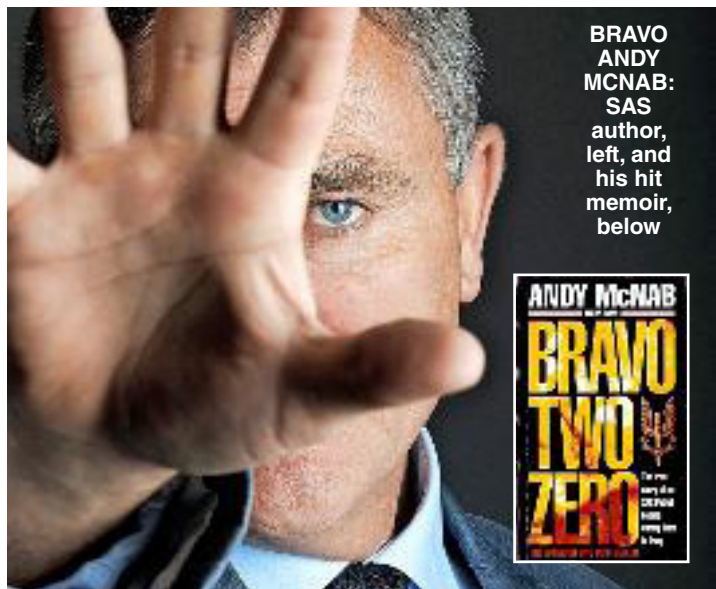


The SAS Bravo Two Zero hero and bestselling author goes into battle for the Express Christmas fundraising campaign on behalf of Give A Book



BRAVO ANDY MCNAB: SAS author, left, and his hit memoir, below

SAS HERO and best-selling author Andy McNab CBE, 62, is going into battle on behalf of the Daily Express Christmas fundraising campaign in partnership with the charity Give A Book. "Reading does change people's lives; I know, because I'm one of those people," says the author of the bestselling SAS memoir Bravo Two Zero.

McNab, whose latest thriller, *Down to the Wire*, was published earlier this

EXCLUSIVE By Jane Warren

month, continues: "I'm throwing my support behind the Daily Express Books Change Lives campaign because putting books in the hands of the people that need them the most is the difference between being the kid who keeps themselves at the back of the class, because they're embarrassed they can't learn, or getting the job that pays more because they can fill in their job application.

"But reading gives you much more than just knowledge and power. It provides empathy and imagination. Being able to travel anywhere in the universe and at any time in history to learn about other people and their situations helps you understand what's beyond your own world.

"It helps you realise that we are all much the same. It's the difference between being able to read a bedtime story to your kids, or not."

Yesterday the acclaimed historian and novelist Dame Antonia

Fraser launched our campaign to help promote the power of reading in the hardest-to-reach places. Express Editor in Chief Gary Jones said: "Books and reading are crucial in so many ways so I'm delighted the Express has been able to throw its

weight behind Give A Book for our 2022 Christmas charity appeal.

"It's a remarkable, inspiring organisation that works minor miracles and I'm confident our generous readers will show their support."

That support means the charity will be able to distribute even more books in schools, prisons, mother and baby units and among disadvantaged children.

McNab can relate directly to the impact that books can have on marginalised people. When he joined the Army in 1972 at the age of 16, he was found to be "functionally illiterate" with a reading age of 11. Having been abandoned as a baby in a Harrods shopping bag and arrested for a string of burglaries while growing up with foster parents, he read his first book during basic training.

"I was in a classroom, alongside about 20 other boy soldiers, with an old sweat of a captain standing up front," he recalls today. "He said, 'You're not thick, you're just not educated. But, from today, all that changes'."

McNab, who would go on to become the British Army's most highly decorated serving soldier by the time he left the SAS in 1993.

The first book he read was a Janet and John tale aimed at primary school children. Twenty years later he wrote the greatest-selling war story of all time, with more than 10 million

DAILY EXPRESS



HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT OUR CHRISTMAS CAUSE

GIVE A Book puts books into the hands of those who need them most.

The charity is dedicated to promoting the pleasure of reading in prisons, schools, and with children in disadvantaged circumstances. Your donation will put books into the hands of people who need them most. A £5 donation will provide one book; £10 will add a book bag; while £25 will give a whole book bundle. If you would like to support the Daily Express Christmas Campaign to raise money for Give A Book, please send donations (cheques only, payable to Give A Book) to:

**DX Give A Book Campaign,
112-114 Holland Park
Avenue,
London W11 4UA**

**Or you can donate online
via:
giveabook.org.uk**

UK registered charity no 1149664

Reading made me feel

I GREW up in a house with few books, yet had a voracious appetite for the written word. My parents were not great readers. They might buy a book apiece to see them through the annual summer holiday, and our home took a newspaper every day, but most of the books that would eventually grace our secondhand shelves were the ones I bought.

