



THE MAN WITH NO NAME

Andy McNab has such a dark past that he cannot reveal his entire face or real identity for fear of death. *FHM* shares a pie with the trained killer turned best-selling author

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hen Andy McNab talks... you do your best to keep up. That's all you can do. It's not just that he speaks at a million miles per hour (which he does), but that he jumps from topic to topic

so seamlessly, you feel that the thing he's talking about right now is just a warm up for the thing he's going to say next.

"Look, when you get involved in killing, which is a very human thing to do... I mean, look at those women over there. If we were even to dream of hurting their kids they wouldn't think twice about ripping us apart, right? Killing is part of us, a part of humanity..."

He'll often start a sentence, finish it in his head, then ambush you with another before you've dealt with the first. If words could kill, his would beat us to death. We are completely at his mercy.

"No, I've never felt bad [about the people I've killed]. At war, there is a responsibility to keep yourself alive, and even more so to keep the lads on your side alive. Certainly some people have problems after the event, like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but I never did... I never gave a fuck."

WE ARE SITTING IN EAST LONDON'S LEGENDARY F. GOOKE PIE AND MASH SHOP, DRINKING TEA WITH THE MOST FAMOUS FACE YOU'VE NEVER SEEN.

Of course, Andy McNab is not his real name, and we can't show you his face. It's a kind face; tanned, weathered, and very ordinary, but for the piercing blue eyes. McNab himself is well built, but not obviously hard. Yet this is one of the most highly-decorated soldiers in the British Army since the second world war; a man who spent 12 years of his life in the most elite fighting force in the British Army – the Special Air Service. He has fought at the heart of some dangerous warzones of the last 40 years, from infiltrating IRA terror cells in Northern Ireland to destroying cocaine cartels in the Colombian jungle. He was captured in Iraq during the Gulf War, where he withstood six weeks of torture. And those are just the things he can talk about, such is the secrecy that shrouds most of what the SAS does.

Nowadays, of course, he is a writer. His first book, *Bravo Two Zero* – about that fateful mission in Iraq – is still the biggest-selling war book of all time. He's written many more since, including 16 fictional thrillers about an SAS veteran turned British intelligence field agent working on 'deniable operations'. How much of that is based on McNab's real-life experiences we

may never know. What we do know is that his books have sold more than 32 million copies worldwide... not bad for a man who couldn't read or write until he was 17.

"I hated school," he says. "All I wanted to do was leave and start earning money. When I finally did, I couldn't even read *The Sun* newspaper properly. Page 3 was easy enough, but that was about it. It took joining the army to realise that every time you read something, you get knowledge. With knowledge, you get power to do the things you want to do rather than what some other fucker has you do. Why not be the one with the power?"

ANDY McNAB IS HUNGRY. We've just watched him demolish a meat pie with mashed potato and mushy peas in four minutes flat. He talked and laughed throughout. It is quite unnerving, in a way, hearing a man so affable say he couldn't care less about the first time he killed a man. Tellingly, he remembers the day vividly. "His name was Peadar McElvanna," he tells us, dropping his voice to a near-whisper. "I was 20 and he was 19. It was a Saturday night in the summer of 1979 and we were right on the Northern Irish border near Castleblayney when my patrol turned a corner and stumbled into six IRA terrorists preparing for an ambush. They were in an armoured cattle truck, balaclava over their faces. As soon as we saw each other, everyone opened fire instantly. It was a proper cabby, y'know, a shootout, everyone going for it. I got one of them, Dessie O'Hare, in the back, as he was trying to get in their truck, but I didn't kill him. Then McElvanna jumps up, firing. I shot him once in the shoulder and once in the chest before he dropped."

What did it feel like to kill another human being at such close range? "When you can see their face, it's a matter of letting the training take over. You reach a kind of

"IF I WAS A KID GROWING UP ON BOGSIDE I WOULD HAVE JOINED THE IRA, WITHOUT A DOUBT"

heightened awareness. Your blood pools to the major organs to keep them working, which can inhibit what you're doing. Your vision becomes tunnelled. But because you've drilled it so many times, you're able to override the part of you that's telling you not to."

