# Sally Interview 2 – 2018

## C

On reflection how do you feel about leaving the RAF?

## Sally

I think I was a positive decision and I think now I have had some reflection time because it is almost three years I believe it was the right decision and for the right reasons and as I said at the time with the children and so forth and indeed I was chatting about it yest or with an ex-colleague yesterday who told me of another individual who had been in my position, she requested a sabbatical, was told no, no sabbatical available or no she requested an extension she was told no extension available but an out of area was coming up and she said well ok but I haven't got time to do my out of area if I am going to be doing my resettlement. terminal etc etc and they said don't worry we will give you an extension to facilitate the OOA. So, when you come back you can do your terminal resettlement and then you can leave.  And she is currently in Africa now and she has a 9-year-old and a 7-year-old.  So, the branch is still doing it they haven't learnt.  …

## C

That is not good.  And yet other stories I hear there is some flexibility going on it sounds on the face of it is branch specific in terms of how desperate they are.

## Sally

I really think it is and what is so funny about it is they are looking for FTRS controllers because they’re so desperately short and yet they are not doing anything to encourage people to stay.  And I really do think it is the culture almost within the branch I think the change and the merging of air traffic and fighter control now and so forth there are so many changes and no clear direction and people still hang onto the coat tails of those going somewhere. you know and individuals take their team with them from one station to another and I don't think that it is positive for the branch from what I see from the other side.  When I started to do evasive support group activity straight away the desk got in touch with me and said oh, would you like to go to Brize and do controlling three days a week.  And I said no thank you.  I have absolutely no interest in that what so ever because the branch I think is toxic so in that respect it was the right decision to go and I am quite interested in the fact potentially re-joining now and doing ADC or the 180 days a year because I will, I've really enjoyed working with like-minded people again. That has ben absolutely key and I have thoroughly enjoyed it. something has dropped and you just pick it up and run with it you know everyone knows the form, they know the processes and procedures etc and who is capable of doing what, and what support is needed when and that has been brilliant but I certainly wouldn't be re-joining FTRS or into my old branch it is something that absolutely doesn't interest me what so ever.

## C

So, would you say that is more, there are 2 things going on there by the sounds of it so one is that it is out of branch so it is something new, something different which seems to be appealing.  There are the limited days which is good.

## Sally

And there is the flexibility. It is absolutely that, the schedule is up to 2 years in advance and I can plan which courses I can or can't work.  My husband will hopefully be able to study around that as well so you can it’s quite amusing he says he is babysitting I told him he was parenting not baby sitting and such like what has been great about the VeRRs role is that if I can't something I say sorry I can't do it on that day I am not available as opposed to the pressure of having to juggle everything and fit it all in when you.  I believe you can strive to have it all but I don't think you can achieve it if you want to keep a level playing field for everyone involved hence the decision I made on Tuesday not to go to meeting because family would have suffered.  It seems ridiculous to then still enforce those values on the when I have left that 24/7, 365 days a year commitment for that.

## C

05:23

Looking back then your own experience of leaving and the first few years is there anything you would change?

## Sally

I think what I would have liked to have done would have been to have been leaving and remaining in an area where we were settled where I had a bit of a base from which to work from.  And as a as we discussed previously one of the challenges initially was in the 6 months prior the 7 months prior to leaving my husband I hadn't been co-located anyway we had only had 4 months in 7 years which was ridiculous and so I left a role where I had the responsibilities the respect and the recognition almost and my rank and my position and my knowledge leaving to a unit where we knew nobody where I wasn't seeing anybody day to day in that complete isolationist position I have never been one for wives clubs because I had never had to be one for wives clubs and I am still not one for wives clubs and while I will converse at the school gates it's I am not that at ease with all the mums it’s just not me. Because I you know you are almost commissioned over the time you are in service you make transient friendships and there are some that will hold the test of time that you can ring at 3 o'clock in the morning and you know they will turn up by 6 if you need them, whereas a lot of the relationships are very transient and you know quite fleeting.  So sorry I am sort of going off ….

