# Interview 1 – Patrick - 2016

(officer, 16 years, married, yes, -11)

## C

Thank you for allowing me to interview you

## P

Not a problem

## C

Why did you join the Royal Air Force?

## P

The reasoning for it actually stemmed from my Grandfather, he was in the Air Force and he always said it was a great career and at the time I was working for, I did a law degree, and I worked for a couple of different companies doing legally type stuff and it was never a happy job. No one ever wanted to come to you for a good positive reason and I just got a bit frustrated with that, moved jobs same frustrations, looked for something different remembered what my granddad had said went to look into it and it all looked quite good. I wasn’t married at the time and I was older than a lot of people who joined, when I finished IOT I was 26 so I joined towards the end of my 25th year. Just looking to do something a bit different a bit adventurous and I liked the idea of being able to move around every couple of years that really appealed to me, so that was my main driver for it.

## C

When did you start to think about leaving?

## P

Not long after I started my first tour really, it wasn’t that I disliked it but I couldn’t see me doing it for ever. My first tour, was, although I joined as a loggie there were no loggie first tours at the time there were no posts, so I as in a senior Flight Leiutenant engineer post in a Project Team and I didn’t have the back ground to give them what they needed and they knew that they were just putting a bum on a seat to help the logs branch out really , so making a lot of tea, doing expeds and things but long term I couldn’t see me doing that and that kind of set my mindset at the time for how I thought the Air Force, how I thought the rest of my career in the Air Force was going to be. It turned out not to be like that but that is when I thought actually the 16yr point, pensionable, I will still have time on the other side to do something else. The pension was a big thing if you stay in you are actually working for that much less because you have already got it.

## C

To have made that decision quite early and yet to have stayed in for your 16?

## P

I think that because then went into the Movements world which I just loved absolutely loved and I saw a few jobs that I wanted and I manged to get those jobs as I was going so it was working quite happily until the, (I can’t say that ((*quietly spoken*)) unfortunate event of getting promoted where the jobs weren’t what the Flight Leiutenant jobs were the buzz was gone. At which point we had kids anyway and priorities changed. For me the Air Force was good when I was doing the movements stuff on teams the RAFLO stuff, exercise plans that sort of thing, the travel, priorities change with the kids.

## C

Would you say that is your main reason for leaving? Or is there something else?

## P

No, there is something else but I Can’t quite put my finger on what it is. It’s time, time I think to do something different. I am a bit fed up with the uniform (I don’t know why I am whispering) we are being recorded aren’t we. I think I am done with the uniform a little bit I certainly don’t dislike it, its hard to say what the drivers are. We did our transition workshop, you did your transition workshop, and I thought it was brilliant. List all the good things about the Air force, the bad things about the Air force, the good things about leaving, and the bad things about leaving. The bad things about leaving to work in civvy 0

So how would you describe your job, now today?

## P

At the moment it is very admin based, it is in no way, I’ve not done anything loggie based since I got promoted and I am on my third tour now. It is not loggie based it is admin based. It’s ok its turn up do the job and go home. That is about it really. There is little need to do more than that everyone around me is doing the same sort of type role, there is no need to surge at the moment, if there was we would. It doesn’t excite me my job but I don’t dislike it, I don’t dislike it at all. My previous job I hated.

## C

What was that?

## P

I was in the JFAC. Just a dysfunctional organisation, badly led, it didn’t really have a direction of where it had to go. It was just turf out the same exercise to train the same people over and over again and people were fed up with it. I think it was because the atmosphere in the place was very flat people weren’t enthused to be there, there was a lot of disgruntled and grumpy people and I like a winge as much as anybody but when everyone is doing it permanently, it got me down and I like a winge more than most.

## C

So what sort of things kept you awake at night?

## P

I think it’s when you have got deadlines that are going to impact other people, when you are a flight commander that sort of thing, have you done the right thing have you made a decision that is bad or how is it going to impact the guys and to a certain extent how are they going to view you as a result of it. All those your typical it’s the management side of things rather more so than the leadership side of things I found that the hardest but keeping me awake at night. Did it? Yeh I think it probably has done over the time, the thing that kept me really awake at night was the worry about the next tour if you know you are due posting and the job that you want for all the right reasons is coming up and you may not get it, that’s that was the real issue I think more so than the, “have I made a decision?”, when I think about it.

