



# ANT MIDDLETON

"It took me a while to realise  
that this was my destiny."

How did an undercover sniper in the  
Special Forces become a celebrity TV  
adventurer? We track down the star of  
TV's *SAS: Who Dares Wins* and *Mutiny*

INTERVIEW **SARAH STIRLING**



Photos: JAMIE FRY/CHANNEL 4

**WEARING** a t-shirt that shows off his muscles, and boasting a thick, glossy beard that would make any hipster jealous (he's

sponsored by Pioneer Beard grooming products), it's hard to imagine the smooth Ant Middleton before me roughing it in the Special Forces, where, as lead scout, he had the somewhat risky job of being the first person to go through any dangerous doors, and he was also a primary firearm operator and sniper.

But, when he talks, Ant reveals unusual levels of calmness, clarity and authority. He's got that cool and clever James Bond thing going on. I realise that what I'm seeing isn't someone who is trying to look trendy to seek approval. It's a product of rigorous training. He is perfectly dressed, perfectly groomed and perfectly mannered for the occasion at hand. He is also, unusually in today's world of emails constantly pinging in your pocket, 100% present.

It becomes increasingly apparent that whatever Ant Middleton is doing — be it serving in the military (he joined the army at 16 and served in the holy trinity of British special forces: the Royal Marines, the Paras and the Special Forces), appearing in a TV show or being interviewed, he is always in flow state. Trained to act on orders in high pressure scenarios, he has learnt to put all his energy and focus into whatever he is doing, without question.

But how did he journey from battle fields to TV screens? In 2012, Ant left the armed forces and started working as a personal security guard for VIPs in South Africa. He was first asked to appear on TV two years ago, as the chief instructor of SAS: *Who Dares Wins*, which puts contestants through SAS selection-style tests. Building on his success as a TV frontman, this year Ant starred as the boat captain of *Mutiny*, a series that recreated a legendary survival story.

Brits seem to have a gladiatorial appetite for tough reality TV shows, and this one really threw its contestants into the pit. Remember that time Mel B peed on Bear Grylls' jellyfish-stung hand? Child's play.

Back in 1789, nine mutinous sailors on the Royal Navy ship HMS Bounty set Captain Bligh and 18 loyalists adrift in a small boat in the South Pacific, expecting them to die. The odds were strongly against them, but they managed to sail all the way to Timor. With the same meagre rations that Bligh and his men had — including just 28 gallons of water and 16 pieces of salt pork — Ant and a team of amateurs set out to recreate that voyage of 3,600 miles.

It was more great TV, so it's no surprise that Ant has become something of a celebrity. He was even recently invited to the premiere of *The Revenant*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio, where he was interviewed on the red carpet about how he would have dealt with the life and death scenarios in the movie. We were very pleased that he found time to talk to OAG.

**Sarah Stirling: Can you tell me about your childhood in rural France, were you out exploring the wilderness?**

**Ant Middleton:** We had acres of land and I used

to go out and build tree houses and climb on everything I could find. I was lucky that I was allowed to explore; it made me very self-sufficient and independent at a young age. It also led me to wanting to join the military.

**SS: Any advice for anyone whose ambition is to be in the Special Forces?**

**AM:** I never planned to join the Special Forces, I just took the natural progression into it. I was in the military for around eight years before I thought I was ready to progress. I joined the Royal Engineers and then the Paras [Parachute Regiment]. After that I joined the Marines and completed courses which led me into joining the Special Forces. It took me a while to realise that this was my destiny.

Anyone wanting to join the Special Forces should just believe in themselves. Don't let anyone cloud your judgement. There will always be doubters out there, but believe in your



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potential and be confident in your capability.

**SS: What are the benefits of military training, and do you think it would be beneficial for teenagers, say going down the wrong paths with drugs and drink?**

**AM:** SAS training showed me what I am capable of and also helped me to enhance these qualities. It showed me how to push myself to become the best I can be. My military experience as a whole has essentially set me up for life. It has given me extreme confidence and versatility that I can transfer to everything I do now.

Having that military structure and discipline in your life helps you plan and prepare for pretty much anything, which can only be a good thing for kids in the long run.

**SS: Worst bit about your own SAS training?**

**AM:** The interrogation process, which I can't talk much about. Once you've been on the run for five days with no food and water and then someone tries to pick your mind, it's crazy how they can get into your head, though.

**SS: Wow. Can you tell us about the jump from being in that kind of environment to being a TV heart throb?**

**AM:** If you give me a job to do I will always do it to the best of my ability. I have extremely high standards so anything that is put my way I have to either lead it or excel at. That's the mind-set that I had in the military and I have transferred that into the media world that I'm in now.