## C

No, the wives thing is quite interesting because I have discussed this with quite a few people because there is quite a few of the people I am interviewing are married to people in the military and it is interesting to suddenly find yourself in the position of a wife, which speaking from my own point of view, when I was serving I had a very definite view of the wives even though I didn't really know many of them.  And I just know that hole ladies who lunch thing and women following their husbands around the place and once you know you actually got to know them and met them properly you realise actually they are quite capable people usually but I don't like being identified as a 'wife' still.  It still kind of grips me a bit.

## Sally

yeh likewise I think for me one of the biggest challenges was all of a sudden it seemed like that 25 years’ worth of service counted for nothing because we would be having a dinner party and I would make a comment and my opinion didn't account for anything because all of a sudden, I wasn't serving therefore I wasn't important and what could I possibly know because I wasn't current.  But you know what you are talking about the policy that I wrote.  Or do you get my meaning and that really frustrates me to the point that 6 weeks ago we had colleagues of my husband over for supper and a conversation started which I'm involved in now in my consultant role I raised a point about it and the individual said well I've just been in Geneva doing x and Y with the Geneva convention and Human rights and du dud du and I said well you had better speak to DSTL and so and so then because this is the path they are going down on that project and you know there was a Stoney silence as if well you can't possibly know that this is a closed project, and I wasn't you know commenting on any restricted information that I shouldn't know and funny old thing 2 days later an e-mail was circulated saying this project is now on hold because of X,Y, Z and well you know funny old thing and it felt I've seen the individual once since and yes yes I've spoken thank you for the Heads Up.  Well I didn't give you a Heads Up I had a conversation with you as a capable individual not just as a wife who has cooked you super09:51. That is one of the biggest challenges I guess for me.

## C

And does this going back into uniform and going back into this role at Shrivenham will in some ways address that point.

## Sally

It will it will. Quite how I will be perceived by individuals on the course when they know that you are FTRS because I think we all had particular opinions of reservists and FTRS prior to doing something and I think in the reservist role it is almost like having all the fun again without the crap of the secondary duties.  It is actually quite an interesting role to be filling. Because you are not doing it to get promoted you are on a set time frame you are set parameters and if it is not working you can give a months’ notice and walk away and that is I think quite liberating almost.  and it will be a three-year post so it will be quite interesting.  We have never done 6 years in one location, which is but in some respects I don’t know if we have helped ourselves because we have bought our family home down in North Summerset we go there now most weekends so we will be there for the summer although every eight days I will be pencilling a day where we will come back the children will have their swimming lesson or we @~@~ because that is where their school life is and some of their activities but you know the lawn will need to be cut because my husband won’t do it during the week and the house will need to be cleaned and etc etc and so I think it is an added pressure of running two homes and living in a military quarter but not renting out the other home I popped down their today, I bought a new car finally 9 weeks ago because my other one was at the end of its life I had 280,000 + on the clock.  In the 8-9 weeks I have had this car I have done 6,000 miles.

## C

Where are you going? UP and down, up and down?

## Sally

So, it’s for work with the consultancy, it’s the Welsh activities that I am doing because I am in Cardiff one day a week for the service if not two days a week.  It is the weekend activities for all the RAF 100 bits and bobs, it’s the school runs and then it’s back and forward to the house and I hadn't quite realised what amount of mileage I was doing and I worked that out at average speed and I think I have already spend four days in the car in 9 weeks.  So, it is a lot but it is just part of my routine I don't question it because we are used to fitting so much in we get on with it but almost it is the unseen. When I said this to my husband he said don't be silly you haven't done that and I said well look at the odometer and go oh! ok how have you done that?

## C

Going back to leaving what advice would you give yourself or someone else what advice would you give them about approaching the transition?