## C

How did that uncertainty make you feel, the ?

## P

yeh, the uncertainty I was alright with not being to control it was what I didn’t like. Whereas if you leave you can control it. If you don’t want to go and do a job leave. You can just walk away. I’m sure it is not that easy in terms of getting something but you don’t have to be in a job for 18 months before you can leave to go and do another job.

## C

What kind of things are keeping you awake at night now?

## P

Oh it’s where are we going to settle, we have had the unfortunate luxury of too much choice, we thought it was great to start with. But my wife’s folks live in Suffolk, my folks live in Cornwall. We are not going to move to Suffolk we are not going to live in Cornwall. Well ok, where do we move, we are not really constrained by budget, that sounds really trite doesn’t it, we have a house in London that we will sell that to offset so I want to be by the coast my wife likes the Chilterns area, where is the nearest beach to here, and we ended up being in an around Hampshire. So we were doing the trips to go down and look at locations and when you have got the kids you can only do it for an hour before they got bored. The Smiths have been brilliant, I will get this on record, The Smiths have been great they have taken the kids for a couple of hours while we go and look at little towns. That has massively kept me awake at night. Because like you said you have got that date and it is moving ever closer and you get that ground rush. So that is keeping me awake I must admit.

## C

Do you think that is the key decision keeping you awake where you are going to live not what job you are going to do?

## P

I don’t care about jobs. I do not care about the job what so ever I will do anything and I know I will get a job because the areas we are looking in are within half an hour from your Portsmouth, your Basingstoke’s Fareham have all got big defence contractors and programme management officer so that I am not worried about. You know Royal Mail distribution centres everyone needs a postie, I don’t care I genuinely don’t care I will do anything. So that I am not worried about. I know I can walk out and find a job, My wife is fairly set up with teaching and she should be able to find a job and she should be able to find a job in advance because they advertise, no jobs haven’t kept me awake at all.

## C

That is good it is one less thing to worry about.

## P

It is yeh,

## C

So 14.5 years in it is a fairly long career in modern day standards in one organisation. What would you say was your greatest challenge to your career progression in those 14 years?

## P

Er, in terms of getting promoted at the time you thought you would. I think for me it was wanting the recognition for my own ego but not being prepared to give up the jobs I wanted to do. So taking the overseas job when actually everyone said you shouldn’t be taking it you should be doing a 2ic job. So you will set yourself back a couple of years. It was reconciling myself knowing that I don’t want to get promoted I want to do these jobs, deep down you know what x, y and z have got promoted now it’s time that I did as well. And I am better then him or I am better than her. You know it is that the ego versus what do I really want to do and would I enjoy doing.

## C

So any regrets on that front?

## P

No none what so ever. None what so ever at all. Maybe if I had tried to do the jobs in a different order. But it has all played out because I have realised that since getting promoted the jobs have not been, for me as fulfilling as the previous jobs. But having said that my priorities have changed. So would I be sat moaning that I was away all the time if I was overseas or something, maybe with the 2 kids I don’t know.

## C

So what was it about the Flight Lieutenant jobs that was so appealing?

## P

Oh they are just so varied and I enjoyed the travel, it’s one of the reasons I did join because I could see the benefits of the travel the moving around every couple of years. The travel and working in the small teams, the responsibility that you had was enough but you always knew you had one up to go to if you needed it. What I missed about it was the travel in a word. Travel, yeh.

## C

So at this level what is the frustration?

## P

For me I can only compare it to being at Air Command as I have just done 3 tours on the bounce and they are all very much the same, it’s the same job just a different desk. The, it’s not so much the job because the job is fine, but it is the monotony, if the 2 star has asked for something and it has come to me to do it, and I will tap away and do it but I can’t just go and give it to him. I can’t just go here you are, this is what you have asked for, I hope it’s alright, red pen it and send it back if you want some changes. My boss likes to put this comma in a certain place, his boss will want to put this comma in a certain place, before it goes to the 1 star. So it’s, I guess it is the bureaucracy of it. That said I can’t compare to how it is outside cause I’ve not done that yet, but having joined a bit later than some and having worked on the outside it was very much the case if someone, however senior, asked you for a piece of work you could walk into their office and give them what they wanted or answer the question as opposed the several layers, I think that is the biggest frustration of what I am doing at this level at the moment with the exception of a command tour I can’t see it changing, it doesn’t matter where you go or what job you do and even if you progress through the ranks I can’t see the jobs particularly thrilling me.

