# Sarah Interview 1 – 9 Nov 2017

(officer, 11 years, married, yes, -3)

Time 43.11

## C

Frist question, a nice easy one, why did you join the military?

## Sarah

Er uggh you say a nice easy one.  Erm I was a sports therapist and personal trainer before I joined up and I actually wanted to be a PEdO so I went through selection process and I was told at OASC that PEdO was quite difficult one cause they were thinning it out etc erm and if I was interested in something else I should put it down.  So, I had a look at the nice blue sheets at Cranwell, erm Fighter Control sounded pretty cool erm so I put that down on my application and pretty much signed my death warrant from there to be honest.

## C

Oh dear.

## Sarah

em when I got the acceptance it was for fighter control erm and I had to make the decision whether or not I wanted to go for the job of the life style erm you know as I said I would very likely lose my erm currencies etc as a therapist erm and I choose the life style.  Erm you know get to travel, a permanent wage cause I was self-employed erm yeh see the world a bit yeh I'd always thought I would join the military when I was younger and bizarrely as a child I had always said I was going to join the Army as a physio, because we have military blood so.

## C

You have got a military family?

## Sarah

yeh, my grandfather all of his family, uncle, cousins, all Army.

## C

So, you are the black sheep. (laughs)

## Sarah

I know I know

## C

So, it was a lifestyle thing that appealed to you about the Air Force?

## Sarah

yeh, it was one of those things that I always, I always see myself in the military but I didn't know enough about it.  Erm which sounds a bit crazy but actually in Kent there is not a lot other than Army cadets erm there is not the same kind of cadetship that you get everywhere else so I didn't know as much about it as I probably should have done.

## C

So, you initially wanted, just just for my own clarity so really you initially wanted to join as a PEdO.  there was no spaces but it was OASC when they said there aren't any places have a look and see what else you wanted and that is when you looked at fighter control.

## Sarah

yeh cause I passed all the aptitudes apart from pilot but I was too old to be a pilot anyway.

## C

yep yep and what was it specifically about the lifestyle that appealed to you?

## Sarah

Erm I think financial stability, you know being able to travel.  Erm I wasn't particularly a home board, hence the move to NI as well, so yeh it was just something different.

## C

And erm when did you start thinking about leaving the military then?

## Sarah

oh, on and off for a few years erm my husband left shortly after we got married erm and we were talking about it then I always thought I was going to do 12 years at least and get my EDP.

## C

EDP?

## Sarah

Er departure payment.

## C

Right

## Sarah

Cause I am on the naff new pension.

## C

Ah right.

## Sarah

Erm and leave from there but with my husband being away so often and me being in Northumberland and then having a baby you know I'd just had my eldest at that point.  We just thought it was just too difficult having a family lifestyle away from each other.  And with my husband in NI I got told there were no jobs in NI erm and so I had to make a choice really to have my family or have my job and I know which one is going to win every time.

## C

yeh. And and how did making that decision was that would you say it was an easy decision to make or was it quite ..

## Sarah

yes, umm yes and no erm yes it was always going to be my family that took the precedent but erm no in that I think there was a lot more that I could have done, er I was close to promotion erm you know my desk officer asked me to stay on to see if I got promoted this year and it’s like well there is no point because there is still no jobs in NI for me.  Erm I would have liked the opportunity to reach squadron leader and do a bit more so yeh it was as I say it sounds a bit kind of just being vague but it was very difficult in one sense, I think it was very difficult personally, erm but an easy decision overall because of my family. In the pride sense I think it was hard.

## C

yes, you you were potentially walking away from promotion in that ...

## Sarah

yeh.

## C

that but that interesting as you said because even the promotion wouldn't have fixed wouldn't have fixed the problem would it?

## Sarah

problem, no

## C

which was the family, so what erm what wold you say is your most vivid memory of service life then?

## Sarah

ohh it depends, it depends what what you mean by that erm there is 2 sides to it isn't there.  Obviously the professional and the social, erm, the the the stand out thing at the minute unfortunately is too much to do and not enough people erm which sounds like a bit of a negative one but there are a lot of positives in my job. Erm but if I was going to give you one memory of it and my departing memory would be that.

