

Andy McNab



In this special interview for Quest, the former SAS soldier turned bestselling author talks to Sandra Stafford about his own transition from Services to civvy street, and why he believes all Service leavers have the skills employers need

It would be fair to say that Andy McNab has packed a huge amount into his working life: 18 years in the military and almost as long as a civilian have seen him amass enormous experience and expertise. Public acknowledgement for his work in the Special Air Service (SAS), in the shape of a Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) and the Military Medal (MM), has been matched by his high civilian profile as a bestselling author and his drive to help other Service leavers find their way in 'civvy street'.

Although McNab's transition from military to civilian employment isn't exactly typical ('I've been very lucky,' he acknowledges), he is committed to the belief that *all* Service leavers are able to provide civilian organisations with hugely relevant transferable skills and high levels of motivation, and thus create a real boost to the UK economy in general. 'At the lowest, lowest level,' says McNab, 'Service leavers will turn up on time. There's a work ethic. They have core values – honesty, integrity and so on. It almost sounds Victorian, but these things are drummed in during Service life. Organisation skills, team playing, understanding a hierarchy – these are all skills that an employer *needs* and that Service leavers *have*.'

Certainly, McNab has had no problems finding work since he left the SAS in 1993:

'My own experience has been that as you go through one door more doors open, so you give them a go.' For example, 'in the last two years of my Service career I was approached by a private security company to go back to Columbia where I had previously worked [for the SAS] on a drugs interdiction exercise. I was also approached to write about my Gulf War experiences. Currently, I'm on the board of a private security company, I'm a director of ForceSelect [see below], an adviser for the MoD and FBI, and I'm a patron of Help for Heroes.'

Leading by example

McNab's CV (see box) reads like a model of excellence achieved through ability, grit and determination – despite his relaxed manner and ready conversation. His success as an author alone (total sales of his books run to more than 30 million) has earned him the accolade of being the highest-selling writer of a war book (*Bravo Two Zero*, a non-fiction account of his Gulf War experiences). His military attainments alongside his fiction and non-fiction narratives have connected him with Hollywood not only as an adviser for action movies but also because his own fiction is about to be turned into films.

As a patron of Help for Heroes (a charity that gives support to those injured as a result of their being a member of the Armed Forces), he helps to promote its cause: 'I go to different organisations, give talks, lecture tours and write about it as much as possible to explain what it's about.'

However, one theme that runs through all his work is his desire to help other members of the Armed Forces make the

Andy McNab: CV

Military career to 1993: Infantry soldier, eight years; SAS, ten years. Postings including Gibraltar, Northern Ireland, the Gulf and South America. On leaving the SAS he was the Army's most highly decorated soldier.

Civilian career 1993–present: Author. Non-fiction includes *Bravo Two Zero*, 1993; *Immediate Action*, 1995; *Seven Troop*, 2008; *Spoken from the Front 1*, 2009; *Spoken from the Front 2*, in production. Fiction includes: The 'Nick Stone' series, comprising thirteen titles since 2000; the 'Boy Soldier' series, comprising four titles since 2005; *War Torn*, 2010. Director of a private security company. Consultant and adviser to the MoD and FBI. Special adviser to Hollywood film productions. Patron of Help for Heroes. Director of ForceSelect.

CASE STUDY



James Duffy

James recently joined ABF The Soldiers' Charity, an organisation that supports soldiers, former soldiers and their families in times of need. He had joined the Army in 1985 as an infantryman and left 22 years later as a Warrant Officer having completed tours of duty to Northern Ireland, Bosnia and Kosovo.

After undertaking jobs as a security guard and then helping homeless ex-Service personnel in North Yorkshire, his wife told him about ForceSelect and he decided to register. James says, 'I was looking for a new job and didn't know what to do, so I registered with ForceSelect and they told me about two jobs in the north-east that were of great interest. The staff all have a military background, which helps so much, and they understood where I was at from day one. I got the feeling that they really wanted to help me.'

'They kept in touch to update me on what was going on when I applied for a role at The Soldiers' Charity. Even the managing director, Lucy Wood, got in touch to make sure everything was going smoothly – and there aren't many companies where that happens.'

'I'm loving my new role as liaison officer and feel I'm giving something back after 22 years – and I've got ForceSelect to thank for helping me big time. I'll be speaking at Catterick soon and making sure everyone knows how much they helped me.'