## C

So if you had a magic wand what would you change?

## P

Honestly, I don’t know. Genuinely don’t know. I don’t know what I would want to change. There are pros and cons for all of it. If I could wear civvies to work, seriously, (interviewer laughs) I think that would make a massive, massive, difference. If I could not wear the uniform that would, you know working in town that would be quite a novelty just that break from the norm. Being in the military and not wanting to wear uniform maybe I am not cut out to be in the military.

Yeh there is no, maybe slightly delayering of the management structure I don’t know would that work? We have got an awful lot of Group Captains and Wing Commanders at Air Command you have to put them somewhere I guess you can’t just chop them all out of the Air Force in one go can you? So maybe a little bit of delayering and civvies.

## C

Friday none uniform day.

## P

Well you know it would help. We had it last week a couple of us were meant to go to a meeting so we came in, in just shirt and trousers and the meeting was cancelled and it just felt a lot better in the office, because people were more cordial people just seemed to be a little bit more engaged. We have got a bunch of management consultants in the office and it wasn’t a them and us type thing, everyone looked the same we were talking differently it was a noticeable difference. It was quite interesting actually, a couple of us picked up on it and it sparked some good discussion.

## C

How did that make you feel that them and us?

## P

It just made everything a little bit easier. I wouldn’t say it changed the way we worked together but the atmosphere changed the dynamic changed ever so slightly.

## C

So when you finally made the decision to leave, how it did feel?

Initially it was elation, yeh we have made the decision. It was the elation of this is great this is exactly what I I’ve always said I‘m going to do and we have done it. Now it is really really good. The feeling was really good, we can finally get the house where we want to. Grow up with the kids, the family home instead of “how long are we going to be here? Do we need to rent this out? So do we need to go back into …? It took a lot of the uncertainty away so it felt really good. Really good.

## C

**And now**

## P

A little bit better because in terms now we know where that area is but a little bit apprehensive of what am I going to really miss from this actually, is it going to be okay to sit and do this job? I don’t hate this job but is it ok to do that on the outside? And not have the gash time to just go off for a run, get a haircut, go see the kid’s school play or whatever. Factoring that in as a day’s leave, or and less leave as well. So I am slightly more apprehensive now about what the reality of it is going to be but that said I know I could always bunce from job to job if I needed to in the short term. Whether it is that easy I don’t know cause of the area we are moving to there is plenty of opportunity, until your CV starts to look clunky and look like you can’t commit to bloody anything.

## C

And your family are happy, you?

## P

Yeh absolutely, there is no, there has never been I don’t want to do that or one of us pushing the other. I think we set out stall out quite early to always leave at the pension point we knew it was coming We kind of put things in place by buying a house in the right location at the right time to use as a ..

## C

It was a planned leave?

## P

yeh it was, yeh the back end of it has come round very quick, very quick. But I think we have done it in a fairly good time. I wanted to. The minute I could qualify for resettlement the two year out point I was on the phone to the desky, 2 years yeh on the phone to do it. There was never any delay or need to rethink the plan, it seemed fairly structured yeh it just seems, apart from not knowing where the hell we are going to live, yeh it was quite exciting yeh. It was. But it did get quite stressful when we couldn’t quite pin point where it was going to be but now we have found the area it’s now just about finding the house and we have got 18 months to find the house, or a house that is going to do the job for us.

## C

So what is your best memory of the Air Force?

## P

When I was overseas it really was cracking absolutely brilliant you had the autonomy of being our there on your own, having the two dets one on each side of the country, different time zones to contend with having the embassy the High Commission always phoning you up and asking you for a favour. It felt very much like it was my train set there was no recourse back to the UK for a given number of hours unless it was an emergency cause of time differences. And living overseas seeing somewhere new.

## C

So what about the Air Force itself?