## C

yeh

## Sarah

But the kind of the happier side of it and it’s not even like it’s any more was mess life.  You know mess life used to be fantastic, erm before Pay as you dine came in and you know you had everyone together, you know everyone would socialise, you would go down to the bar of an evening even if was just for a soft, a soft drink you know. there was a lot more camaraderie than I think there is potentially is now, erm mess life seems to be dying away which is a shame.  You know I met my husband in the mess.

## C

yes, me too.

## Sarah

yeh erm so you know but yeh but professionally unfortunately I'd say there is just erm wanting too much with not enough people.

## C

Have you got an example of that you can think of, off the top of your head?

### Sarah

oh well I mean working in the bunker.  Well I don't know how much you know about ABM.

## C

A little.

## Sarah

So, there is 2 main CLCs one at Scampton and one at Boulmer erm and you at Boulmer they have a 24/7 Q shift, erm doing UK Defence erm and for that you need 4 crews.  That is just to do crew on top of that you then need your day crews and they are just aren't enough people so when I qualified, I qualified as an FA after 3 years of controlling FAs I cold supervise it erm that was considered quick they are now qualifying people to FA role who have been out of who have been controlling for a year and a half.

## C

MMM

## Sarah

Erm because they are so short of people er I mean my entire generation has has gone.

## C

Or left

## Sarah

we have all gone and I mean that is not even an exaggeration.  Apart from the surveillance guys all the weaponeers the ones that actually do the pointy side yeh er have all left.

## C

And why do you think that is?

## Sarah

Erm underappreciation, erm overworked because because of how many people you need to run a bunker you then missed out on courses, erm on AT on FD stuff like that you know it was regularly getting cancelled you were regularly not getting your 4 off.

## C

Really.

## Sarah

and pile on top yeh and pile on top of that for the Flight lieutenants all your secondary duties, you know I was always always 14:29in work on my days off doing secondary duties. er 14:31 erm and then you were still expected to do station duties.  and people just got sick of it and then there was no appreciation for it you know we are not classed as a professional scale so erm the amount of training and currency we are expected to keep and you are getting paid the same as erm an admin clerk for example which is a very important job but a completely different scale of

## C

yeh

## Sarah

you know <><>< er and I think it just gets people frustrated.  Erm Plus the limitation, like I say I joined, I joined to see the world. I've been quite lucky cause I have been to a few places erm but you get to be based at Boulmer, Scampton and High Wycombe pretty much erm and then again cause of the shortage of people you don’t get to go on the exercises where they are requesting us cause we haven't go the people to release.

## C

OK you paint a pretty a pretty erm dire picture of it all but ..

Sarah

it is a bit desperate at the minute and don't get me wrong I loved my job.

## C

what did you love about it what was it that you loved?

## Sarah

the (sigh) I suppose it was the fast pace of it.  Erm I mean when when I was a controller, it was brilliant, we had a lot of air craft to control we were busy erm you know exercises I remember seeing like what we would call a ladder of aircraft coming from from the coast from Europe, Belgium, French, German you know all coming over to play.  Erm and you just don't get that any more erm but actually controlling was great fun but the last time I controlled was 2 and a half years ago in Oman and I only did it because I knew it would be the last time controlling.  And its just great fun, you know speaking to aircraft telling them where the bad guys are erm its fun it’s exciting and then the Q side of it obviously we are there to make a difference to to try and keep the UK skies safe which we have been needed for you know.  Erm and it was a lot of responsibility especially on allocator at night erm you know your your kind of in charge.  So yeh it was that side was brilliant it’s unfortunate that it wasn't everything that you got to do.

## C

yeh it was the additional the additional stuff, erm was there anything that worried you specifically when you were in the Air Force? when you were working?

## Sarah

Hmmm not really I  mean erm my last post when I went back off maternity leave was a little bit cause I was trying to work out what I was going to do where I was going to live I ended up living with friends because they told me I had to have a 3 bed quarter, and I couldn't afford a 3 bed quarter with erm my husband not working cause he was studying a little boy to put through nursery and then commuting back and forward to either Southampton or NI depending where my husband was at the time.  Erm and they wouldn't let me have a 2-bed quarter because the station commander wouldn't allow officers to live amongst the ranks.

