make sure that such individuals are able to develop the right skills to get into civilian work?

At present, on completion of service, personnel are given varying levels of funding and paid time to complete courses to improve their situation. This is something both General Jackson and McNab see as valuable.

The General tells *DMJ*: "You can go on just about any course imaginable to improve your attractiveness to a potential employer; you can go on accounting courses... you name it you can do it."

McNab advises the soldiers he speaks with to take advantage of the system. He says that "the biggest adult education set-up in Europe is producing military education. The military are gagging for soldiers, sailors and airmen to take up these opportunities." His message to soldiers is to "therefore use them and abuse them, because actually when you come out, you are going to get a better job."

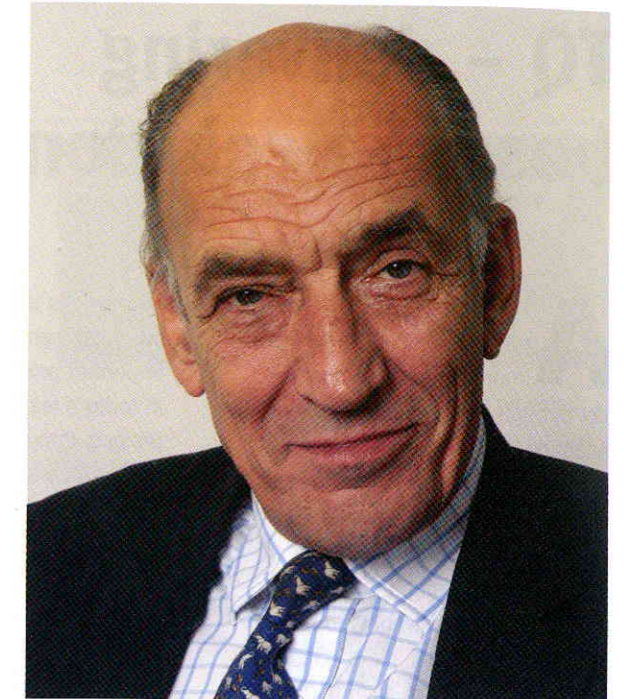
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This support to aid personal development is not seen as 'nice to have'; rather it is seen as essential. In times of such economic uncertainty, job hunting is difficult for anyone – military or civilian. But for service personnel there are added challenges, explains General Jackson. "Military life is unique," he says, "and the move from a military career into a future civilian career I would argue is more of a pretty fundamental change than say moving from one bank to another, or from one retail outlet to another."

McNab also feels that there is further justification for providing this assistance in the transition to civvy street. In discussing joined-up government he says "if you are not preparing these people correctly for civilian life, they then become a burden on another department of your government, whether it's the DHSS or whatever it may be."

He adds: "There is a responsibility to make sure that when they come out they are productive, because if they are productive they are paying taxes."

At the same time, however, General Jackson suggests that there may not be scope for much more additional support from the MoD. "In an ideal world," he says, "more could be done, but we all know where we are with the defence



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budget and public finances as a whole." With this in mind, he feels that certain services, such as job placement, are best dealt with by specialist companies.

Indeed, the placement of service leavers is an important issue. Typically, many people who leave the armed forces may find work in the security area. "On the combat side, an infantry soldier makes a very good security operator," says the General. But he acknowledges it would be restrictive for soldiers to limit themselves to careers in this path.

McNab expands on this, explaining that from the ForceSelect perspective, broadening placement into a variety of areas has proven beneficial. One example he gives is a partnership formed with a major freight and shipping company that provides training for service personnel whilst they are still in the military. In addition to numerous other areas, they are also working with financial institutions, construction companies and even the film industry to place service leavers.

People who have worked in the armed forces have a lot to offer the civilian employment market, and there are numerous career paths open to them. Not only do many leave the forces with more obvious transferable skills attained through specialist military career paths, but also highly prized are the personal qualities that soldiers, sailors and airmen possess. Making sure that people are well informed about the advantages this experience provides is vital, and taking advantage of the military education system can provide important preparation on the road to civilian life.

Andy McNab
Former SAS

General Sir Mike Jackson
Former Chief of the General Staff