Has he kept count of all his kills? His voice drops half an octave and he looks serious for the first time: "Yes, I do know how many people I have killed, and some of them have been very close up. But I won't say how many as it isn't like in films – killing people is a serious business."

He must surely have felt a modicum of guilt over ending the life of someone so young; someone's son or brother? "Not for one moment," he says. "I was doing my job and he was doing his."

Then, McNab ambushes us with a startling revelation. "If I was a kid growing up on Bogside I would have joined the IRA, without a doubt. But circumstances put me in a housing estate in London so I ended up joining the army. Simple. For a lad like me, it was join the army or rot in prison. That's just the way it was."

McNAB WAS BORN IN LONDON IN DECEMBER 1959.

He doesn't know exactly where because he was found dumped on a hospital's steps in a Harrods shopping bag. He was adopted at five. "I had a very loving and happy childhood," he says. "It was great, I grew up on a housing estate in Peckham."

But he grew into an adolescence of petty theft and scrapes with the law – a lifestyle that would, ironically, prove to be his making. "We got caught doing this private block of flats in Sydenham Hill," he says. "I was being chased by the fattest copper you ever saw. So, as I got to the footbridge over the railway, I stopped and shouted, 'You fat cunt.' Next thing I know, he's only gone and thrown his truncheon at my head, sending me flying down the stairs right into a police dog handler."

He was sent to Borstal, a youth detention centre, where he was offered a choice. "I was 16 and the army gave me a place on its programme for delinquent kids," he recalls. "I was like, 'Fuck this, I'm out.' I joined the Green Jackets [an infantry regiment of the British Army], which sounded more like a football team to me at the time. I thought I'd sign on for three years, but fucked up because I joined their junior leader programme without realising that it was a six-year commission." By 19, he was the youngest corporal in the British Army. There followed a tour in Northern Ireland before he signed up for SAS selection.

In 1982, he passed and was soon seconded into 14 Intelligence Company, also known as The Det, an elite unit responsible for infiltrating IRA cells and destroying them from within. It was his work there, he says, that would make him a hunted man for the rest of his life.

"We were there to find Active Service Units who worked on deep-cover cells. Our job was to identify someone who is weak to turn them into a source with bribes, coercion or whatever. That pissed a lot of people off and I still get death threats today. That's why I keep my identity hidden – it's not a rule, it's common sense."

WE'VE TALKED ABOUT KILLING, BUT WHAT ABOUT DYING?

For McNab knows more than most what it means to face death. In 1991, he led Bravo Two Zero, one of the most controversial British SAS missions in post-war history, when eight soldiers were dropped inside Iraq with the instruction to disable scud missiles. The group found themselves immediately out of radio contact and three died as they tried to escape to the Syrian border. McNab, who was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal, was captured a few miles from safety. Imprisoned for six weeks, he was tortured by his Iraqi captors.

"They beat me with planks of wood, and pulled my back teeth out," he smiles gleefully, opening his mouth and pointing to where one was ripped from its root. "One of the guards, a really sadistic fucker, would sing Michael Jackson at me while making me eat shit out of the slop bucket."

Then, one morning, he and the other hostages were led to an aircraft hangar and lined up facing a wall, handcuffed and blindfolded. "We started hearing weapons being cocked and I thought, 'This is it, we're going to get done now,'" he says. "We were a group of British, Americans and Saudis, if I remember. Some started crying, others started to beg. I was standing next to a US marine pilot called Joseph who started praying, mumbling away to himself. Suddenly, he bellowed, 'Shut the fuck up. The last thing I want to hear before I die is you lot weeping.'" McNab laughs out loud: "It turned out to be a sick joke and we were handed over to the Red Cross hours later."

