

Mike Sadler, one of the first recruits and believed to be the last surviving original member of Britain's Special Air Service (S.A.S.)

Mike Sadler: The Legendary Human GPS Who Made SAS History

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When we think of modern special forces and their high-risk missions behind enemy lines, the mind inevitably turns to the British **SAS (Special Air Service)**. But who paved the way first, literally? The answer has a name and a surname: **Mike Sadler**.

Passing away in January 2024 at the age of 103, Sadler was the last surviving founding member (*the "Originals"*) of the SAS and a key figure of World War II.

From the Farms of Rhodesia to the Long Range Desert Group

Born in England in 1920 and moving to Rhodesia (today's Zimbabwe) at a young age to work, with the outbreak of the conflict Sadler enlisted in the British Army, fighting on the North African front.

The turning point in his life came when he came into contact with the **Long Range Desert Group (LRDG)**, a unit specialized in long-range exploration and reconnaissance deep in the desert.It was there that Sadler discovered he possessed an extraordinary and almost mystical talent: **the art of astronomical and desert navigation**.

The “Human GPS”: Navigating in the Middle of Nowhere

In an era when satellite navigators did not exist and maps of the Sahara were often lacking in detail (if not just a few lines of longitude and latitude), Sadler knew how to guide convoys of dozens of vehicles for hundreds of miles in the middle of nowhere.

His “equipment” consisted of:

- **The sun and the stars** to calculate the exact route;
- **A theodolite**, a precision instrument usually used by surveyors;
- A formidable memory and instinct for the terrain's morphology.

Thanks to these skills, he quickly became the trusted navigator of **David Stirling**, the legendary founder of the SAS.

Legendary Missions: From Wadi Tamet to Sidi Haneish

As a key member of the SAS, Sadler took part in some of the most daring sabotage operations of the North African campaign against Rommel's Axis forces:

- **December 1941 (Wadi Tamet):** He precisely guided a SAS assault team to the Libyan airport, where 24 enemy aircraft were destroyed on the ground.
- **1942 (Sidi Haneish):** He led a column of **18 SAS jeeps** in the middle of the night through the desert. The jeeps advanced **without headlights**, guided solely by Sadler's reading of the night sky, to unleash a devastating attack that pulverized dozens of German and Italian aircraft.

Beyond the Desert: Italy, Europe, and the Later Years

With the end of the North African campaign, Mike Sadler's commitment did not stop. He continued to fight with the SAS on the **Italian front** and later in **France** (participating in

operations behind the lines after the Normandy landing), concluding the war with the rank of **major** and receiving important honors, including the *Military Cross* and the *Military Medal*.

After the conflict, his spirit of exploration led him to work in Antarctica and later to serve in the ranks of British intelligence.

Until his passing in January 2024 at the age of 103, Mike Sadler was remembered in the collective memory as the last witness of an unrepeatable era of heroism, where survival depended on courage and the ability to read the stars.



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News link: https://historynet.com/mike-sadler-the-last-member-of-the-original-s-a-s-dies-at-103/#:~:text=He%20was%20103.%20Dubbed%20a%20human%20GPS,was%20Sadler's%20duty%20to%20guide%20the%20commandos