**SS: How do you balance the different worlds in your life — your undercover SAS background versus the media spotlight, for example?**

**AM:** I make sure I commit myself fully to whatever I am doing at the time. So if I am at work I commit myself to work. If I am at home then I fully commit myself to my family, if I'm on a shoot then I fully commit myself to the shoot. I try to make sure I spend a healthy amount of time between my worlds.

**SS: How important is your position as a role model?**

**AM:** When I first got into TV I saw it as a massive privilege and now I see it as a massive responsibility. I see how many young people look up to me and now it's my responsibility to show them what they are capable of. One of my main motivators is to be able to inspire the younger generation to succeed.

**SS: What do you enjoy about being in uncomfortable situations?**

**AM:** It makes me feel alive. I've had lots of experiences of being close to death's door and I know how alive I felt in those moments. I'm just someone who was born to go out and explore, and unless I'm exploring boundaries then I get bored very quickly. That's when trouble comes — when I'm sat there twiddling my thumbs not when I'm out in testing situations!

**SS: Scariest moment of your life?**

**AM:** Running through a minefield in Afghanistan. I knew that I could literally get blown up at any minute but I had an objective, I had a mission to complete. I was leading around 40 men at the time so I also had the added pressure to get them across safely, too.

**SS: Most unusual place you have camped?**

I camped right next to a watering hole, once, and was woken up at 2 am by the ground trembling. It felt like something out of Jurassic Park. Out of nowhere a herd of elephants made their way to the water. One hell of a sight!

**SS: Which environment is harder to manage — extreme heat or extreme cold?**

**AM:** Give me -30° over 30° any day. If you prepare and plan correctly, with layers for example, you can work through it. With heat you can only strip down to so much. It's much easier to warm up than it is to cool down.

**SS: Are you scared of anything? With your**







## ANT MIDDLETON

is an Ambassador to the RNLI (rnl.org) SSAFA (ssafa.org.uk) and Forces Cars Direct (forcescarsdirect.com). You can follow Ant on Twitter @antmiddleton and Instagram @ant.middleton or antmiddleton.com

Ant endures extreme cold in Channel 4's *Mutiny*

“I prefer to work in the extreme cold. Give me -30° over 30° any day.”

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### training background do you have any fear left?

AM: There will always be a sense of fear there but I have the mind-set: “If it’s my time, it’s my time.” I try to never let fear get the best of me. I harness it, I contain it and I use it to my advantage. There will always be things that you’re scared of but I don’t let fear become part of my life.

**SS: I’m researching flow states at the moment, the feeling when you get really into whatever you’re doing and you forget about everything else. Eureka moments happen. You do everything better. The parts of your brain that**

### manage fear and doubts switch off.

AM: While in the SAS I would get into this state so I could completely focus on my objective and it helped me block out things that would make me miss home. It is how I operate in everything that I do. It allows me to concentrate and focus all my time and energy into a task.

### SS: Moving onto your latest TV series, did the *Mutiny* expedition match your expectations?

AM: I knew it was going to be physically and psychologically hard but I didn’t realise that it would be so emotionally draining. As time went by I could see how much the men were suffering. The pressure was high to make sure the decisions I made were the right ones as the men were deteriorating.

### SS: How did leading a civilian crew differ from your military leadership?

AM: I instilled the basic military-style discipline structure on the boat from the beginning and it was maintained throughout the journey. As time went on I had to change my thought process and learn to deal with the crew individually. They are not military people so they didn’t know how to take orders and follow them under pressure. I was conducting constant personal assessments on each crew member: what motivated them, what were their strengths and weaknesses? I was also conducting constant threat and risk assessment surveys. I had a higher duty of care as I knew these were not military men and I needed to

cater to their emotions and sensitivities.

### SS: How easy is it to be authentic on reality TV?

AM: Authentic is all I know. It’s been a case of, “Ant you go and do your thing and we will follow you with cameras.” I’m lucky that the production companies I have worked with have allowed that to shine through.

### SS: What do you think you’d have been doing for a job if you were alive in the 1700s?

AM: I would like to believe that I would have been an Admiral in the Queen’s Navy.

### SS: I understand you have another TV series coming up later this year, called *Escape*?

AM: I’m going to be filming *Escape* all summer and it’s still very much under wraps so I can’t tell you too much. It will involve hostile environments, survival skills and engineers using their ingenuity to try to escape scenarios.

### SS: How do you juggle your life with fatherhood?

AM: Juggling life is hard. I want to work as hard as I can so that I can provide for my children and give them opportunities that I never had. If they want to explore different avenues in life then I have the means to support them now.

### SS: What do you see yourself doing in ten years?

AM: I’d love to be travelling the world with my family. I’d particularly like to take them to the islands that we visited during the *Mutiny* expedition and show them the different walks of life in this world. **oag**



Ant Middleton: born to explore