Surely he felt fear, even if he didn't want to show it. "No," he says defiantly. "What can you do? Are you going to turn round and cry? No. Fuck 'em. When we got released, the first thing everybody wanted to know was, who were the fuckers crying and begging? That's the last thing you want to hear. They really got a hard time." »



ACCESS

It's hard to grasp how a man who's spent so much of his life killing or trying not to get killed is not even a bit messed up. But there is, he says, one simple explanation. "Two years ago, I was asked to undergo tests for an Oxford University study and they told me I'm a functioning psychopath... in a good way. It means my amygdalae (the brain's threat-processing hubs) are so underdeveloped that I can't feel fear and empathy in the way most people do. It's nothing to do with bravery, I simply don't have the mental capacity to develop the neurons to fear. It's fantastic."

SO ANDY McNAB, THE GOOD PSYCHOPATH, CAN KILL.

But can he love? He is, after all, now with his fifth wife, Jenny, and – by his own admission – incapable of human empathy.

"Yeah, of course I love my wife dearly, and my daughter too," he says, calmly. "I've been married to Jen for 13 years and she's been a bigger influence on me than anyone."

But the difference for a psychopath, he says, is that to fall in love is to make a choice. "I can manufacture love – but that doesn't mean it's not natural. I don't have to fight to love someone but I do have to choose to conform. The beauty of it is, though, if Jen were to walk out one day, I can easily just go, 'Alright,' turn the dial down and carry on."

Somehow, McNab has achieved a superhuman talent for living in the moment. "It's like when I was handcuffed, black and blue, and stark-bollock naked in that cell in Iraq," he says. "I had no control over what was happening. So I thought: 'Mate, you might as well enjoy it while it lasts.' The more I focused on each event in isolation, the more it washed off. You focus on the feeling of the gun forced inside your mouth – interesting! How does the steel taste? You focus on the looks on the guards' faces, the smell of cheap aftershave, your breathing, the fact that, yes, you're still alive! When



all you've got is the present, it's amazing how fascinating it can become."

OUTSIDE THE PIE AND MASH SHOP, PASSERS BY ARE BEGINNING TO GATHER.

Word's got out that someone famous is having their photograph taken. We're standing by the door when a woman approaches: "What's going on?" she says, craning her neck over McNab's shoulder to investigate. "Is there another celebrity in here again?"

"No idea, love," McNab smiles. "Not one I've ever heard of." As she sidles off

mumbling something, we ask if there isn't a small part of him that would enjoy the affirmation of being recognised in the street. "Fame doesn't interest me one bit," he says. "I can't be arsed with it. I really don't care how I'm remembered. Just burn us and that's it, we're done."

Our time together is up. McNab has to go to a fancy dinner in the city where he's giving a talk (and being paid quite handsomely, no doubt). There's still one last thing that's bugging us. What is Andy McNab's real name?

"I could tell you," he says, the faintest of smiles creeping across his face. "But then I'd have to kill you." **FHM**

ANDY McNAB'S FIVE BOOKS THAT EVERY MAN SHOULD READ BEFORE HE DIES...

Catch 22

by Joseph Heller
"Any book which invents a phrase that's then used around the world should be read. The 'catch' is simple: if one is crazy, one can be discharged from the army. But one has to apply for the discharge, and applying shows that one is not crazy. War, money sex – great!"

Meditations

by Marcus Aurelius
"Roman Emperor and scholar. He wrote this while he was leading the Roman army against Germanic tribes. How this guy decided to live and love is so inspiring that although he has been dead for nearly 2,000 years, he has over 36,000 Twitter followers and his own hashtag."

Adventures Of Huckleberry Finn

by Mark Twain
"For me, Twain is the best. It's about a slave and a homeless street kid on the run in the USA's deep south. Twain's take on racism, 'real talk', was banned and it stayed that way for decades. It gives you the real life version of *Django Unchained*."

Brave New World

by Aldous Huxley
"It's London in the year 2540 and 'community, identity, stability' is the motto of this utopian World State. Babies are born in labs and humans are clinically detached from each other. This is a classic science fiction work that continues to be a significant warning to our society today."

The Good Psychopath's Guide To Success

by Dr Kevin Dutton and Andy McNab
"I took a *Clockwork Orange*-style personality test and it said I was a psychopath; there are more of us than you think. This brilliant book will change your life." *Do the test at thegoodpsychopath.com*