## Sally

It comes around very quickly, the two years resettlement etc ?@?@ to when you are doing and why you are doing it and what age you have a family and I think the transition needs to be over a 5-year period so you can get your mindset into that being the goal and the development process.  And I think it is as part of the resettlement you need almost to discuss self-value and self-worth which isn't within a resettlement programme just with general advice on how to approach a room full of civilians how to write a CV, how to approach a job interview but what I don't think you are necessarily given some of that advice on the list basic self-support activities out with the family that the military is.  And even as a married individual the life is still very different when you are in uniform to when all of a sudden you are on the other side and you are a dependent and you don't have the ID card and you don't have the initial gravitas almost that you maybe were were used to and I think if you have a young family you are then completely torn between whether or not you are looking to leave for a different career, or whether or not you are leaving because of the family whether or not you still need financially to work in order to provide something for that family or whether or not you want a mix of all three and I think almost it is it is almost worth having a couple of counselling sessions but not use the word counselling to just let people to get out  all of their verbal fears.15:41 Because I don't think they can necessarily and in some cases I think it must be harder for the men because there is the presumption that the man will be the one providing financially for the family but its I think people are loath to talk about what their actual fears are outside you know just the having a job and it’s just the living side as well. Yeh I think.

## C

So, we have talked about it a little bit already but what is it you miss most about your time in the military?

## Sally

I think it was the focus I think it was the camaraderie I think it was the immediately knowing where you slotted into a teal or led a team or the familiarity of the day to day routine, the application the running you could be anywhere in the world and you knew that a mess would operate in a certain manner or that individuals you knew from certain branches almost what those labels were or what your skill sets could be and how you were best adapted to any given situation and still the challenge and I loved the pace of life and all of a sudden that pace of life transferring across to whether or not Sainsburys have got the right bread for keeping 4 and 6 year old happy when they get home from school or whether there is going to be a tantrum because you have bought royal gala instead of pink lady apples for something and all of a sudden that becomes their focus and your priority which is completely unimportant but in that little persons world it is the most important thing at that very one time and there is nothing you can do to make it better.  Whereas in work you can say I can do it but I can't change the world and I am sorry this is what I can achieve and it’s that management of expectation I guess yeh that is what I miss the most.  that is what I miss the most its having that independence that ability to say this is A, this is B and that's what is going to happen. It’s that complete role reversal on transition.  Having a discussion with another adult in a work place and saying well this is my opinion and this is why I would like us to act upon it or these or my thoughts whereas a discussion with my daughter and I said please don't argue with me and her response was well you are arguing with me and she was absolutely right I was.  But in a work place it never it never got to that because just the process.

## C

So, would you say your military experience and how you went about doing things in the military continues to influence you since you have left?

## Sally

Without a doubt.18:40 Absolutely without a doubt.  I think even just the simplest role the way I go about doing my note, my e-mails, how I approach people how I do the networking to arranging a coffee morning, for having my husband’s command group over for brunch and serving 30 people you just get on with the process. You know what you have got to do you know you have got a short time frame. I thrive on the last-minute stress of any activity and I almost leave things to the last minute so I can get that adrenalin buzz of delivering and getting it out of the door on time but not intentionally subconsciously maybe.  Sometimes I think to myself just do Bevan for goodness sake you know you have got to be here and you have go to be there and you have got to do X and Y why are you folding laundry?  Just leave the laundry - oh I don't want my husband to come home and find the laundry on the bed.  Too Bad.  And it is just silly.

## C

And what has been the most striking thing about civilian life that you just weren't expecting?  The thing that has taken you by surprise.19:58

## Sally

Reading a book in the middle of the day and saying I am not available for work and just taking time out.  In the garden, in the sunshine with the dog at my feet.  And not feeling guilty about it and its putting those thoughts at the back of mind you know I used to go out and think oh I still need to do X and I still need to do Y and do this that and the other, and then I say no I promised myself half an hour I will schedule it in my diary and I will make myself go out and do it and when I am doing it I love it.  If I didn't schedule it I probably wouldn't do it.  That's it because there are always more important things to do or seems more important things to do and I don't think we put ourselves first and I still don't sometimes just for that bit of reflection time I am starting to learn that now.  But I think I am learning that because of the children too.

## C

Cause you have been working then, what has been your biggest professional challenge at work?  I suppose I am thinking more of outside the Ari Force work rather than inside.