Before that, however, there was the local Carnegie library, which I haunted, taking out the maximum allowance (three books per visit, I think). On visits to friends and relations, I headed straight to the bookcase. If there was no

**By Sir Ian Rankin
Bestselling Inspector
Rebus Author**

bookcase, I'd be scouting for magazines and newspapers.

Children's comics were an affordable luxury and also my gateway drug to other forms of storytelling. At one point, I think I had about seven or eight weekly comics on order at my local newsagent. At school my best subject was English and I was blessed to be taught by a succession of great and passionate teachers,

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Morrisons

ASK FOR HENRY

We want to give a little helping hand this half term... something our founder Henry Heinz was known for. Just 'Ask for Henry' at a Morrisons Cafe and get a warming and hearty jacket potato with Beanz on us.



Available from 26th October

From 26/10/22 - 27/11/22, ask for 'Henry' at the till point at any UK Morrisons Cafe to receive a free Heinz Beans & Jacket Potato meal, while stocks last and subject to availability. Limit of 1 meal per customer per day. Offer is not transferable and cannot be exchanged for cash.

Pictures: PA, GETTY

Reading DOES change people's lives ...I'm one of them, says Andy McNab

**THE GIFT OF
READING:** Your
donation will help
change lives this
Christmas

copies of Bravo Two Zero sold to date in the UK alone.

For the past 20 years, the SAS hero has been widening the horizons of non-readers everywhere.

"Reading gives you knowledge, and knowledge gives you power," says McNab, a tireless campaigner for literacy who was awarded the CBE for his services to literacy and charity in the Queen's Birthday

Honours List 2017. "I visit prisons, schools and workplaces, and see the difference reading has made.

"Recently, I met a bus driver who could not read, even road signs. He would drive by memory alone, which caused problems when there were roadworks.

"But learning to read didn't just help him in his work. He can now read to his grandchildren because

he started reading by sharing the same bedtime storybooks.

"Some of the prisoners I've met couldn't even read a newspaper and after starting to read have become evangelical.

"It isn't just because they knew that once released from prison they had to compete for jobs, but they realised there was nothing wrong with them and that they weren't

stupid, as they'd been told." In Leicester, he met a council worker who could not apply for promotion because he couldn't read and was unable to fill in the application form. He put his arm in a sling and went along to answer the questions verbally; that old trick.

"But the council realised and have now taught him to read. It's been life-changing for him. It

doesn't matter what you read; whether it's a book, a billboard or a magazine.

"Learning to read gets things done, and reading means you get to do more of the things you want to do, rather than being told what to do by people with more power than you.

"Books are an agent of change in so many ways."

like a traveller in space and time

themselves advocates of the written word. Not that bookishness was something to advertise – I came from a working-class coal-mining village in Fife. It was a tribal place, an environment where you didn't want to stand out from the crowd.

Though I spent quiet hours in my small bedroom scribbling song lyrics, poems and stories, I never told anyone. But when I was 17, I entered a national poetry competition and came second.

This was reported in the local Courier newspaper and suddenly my parents realised they had a poet in the family. They were supportive, if a touch bemused. The same went

for my high school, where the rector asked to see my poem. It was titled 'Euthanasia' and I'm not sure he was entirely complimentary – a feeling shared by most of my elderly uncles and aunts. Not that I cared overly, I had written something of merit after years of reading – soaking up authors' words, feelings and world views.

My village was small and tightly-knit but a universe of stories was available to me at all times. I felt like a traveller through space and time. This is why I've always been a keen supporter of initiatives to get people reading. Books can be a form of escape and of therapy, a

way of learning about the world and its cultures and inhabitants, a means of making sense of the seeming chaos around us and of the problems we can sometimes face.

I've visited prisons where literate prisoners sit with their non-literate brethren and help them understand the jumbled sequences of letters placed in front of them. I have talked to homeless people who regard books as their friends, hanging out with them to pass the time more companionably.

The Give A Book charity connects books to those most in need of them and should be celebrated for that. Celebrated and supported.

FULLY BOOKED:
Sir Ian Rankin
went from 'secret
poet' to global
bestseller