## P

Probably something similar, working in teams all the stuff you, I think you thrive in the Air force it is because you like working with people you like the responsibility, you like the authority and being out there you had all of that in spades. Although the team was small you lived and died by your decisions and I liked that, that side of it being out on det you know you have got a job to do, you don’t mind working long hours you don’t mind working hard because you are all in it doing the same together. Not too much in this sort of env where people tend to have different agendas. There are a lot of people in jobs which are none jobs, simplifying it somewhat but yeh I think when you are busy when you are being absolutely ragged but everyone is in the situation and everyone just cracks on and does it together. I think that is going to be my best memory of it all.

## C

What do you think you will miss the most?

## P

Probably the travel. I say the travel now but actually it wouldn’t surprise me if I miss the flexibility and what I am criticising now people having too much down time that will probably be what I will miss when I am being flogged to within an inch of my life in a job somewhere.

## C

Do you think, you say you have been able to go to sports afternoons, school plays you have been able to manage our own time effectively?

## P

The majority, sometimes you can’t cause work load dictates. But its knowing that if I wanted to I could, there would never be.. I’ve not had a boss who would frown on that I think I have been quite lucky in that respect. There have been times when you have missed things but on the balance of everything I have realised that it is a good place to be in and we are quite lucky with that. I have never had any issue with letting somebody going to their kid’s sports day for instance and I wouldn’t even dream of asking them to put in a leave pass or that sort of thing and having the flexibility.

## C

Why is that do you think?

## P

I think because the majority of people have experienced being the being on det, working your guts out, being away from your family for 4/6 months at a time and literally really working 14/18 hr days with no down time in quite miserable conditions, living in tents in Afghanistan you know and I think if you are honest and you know that you have done it you don’t mind giving people the time back on the other side because it is probably going to happen again at some point. Not to me because I have got two small kids now so that is a driver.

## C

You said it was always your plan to leave at 16yr point whether you had kids or not.

## P

Yes that was always the plan.

## C

So you never saw the Air Force as a career for life?

## P

It was always bounded within those 16 years. Not once have we seen in extending beyond that time.

## C

Do you think that has changed your attitude to the job, did it change your approach?

## P

Yeh, it might well of done actually. Em the reality of not being able to do some of the Flight Leiutenant jobs anymore was one thing but I think maybe I’d changed my mindset to always feel that way as it got closer to the end. With the exception of going off to do a command tour, which I think would be great, absolutely superb, you are only going to do that once then you are a back into this sort of environment. And not that there is anything wrong with it, it just doesn’t sit well with me and even if you are going through the ranks you are still going to be in this env. Instead of sitting at this desk I will be sitting at my boss’s desk there, we both do the same thing. We both working to the same person delivering to the same sort of output I just can’t see me doing that.

## C

Can I ask why you didn’t ask for a command tour?

## P

At the moment because I knew I was coming out, my wife is settled in her job so we have got two incomes coming in at the moment as opposed to cutting off one of them to move away for, move the kids out of nursery to then know that I am going to be leaving next year. Yeh, I came off the command board last year but I said to the desky no I am not interested. Not at the moment.

## C

You seem very steady everything is planned out.

## P

It was always the plan, to leave, nothing could change it really. I don’t know why maybe My wife and I just don’t talk enough. Maybe she doesn’t want to leave and I am too busy watching tele, to listen. I think maybe it is the ages of the kids as well now they are coming to school age and it aligns perfectly with my option point

## C

It is a natural break

## P

It is, if the kids were going to school this side of my option point then maybe I would have thought twice about it if they were settled in a school around here. Then actually why don’t we stay here yeh I just think everything just aligned quite nicely and you know we are working with various management consultants at the moment and all of them are very much here is a card, here is a card, to my boss and they want to sit down and have a chat and these are the type of conversations that are going on it’s reassuring for the job situation and now that we have found some where it aligns. And you know when I did tell the desky he said, what were his words, “they are very much retention positive” at the moment so right up until the end if I decided I didn’t want to leave I could rescind it and there would be a good chance it would be accepted.

## C

Was there any conversation with the desky as to why you were leaving?

## P

Yeh he was quite good actually, you have to do it in writing don’t you so I did it in writing and he phoned up and said before I do anything with this why don’t we have a chat find out what you drivers and what can we do to keep you in and then.

## C

God I didn’t get that

## P

Didn’t you? Well I think about a year ago he was saying willingly taking Squadron leader Ldr PVRs and when Smith when he did his he said the same the desky is trying to rebalance the pyramid at the moment, think twice before you press any buttons. But when I did it a few months later bearing in mind that I would be leaving a year later than Rob the timings. He could see some gaps maybe.