For further information about The Soldiers' Charity visit www.soldierscharity.org.



James Duffy (left), recently placed with ABF The Soldier's Charity by ForceSelect, with Major Young, Unit Welfare Officer, 4 Regiment Royal Artillery.

transition from Service to civilian life, specifically when it comes to finding employment for the approximately 22,000 people who leave the Services each year. 'The figure sounds horrendous,' says McNab, 'but you need those sorts of numbers in some Service roles. In the Infantry, for example, you need a fairly healthy six-year turnover.'

And so it was that, in 2009, ForceSelect was formed as a specialist recruitment consultancy for Service leavers and ex-Service personnel. Comprising a highly experienced team of ex-Service professionals, the organisation covers three key areas: recruitment, support and mentoring, and charitable donations through its own Foundation.

Transition

Despite his own smooth transition to civilian life, McNab is only too aware that some Service leavers don't find it so easy. First and foremost, his desire is that Service leavers are given 'proper jobs', jobs with 'decent wages and prospects' that fully utilise the skills they have learned in the Armed Forces. His priority with ForceSelect is that it places itself as a bridge between Service leavers and employers. 'So,' he says, 'we help Service leavers to understand all the qualities that they've got, and we make industry aware of this pool of people that they could use. And it's working: we have a 99.9 per cent (recurring) success rate.'

Part of that success is due to the fact that ForceSelect is run by ex-military personnel who understand first-hand the transition process they are helping new Service leavers to negotiate. 'There's a lot going on through that stage, and if the process isn't right it actually costs us, the tax payer, perhaps through benefits, housing, maybe even the criminal justice system. So we need to ensure that Service leavers understand their skills, then use them to earn money and pay tax – so everyone benefits.'

Since its inception, ForceSelect has forged links with a number of large civilian employers who readily appreciate military core skills such as time-keeping, team-playing, commitment and a 'can do' attitude. 'We work with (for example) UPS, British Gas, KBR, Sainsbury's and Unite, who all see ex-Service people in their organisations working so hard. There's a joke that "at least they turn up". Well, actually, they do. And that's so important. Really basic stuff.'

Support

In addition to marrying employees with employers, ForceSelect is currently putting in place a mentoring scheme to support Service leavers during their transition phase (and is always on the lookout to add to its current list of mentor volunteers). As McNab explains, 'We have about 55 ex-military volunteers or their wives on the end of a

Andy McNab's top tips for Service leavers

- 1 Take advantage of all the opportunities you get in the Armed Forces:
'That's the time to get your education. Look at what happened to me; it can happen to you, too!'
- 2 Take your military 'can do' attitude into civilian life:
'An ex-Navy chef went for an interview in a hotel on the same day as the regular chef failed to show up. So he stepped into the kitchen and cooked. Service people are used to getting on with the job.'
- 3 Know that you will make a real contribution to your new organisation:
'Employers want people who are going to turn up and work hard, and that's what the military can provide.'

phone to answer simple questions like "How do I register with a doctor?", "How do I get stuff done?", because they've never had to do it.'

Meanwhile, the ForceSelect Foundation ensures that part of ForceSelect's profits are passed to Forces charities as a way of 'giving something back' to the men and women who, as part of the military, have served their country.

In the coming months, McNab will spend time in Hollywood helping to turn his novels into films. But he also remains deeply committed to helping Service leavers gain good permanent work. 'Everything is focused on proving that ForceSelect works,' he says, adding that 'the plan then is to open up six regional offices throughout the UK, which will happen from 2011'. McNab is confident that partners will continue to come on board, and that ForceSelect will continue to provide very real help to *all* its users. The support will always be practical, relevant and useful because, as McNab says, 'we need Service leavers to understand that once they're out, they're out. That's it. They're in the real world.' It's a larger world than the Armed Forces, but with the right encouragement and connections, it offers just as many opportunities.

Contacting ForceSelect

- Finding employment through ForceSelect is free to Service leavers. To register, visit www.forceselect.com/jobseekers/index.html
- For more information on becoming a ForceSelect mentor, visit www.forceselect.com/mentors/index.html
- For details of the ForceSelect Foundation, visit www.forceselect.org/main/index.php

About the author

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