## Sally

I think one of my challenges has been managing expectations because the role I could work 14 hours a day at it because there are so many opportunities and I think I think the challenge has been managing my own expectation of what we can achieve and what we can't achieve and putting a parameter around it because some of the fields that I have moved into and I am for example co-chair for a standards institute for beyond visual line of sight from drone activity I am working with the smart cities programme for how you use drones in inner cities for moving critical medication or supplies between one hospital and another not by road but by unmanned drones so I am dealing with some really innovative programmes in civil sector what is key for me though is my military experience people immediately take notice of what I have to say because they fully understand that I gained that experience over 2 decades worth of application and that has been really really interesting and it is meeting some ex-military individuals in those work forums as well and you know saying well this concept does X, Y and Z but a small civilian company does not have the same funding resource and the slow machine that keeps grinding that the military is that can almost bring some of those innovations into being. That has been one of the biggest challenges in the civil sector I would say.

## C

And would you say you have had to adapt your professional or personal style since leaving the military?

## Sally

Not really, not really and I say that because I think as you do when you get into middle and senior management and having done outer office duties and so forth and I have worked along with civilians in my roles in the later years I was always very polite but firm and fair and I would like to think that is still the case and it was never for me about being part of a popularity contest because I wasn't there to be liked I was there to get a job done but I guess people know where they stand I am always polite but I will make a comment but I will only make a comment on this or that it won’t be you know a left of arc idea for the sake of making it.  I am a proceduralist through and through I have always been and I always will be and so I haven't really changed my style.  And that works with ex-military because immediately you recognise an ex-military in any meeting because of it.

## C

Can you I am trying not to put words in your mouth but ……

## Sally

For example it maybe whether or not someone has polished their shoes whether or not they are wearing a suit or not it may be whether or not they need a neck shave, or trimmed their nasal hair, you know it is all sorts of silly little things that immediately and they shouldn't but they do, first impressions count and so I will always wear a pin striped suit with a smart collared shirt, without a ton of perfume that I gas everybody with scent as I walk passed them.  And that I would say is very interesting I think I am very conservative amongst the other women in the industry I am working in.  In that respect, I think more androgenises actually.  You know I am not there to be listened to because I have got blonde highlights or red lipstick I am there to be listened to because I have an opinion.

## C

Punctuality is something that always comes up as well in interviews when I say what's the thing that you have found difficult to deal with and the frustration that ex-military people have when other people are late.

## Sally

But perversely it is almost that getting back to tidying your clothes and I will be right ok its 0905 I have got to be in Cardiff by 1030 well its 77 miles and I know I can get there in one hour and 14 minutes if the roads are clear and I will almost now leave it to the one hour and 15 minutes before I jump in the car and I hope the roads are clear because I know when I get there everyone is going to be 20-25 minutes later anyway.  So, I arrive exactly on time, punctually but not the 10 or 15 minutes before that I always used to because everyone else is still going to be at least 20-25 minutes late and the meeting will never start on time. So, I squeeze that little bit extra in.

## C

I love that everyone has a story about punctuality.  I think it’s just gets drilled into you doesn't it because you are taught to be respectful of other people's time.

## Sally

But do you know its funny because my husband being cavalry and Army they don't necessarily have that.  When it is his meeting he absolutely has to be on time when it is us for a social activity then you know or a family activity then you know ?@?@?@?@ well it does because I think it gives a really bad perception and I am still not you know, RAF stations say 1.30 therefore we will be there at 1.40 drinks and party food from 2 o'clock de de dududu then 10 minutes after the official start time then dinner or whereas ?@?@?@?@?@? then we are going to be half an hour late and it doesn't matter, well it does matter because people are waiting for us. …...The children are saying ok mummy you are going back to work like daddy when I put on my civilian style suit they'll say you’re going to a meeting but but it is not like daddy's work is it mummy it is not like your other work.  The children automatically have that expectation management of remembering what I used to do in uniform and how the scenario of the situation used to be but no I think I am not in a critical role nobody is going to die if I don't turn up to a meeting.  Whereas in I guess and this is the proceduralist in me Caroline, whether or not in the military role in a control tower potentially flying may not have been able to take place or they may not be able to enact operationally or flight safety and everything that goes with it and one person makes a difference in every military role they fill.  Whereas I don't put the same pressure on myself in my civilian role.  You know the managing director probably does and the CEO does but I've clearly elected not to do that type of role anymore I have stepped away from it and I am not going to put myself under that pressure that I don't need to.