## C

So how did that make you feel when he asked?

## P

It was quite nice, it’s nice for the ego but what realistically could I have said, I want a pay rise and I want to work three days a week and I want you to do all my ironing. (Laugher). What is he realistically going to say well maybe we can give you that job next time or but there is no guarantees.

## C

Yeh, there is nothing that

## P

There was nothing of substance it was nice that he just didn’t say or sorry to see you go, off you go then. Yeh he did his bit, yeh, a tentative arm around the shoulder while someone else is asking where they are being posted to next, you know it is, yeh but it was nice to be asked.

## C

I mean your biggest stress was deciding where to live.

## P

Yeh and actually I think the thing a different way of looking at it for me was I was never planning to leave I was just never planning to stay beyond that point. So for me it was just oh my job finishes then I must do something as opposed to I am going to throw all of this away. I felt that it was taken away from me as in it is not even a decision I need to make. Part of it is that you are pensionable I know I am going to have a basic income of some sort. I was chatting to S’s husband and he very much said you know the grass isn’t necessarily greener.

## C

He works for his money though doesn’t he?

## P

Yeh he does. And we have got a couple of FTRS guys that have just started with us that left and then came back in again a few years later. And all of them have said I am glad I left when I did I missed it massively but I don’t know if that is that now they are back they can go ok I will learn from that experience and it was quite good for me. If they were still out there being thrashed would they say it was the worst thing I ever did.

## C

For you moving onto another job, what are the things you will take forward?

## P

For me it will always, always, be value the people you are working with as opposed to climbing over them to get somewhere. Because I have seen people do that and I have also seen some really good people who are valued massively and it doesn’t necessarily get reflected in their promotion. But you know what massive massive respect and you know what I think I would like that more because on the outside it is not so visible what level they are and you can almost say that is the person I want to follow or emulate or something like that. You know just always look out for those around you and of course value any time you get off. Because outside you might not, you might not get it. Or when you have it, it might be harder to have got.

Stopped /Started Recording

## P

The fact that we lived in our own house so each tour we would buy and sell our own house. So we would move around.

## C

So you have not lived in quarters all the time.

## P

No No. This is our first proper quarter. No actually Oxfordshire was our first proper quarter this is only our second, before that we bought and sold. So we always lived in the community as it were. So we lived in London for a while the majority of our time, our friends were outside of the Air Force anyway. So it was a job I wasn’t living and breathing it, whereas at the moment it is, everyone is on the patch they are the same age, the kids are the same age. So may be by having that time living separately I may not be as institutionalised as some, I don’t know but it certainly didn’t want me to change my overall plan to leave when I did and maybe because of that plan that is why we elected to live where we did, I don’t know. May be I am a case study for a psychologist or something, I don’t know, it was always, we always preferred not to live in a quarter.

## C

Because?

## P

I don’t know perhaps we wanted that independence perhaps we didn’t want to be institutionalised. I don’t know. I genuinely don’t know, there was no rhyme or reason for it. The only reason we did it initially is because we moved back from overseas so we needed somewhere to live and the job I was offered at the time was either Oxfordshire or Norfolk. Neither of which we could commute to from our house and we couldn’t be bothered to try and sell a house from overseas. By which pint we were 5 years away from my option point so we thought we would just stick it out.

## C

I probably spent most of my career living out and I do think it makes a difference.

## P

Yeh, I mean it is nice where we live now but and we will definitely miss it because the neighbours are really really superb really good actually to the point where we really consider them good friends and we will keep in touch. While up until we moved to where we are now it was very much a acquaintances versus friends. We have a couple of very very good friends and they are moving to a similar area so it instantly works you have an instant support network and that sort of thing.

**Extracts from Post Interview discussion;**

## P

It’s not that I decided to leave it’s that I decided not to stay in.

## P

People have asked me if I am worried about the next job in Civvi Street but I am not because I am just seeing it like another posting, if I don’t like the job I don’t really expect myself to be in it in 18 months’ time”

## P

Perhaps we lived in our own house so that we weren’t in the bubble, so that we weren’t institutionalised perhaps that is why we lived in our own house more often than we didn’t.