
Ever since the Falklands war and Thatcher's victory over the Argentinian military junta in 1982, there has been a resurgence of popular militarism in Britain. One important aspect of this has been the popularity of military memoirs and first-hand accounts of military life. Such books have sold in hundreds of thousands -- but what they represent has been largely ignored by social and political commentators and by cultural studies experts. Yet, the success of popular militarism has been a significant factor, not only in helping generally to construct the Conservative hegemony of the 1980s and early 1990s, but also more specifically in feeding into a violently punitive, right-wing law and order agenda. The SAS is one regiment particularly feted for its exploits, for its ruthless macho image. It is an image well suited for adaptation to life on Britain's mean streets, where danger can be imagined lurking in every alleyway, and it has spawned an immensely profitable array of good and best sellers.

A number of volumes by various hands offering the SAS as a guide to civilian life have appeared in recent years and are available and often prominently displayed in all 'good' bookshops. So far we have John Wiseman's The SAS Personal Trainer (and the earlier SAS Survival Handbook), Barry Davies's The SAS Escape, Evasion and Survival Manual and Andrew Kain and Neil Hanson's SAS Security Handbook. They are all written by former SAS personnel: Wiseman served with the regiment for twenty-six years and was its survival instructor, Davies was with the regiment for eighteen years and took part in the storming of Lufthansa 181 at Mogadishu in 1977 and Kain served for eleven years and is a veteran of the Falklands war. Their contents range from little more than attaching the SAS label to an advanced fitness manual, to a proposed militarisation of personal life in a violent and dangerous world. They bear testimony to the continuing cultural impact of the SAS in the Britain of the 1990s.

Wiseman's The SAS Personal Trainer is, in many ways, a conventional keep-fit book. The blurb claims that, with this book, 'you too can acquire the unique range of skills taught to members of the Special Air Service'. Nevertheless, despite the fact that it was written by someone with over twenty years' service in the SAS, the bulk of it is concerned with commonplace fitness issues. Some chapters, such as those on `Strength training', `Running', `Swimming', `Cycling' and `Injuries', do little more than pay lip service to the SAS connection and the book is remarkably free of photographs of soldiers. What separates out the average fitness practitioner from the hardcore is the Complete Fitness Programme, supposedly modelled on the professional SAS programme. This is presented in typical gung-ho fashion: the SAS training programme `is tough but only the best get to wear the sand-coloured beret and the winged sword. "Who Dares Wins". Do you dare to win? Do you dare to...

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After spending time with the SAS on TDY & again working with them as instructors at the International Long Range Recon School (ILRRPS), then in Weingarten Germany, it is good to see much of they're instructional material in print & available. In comparison to US Army FM 21-76, this manual is far superior. As a member of USASOC at Ft. Bragg, NC (USA), I have used this manual in the conduct.