

COMMANDO DAD

NEIL SINCLAIR

Ex-Commando and dad of three, Neil Sinclair has recently written a training manual for new recruits to fatherhood, here he shares his thoughts on parenting, his family and the reasons behind his book, *Commando Dad: Basic Training*.

Q. What inspired you to write a book about parenting?

NS: The inspiration for *Commando Dad: Basic Training* came as I recced bookshops looking for something to tell me what to do as a new dad. All the classes and books only led up to the birth, not the entire life beyond. I have had an exciting, and sometimes dangerous career- I have cleared mines in Iraq, tracked drug barons in Belize and dug snow holes in the Arctic – but the experience of bringing a tiny baby trooper home was one of the most daunting of my life.

What I wanted, as a new dad, was a straightforward guide that could teach me – fast – all the practical skills I needed to be an effective parent.

But that book simply didn't exist. The books for dads were either novelty books (and believe me, if your parenting is a laugh a minute, you're doing it wrong) or books that were too wordy to be practical. At O-silly-hundred-hours, with a screaming baby trooper in your arms, 700 pages of someone telling you about their emotions isn't the answer.

This got me thinking that what I needed was a basic training manual for new baby troopers; a parenting version of the 'Basic Battle Skills' that I was given when I joined the army. And that is what I hope I have created with *Commando Dad*.

Q. How has being in the Army, trained you to be a Dad?

NS: Being a Commando has affected every part of my life in so many ways I could write another book about them all. But in terms of being a parent, it has helped in two major ways. When I became a new dad, I fell back on my military training: my ability to adapt, improvise and overcome. As I got to grips with

hours, with no sleep, you are being lashed with rain and have been told you're doing a 6 mile log run, what keeps you going is personal morale. You believe that no matter what is thrown at you, you can handle it, and that experience has been invaluable to me as a dad. Parenting can be really tough and at times it can feel like an isolating and unrewarding experience. It is at times like this you need to fall back on your morale.

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the basics I did what came naturally – I applied military precision to the task: I got essential kit and supplies, I got organised and I got into a routine. And this approach helped me to create a well ordered and happy family unit, and laid the foundations for *Commando Dad*.

But my career in the army helped me in another key way, and that is that I learned the importance of keeping my morale high. When you have been on exercise for 72

Q. What have you learned yourself about from writing the book

NS: Writing *Commando Dad* has taught me a lot about myself as a parent. It has made me feel proud about how far I've come in the past 10 years. I have gone from being a complete novice to a father of three, a qualified child minder and now in the fantastic position of being able to offer advice to other dads.

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It has also underlined what I knew about myself as a parent: I am still a Commando Dad in training. My teachers continue to be my three troopers: Sam, Jude and Liberty. As they grow and develop each day, I'm faced with new situations that require me to learn new skills, ask questions of my peers, research and ultimately adapt my parenting style so that I can continue to meet their changing needs. I also hope that, via the forums on the Commando Dad website, that dads can share their experience and advice with me – and other dads.

Q. The army is well known for being regimented with discipline, what are your views on discipline

NS: Discipline – the act of teaching your troopers to obey rules, and using age appropriate sanctions to guide behaviour - is an essential element of parenting. Its purpose is to keep your troopers safe, to teach and guide them. It is not about punishment.

The key to discipline is to be age appropriate. Between the ages of one and three – the age covered in the book – troopers are gradually developing a greater understanding of cause and effect, and they do not have the ability to think logically. There are certain steps that parents can take to lay the groundwork for later, logical, decision making though. These includes things such as keeping calm and objective when disciplining your trooper and only saying the word 'no' when you mean it (which is harder than it sounds).

I am also a firm believer in parents having self-discipline. Parents should never, ever, vent anger or frustration on their troopers. Parents should always strive to set a great example for their troopers to follow.

Q. Do you have a history of military in your family

NS: Not at all – both of my granddads, Napoleon Bonaparte Sinclair and Teddy Williams fought in the Second World War, but we're not a military family. From four years old, I was obsessed with being a soldier. I finally got to realise my dream when I signed up at 15 years and 11 months. A year later my twin brother Mark followed me into the army.

Q. Did you raise all three of your children the same way?

NS: In terms of the practicalities – did I do everything the same way, then no, because over 10 years my parenting style has changed (and hopefully for better). But I have loved them all the same, and I am trying to raise them all to be kind, responsible adults.

Q. What do your kids think of *Commando Dad*?

NS: I've been talking about it literally all my daughter's life, so she's just accepted it as completely normal that dads write books. She's just takes it all in her stride and doesn't really see what the fuss is about.

My sons are completely the opposite, in their opinion, I am now famous. They are really enjoying going into school and telling their friends and teachers about it – and anybody else that will listen! Actually, I'm going in to their school to talk to their classes about *Commando Dad* and writing a book, which I'm really looking forward to. I have included the kids as much as possible, getting their opinion on designs for the book and the website, and they've given me their ideas for an app. I can't wait to take them into a bookshop and show it them on the shelf. If it wasn't for them, it wouldn't be there!



Q. Is it only soldiers that will understand your book

NS: Absolutely not. The book is all about applying military precision to parenting – in terms of being organised, prepared, and planning ahead, all while being the best dad you can be. You don't need to have been a soldier to understand the book. I do use some military terms that I have adapted to parenting, but I include a glossary at the end of every chapter. These include terms like 'flash to bang time' (the time it takes dads to react to a situation), 'squared away' (everything organised and in the right place), and 'compassion fatigue' (when tiredness makes you feel you have no compassion left. Dig deep).

Q. Would you like your children to join the army?

NS: My approach to parenting is to equip my troopers with everything they need to make their own decisions. If they decide to join the forces, then I will support them 100%. I loved my time in the forces, so I know first-hand what an amazing experience it is.

Q. What does the future hold for *Commando Dad*?

NS: In terms of *Commando Dad* the book, I want to get it in as many new dads' hands as possible, and for it to become a well-thumbed and useful resource. I have built a website where I have put how to videos and other resources on there, and there's also a great forum where dads can ask for help and share experiences with other dads. It's www.commandodad.com. Then there's the app – it's still in development, but will be out soon.

In terms of what does the future hold for me, Neil Sinclair, well I shall continue to be the best dad I can be to Samuel, Jude and Liberty.

Q. What was your childhood like?

NS: My childhood was brilliant. I was lucky enough to have two parents who loved each other and loved us four kids completely. They gave us everything we ever needed. They were Salvation Army Officers and then my dad became a vicar, so they could never afford to give us a huge amount of material things, but in terms of everything that matters, we lived in abundance.

*Neil Sinclair is the author of *Commando Dad: Basic Training* which is available from Amazon.co.uk. For more parenting tips, techniques and resources please visit www.commandodad.com*