## C

Really

Sarah

yeh, the wasn't the only thing cause I had already made the decision that I was going to leave because it wasn't as it I was worried about leaving

## C

yeh

## Sarah

erm so yeh that was it really.

## C

That is interesting cause I have never you know I know child care is expensive I've never do you think it was down to the fact your husband was away and you were trying to see him as well and that was what the financial pres

## Sarah

yeh, cause he wasn't earning you know and I mean we sold our house and stuff so we could put him through pilot training I mean that's a hundred and about a hundred and forty thousand.

## C

yeh

## Sarah

Just to become a pilot.  So, if if we had been living together in Newcastle or in Northumberland there it have been no issue.

## C

yes, and the station commander wasn't sympathetic to that situation.

## Sarah

No, no.

## C

that is terrible

## Sarah

yeh (laughs)

## C

Ok so is there anything that erm that has really worried you now, you have had your last day haven't you so you are officially a civilian, is their anything that worries you now about your situation?  I know you are over in Belfast aren't you.

## Sarah

Yeh well I am probably a little bit of an oddity because I am going back to university next year anyway.

## C

fantastic.

## Sarah

and I had already made that decision that is what I wanted to do I did all my applications and stuff while I was still at work erm, when we first came over and I had  a discussion with my husband erm I felt I did feel lost from a personal sense in that I was suddenly and it sounds awful, I was suddenly just a wife and a mother, and I didn't have anything for that was me and that sounds awful because you know it’s a very important job being a wife and a mother and you know I would never want to take away from that but at the same at the same time having had a career as being a wife and a mother I suddenly didn't know what was for me erm cause he was going away to work and you know he was doing his course and you know a happy little pilot erm and I guess I kind of lost that sense of self.

## C

yep

## Sarah

Erm which I I suppose because I was heavily pregnant as well with hormones and all that kind of stuff going around and I mean since he has been born I haven't had a chance to feel sorry for myself so (laughs)

## C

yeh

## Sarah

But I think that was it yeh it wa just losing my identity as Sarah and not just mummy.

## C

yeh

## Sarah

Er Which was the the tough bit

## C

And do you think because you have got this university course to look forward to do you think that helped you.

## Sarah

I think that is part of it but also like making friends over here because it wasn't like I just left, you know I moved to a different country.

## C

yeh

## Sarah

And although I have my husband’s friends and family over here, I mean we have been together nearly 10 years so I knew them all but I didn't have anything that was mine.

## C

yep.

## Sarah

Erm so now that I have started to make friends you know through pregnancy groups and things like that has really helped and building you own life really again.  Almost starting from scratch.

## C

Have have you found that challenging or has that been fairly smooth?

## Sarah

erm no it was once I got myself organised actually fairly smooth cause I went to pregnancy yoga and I've met a good friend there and erm now I'm going to mum and baby groups it does actually come quite easily because you get in with likeminded people and then usually find erm people that you have got similar interests to.  There is a girl I met yesterday she actually starts uni in Sept at Queens although she is doing mid-wifery erm so we will probably have some classes together so that is nice.

## C

So, what are you going to go and study?

## Sarah

I am doing children's nursing so yeh paediatric nursing erm which is going to be a challenge in itself but yeh once you start building you won network up again I think it it’s made it a lot easier erm erm but yeh that has definitely helped.  the only tough thing is obviously being in NI its its having to keep my last 10 and a half years secret. That's what difficult because I am proud of my time served erm but you can't tell anyone cause you just don't know who they are erm I think that's that's the hardest part cause I tell people I was an air trafficker which is about as close as you are going to get erm

## C

And does that tend to satisfy people do they tend to ..

## Sarah

Usually yeh erm and its anything you can't really join them on Facebook because you know I have military photos on their and it’s pretty obvious that I am ex-military on there and stuff like that so you just hope that they don't ask to put you on Facebook. (laughs)

## C

It must feel like almost duplicitous when you are having when you are meeting new people and you want to make friends and there is a big part of you your life that is effectively hidden.

## Sarah

MMM, you basically start out with a lie.

## C

yeh

## Sarah

which is hard but unfortunately is a necessary you know I the whole the reason I didn't push getting a job over here is because I didn't want to put my children at risk cause there are people who would still happily put a bomb under your car.  or a brick through your window and I wasn't willing to put my children at risk.

## C

yeh I appreciate that.  I mean have you thought of creating a new Facebook page is that, am I being a bit farfetched here or is that just ...

## Sarah

yeh I've thought about it but yeh I don't know.  I guess once you know people well enough then you can actually

## C

you will learn

## Sarah

you can trust them or not.  I mean one of the girls over here she is English and she has got family in the Air Force so you know I know she is not going to be an issue.  yeh you just try and avoid it though.  I think you can put a limitation on your profile anyway so they can only see form when you became friends.

## C

yeh.  that might, yeh it’s a strange situation.

## Sarah

It’s crazy over here.

## C

Do you like it though?

## Sarah

I do it’s a beautiful place.  I am not so keen on the weather cause I am from the southeast but er its cold and wet

## C

But you have spent half your life in Northumberland surely you are used to it now

## Sarah

I'm used to the cold it’s not actually as wet in Northumberland

## C

that is true.

## Sarah

er I do actually miss Northumberland it is a stunning place in the world. er yeh this is nice it’s not a bad area at all. Good for the kids.

## C

yeh So if you had a magic wand and you could change about your Air Force career what would you change?

## Sarah

Err, I'd probably of done a different job.

## C

yeh

## Sarah

I'd have been a squadron leader about 5 years ago26:18 erm I yeh I probably would have changed career path and that's is really my own fault though for not researching enough into what other things are available.  And that doesn't you know take away from the fact that I had some great years as an ABM but erm I think I would have seen, done, experienced a lot more had I gone down a different path.

## C

And what is it about ABM that you felt or feel stopped you from doing that?

## Sarah

we were just limited because of numbers we weren't able to go go out and do erm a lot of the exercises and take part there were a lot of jobs that used to be for ABM erm and because of the F3 and the GR4 going they got handed over to Navs, so we lost a lot of our erm broadening jobs and then than just hampered careers.  A lot of the weapons guys were hampered because we weren't allowed out of core erm so I mean if that was solved and we could have done those jobs then it would have been perfect.

## C

ok.

## Sarah

pesky mouse (baby noises)

## C

Erm how would you describe military life then to someone who has not experienced it?

## Sarah

Erm depends on how old they are.  If they are young free and single I'd say it was the best thing they could ever do er you know get out see the world lots of experiences doesn't matter where they are posted er great financial I mean yeh the pensions not brilliant any more but erm still it is a very well paid and secure job I'd tell them it’s probably the best thing they could ever do.  Erm if people were older with kids erm I'd tell them to seriously think about it but it’s great for stability it’s definitely a worthwhile job to be doing to serve but they need to be aware of the sacrifices you have to make or potentially have to make and not just for them for their family you know if it was a man, you know it’s a big sacrifice for a woman following their husband if that is what they choose to do or you know living a weekend marriage so yeh 2 different stories depending on who I was talking to to be honest.

## C

yes. and how would you describe your life now, now you have left?

## Sarah

Getting there.  (laughter) a work in progress erm yeh its all stepping stones isn't it.  So right now, we are on a stepping stone we have got our family together and he has got his career sorted and so it is just me to go so yeh getting there.  (laughter)

## C

like British Rail

## Sarah

yeh I don't I don't regret leaving I do regret not being able to achieve everything I wanted to, if that makes sense.

## C

yeh it does it does. Erm not being able to achieve what you wanted how does that make you feel when you look back at your career?

## Sarah

Erm a little bit gutted, because I did leave a year and a half earlier than I wanted to but I know it was the right decision definitely the right decision.

## C

And you left because of the distance between you and your husband, geographically and

## Sarah

yeh, there was never going to be

## C

A way you could be together

## Sarah

pretty much and especially not to do what I wanted to do cause you know for promotion and to get a good job probably go down south and my husband wouldn't have worked at Gatwick cause its horrific for junior pilots and then my other option would have been to stay in Northumberland and then I would have been promoted and put down the bunker as an Mc which is not a challenge erm so yeh it was always gonna it was never going to work out.31:13

## C

yeh yeh so when you actually decided to leave can you just tell me how that felt, when you made the decision?

## Sarah

Erm ..... it was it was easy I know that sounds daft but it wasn't really a case of shall I leave because of this shall I leave because of that it was like right well I have got to leave it wasn't really an ummin and ahhin it was I am going to have to.  And erm so and when I actually pushed that button it felt great erm because I knew then I was getting my family together but the actual decision was just a case of well I have got to do it so that's it.

## C

And when you, did you get good support when you made that decision to leave?

## Sarah

Oh yeh they were fantastic, I mean my line manager that I've worked with over the years quite a lot and he was very supportive all my co-workers were, I mean we were a very small office anyway, erm there are only 4 of us plus the boss, yeh they were all very supportive and my Wing Commander at High Wycombe was gutted but erm he understood I mean he commutes from High Wycombe to the North West so you know he completely got why I was leaving and tried to find a way to make me stay whether it be home work in NI if I'd but it just wasn't going to work.

## C

Ok thank you very much.  What erm what do you expect to be the biggest change for yourself, I know you are back together as a family but for you personally what do think is the biggest change for this next part of your life.

## Sarah

Erm, not having a wage (laughs).  Erm just starting again I think, especially with ABM there is no translation into civvi street there is nothing.  So, I would have had no choice but to start again, erm I think that really whatever I went into it would always have to be from the beginning.

## C

Was that something you appreciated do you think when you chose the branch?

## Sarah

Not when I chose it, erm but it was a stark realisation about half way through and that was probably talking to other people who were then leaving and saying oh you know we don't translate into anything else.  We can take out leadership and management qualifications and erm you know the fact that you are military, apart from in Northern Ireland, is very well thought of erm but yeh when I first joined I didn't even think about it.

## C

So, what what I think you have already answered it really but what would you say has been the biggest challenge to your Air Force career.  Would you say it is that .(coughs).

## Sarah

I think it is trying to have your life at the same time erm because I say my husband and I we have been together for about 10 years, the majority of our careers erm and trying to get posted together which should be quite a simple thing was crazy, you know we we were cross over dets in the Falklands in 2009, I got sent to Boulmer he got sent to the Navy.  He got sent to Boulmer I got sent to Scampton, erm and then we finally got back up to Boulmer and there were rumours he was going to get sent to Waddington.  So I mean that was the big hit for him and that is what made him go no I've had enough now cause all we wanted to do was be together which should have been relatively simple given that there are only three locations we can go anyway in theory and we still couldn't get posted together so that that was probably it, I mean the work side of it was challenging but it wasn't what I would consider to be a challenge.

## C

yes, yes, I do understand. So yeh ok so what are you looking forward to the most now?

## Sarah

Erm well I have already got my family but I am really looking forward to going back to uni and maybe doing something that (dog barks) sorry erm and doing something that I should have done from the beginning and done something medical erm but I didn't really know about it I didn't really know even about the medic board cuase I didn't look into enough.  so that that's it really to finally do something that ... I've always really wanted to do.

## C

yeh, sounds quite exactly, that will be four years will it? 3, 3

## Sarah

yeh well I will graduate at the ripe old age of 40.

## C

That's alright.

## Sarah

It’s a whole nother career isn't it.

## C

It is, you have got another 30 years of working (laughs)

## Sarah

I will actually have another pension.

## C

Well yeh exactly Oh bless him he has been brilliant.  37:45 Is there anything else you would like add about the whole process?

## Sarah

Well no not really, I say it’s quite cause for me it was a cut and dried decision and the transition hasn't been quite as challenging as perhaps for someone who doesn't know what they want to do.

## C

yeh

(baby crying)

## Sarah

erm so yeh I think the hardest part of the transition has just been starting from scratch and the fact that in this country you can't say what you did, you know.

## C

Are you sad about it at all are you sad that you have left?

## Sarah

In some aspects yeh like I say I would have liked to get promoted and tried some different jobs but even that would have been a challenge in itself because its where the jobs are they have always been away from my husband so I can kind of from personal pride point of view then yeh definitely erm I I I said I don't miss the job I was doing but I do miss my friends I do miss being part of the you know the Force erm but yeh at the same time I know it was the absolute right decision to make so. yeh

## C

yeh yeh.

(General chit chat)

## Sarah

yeh I can't wait it is going to be hard work with 2 little ones but it will be worth it.

40:52

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Concludes with general chit chat.

Contact Aug/Sept 2018.