## C

This is a really silly question because I know the answer but because you have gone back into do the VeRRs stuff but do you still see yourself as part of the military family?

## Sally

Yes.  very much so and it is part of my identity it moulded who I am.  Completely but what is funny in light of the even friends who are still serving even before I went back into the VeRRs role will contact me and say, can I ask you about so and so and I'll say well X does this or that was why or such and such cause I was such a without sounding showing off I was very much a policy guru on all things AGM related and accommodation and allowances etc for so many years and you had to be because when all the systems changed nobody did it for you.  So even now with housing or entitlements they will drop me a line and say do you remember what JSP this is in? and I will give them, you know I will check it on line I will give them the exact line they need with the reference and people still do that to me so in that respect the legacy lives on it is quite funny.31:53

## C

What would you say is your main motivation now compared to what it was when you were in?

## Sally

My children, my family and providing the best that I can for them but also yeh the main motivation is the children.

## C

And what is the most appealing about this job at Shrivenham?

## Sally

It’s a guaranteed time frame it is up to 3 years it’s up to 150 days per year it is knowing what is on the calendar its knowing what I can and can't do its knowing there will be a pay check coming in at the end of the month which will pay the private school and when we know that my husband was going to be extended we had financially planned that the girls would be at private school until July 19 and they are now there until July 21 so that is an additional £58,000 that hadn't been in our budget and so it knowing that I can make a different to that budget we don't want to rent out our family home the mortgage for that is most of my husband’s salary my pension then pays for school and day to day living costs, you know what I put across from my gratuity and I feel that we want the children to stay there we want to not rent our house out we want to have a respite at a weekend to get out of military quarters and you know we are not millionaires so in order to achieve that you know I need to be earning reasonable money not just you know 10 til 2 in Waitrose or ?@?@?@?@/ but additionally I need my mind to be active and what I have really enjoyed about being involved in the VeRRs projects yeh I've really needed, I've really needed to keep my self-worth I think.

## C

This is the last question.  Where do you see yourself in 5 years’ time?

## Sally

In 5 years’ time my husband will have finished his PhD …

## C

I am going to stop you again cause it has gone quiet ……...

## Sally

in 5 years’ time the children although I'd rather they weren't the children will be in boarding school.  We will be coming towards the end of whatever tour follows the completion of my husband’s PhD.  We will probably be doing a lot more caring for my parents cause they will be a lot older.  I think James by then may have lost his parents I think we are going to be a bit more pragmatic about what life is throwing at us as opposed to you know I will be in my 50's by this time, I am 47 in Sept so, life will be quite different I think.  So yeh I think my husband will be considering his options as to whether he will be going at 55, so in 5 years’ time he will be 49, he is my toy boy.  And have 2 tours left in him but he maybe a lot of things will have changed I guess there is no real answer I guess if I knew where I would be in 5 years’ time I would be putting big bets on at Ladbrokes and filling in the pools coupons.

## C

Where would you like to be? Would you like to be living permanently in your own home?

## Sally

Em I'd like to be I’d like to my children and my husband to be fit and healthy I would like to be physically healthy and I would like to be happy and content.  And home is where we make it you know whether I don't know if I am ready to settle in Clevedon yet because it is lovely and its great going there every weekend and it feels like a respite and a beautiful break but living there permanently at the moment I know isn't for me anyway.

## C

Is there anything else you would like to add about the whole transition experience and where you are at now?

## Sally

Sometimes it felt when I first left it felt like a bereavement and I think I am now at the acceptance stage and it took a long time to get there and it was the whole waves crashing around you and finding which one you could dive beneath and going beneath that wave and having that moment of respite before coming up again into the choppy waters and getting back down under it and being on the dinghy and so forth and now seeing that it’s not so bad and there is a focus and a reason that I am doing things for and I think that improves as the children get older and health and the ?@? isn't great I am the executor for an aunt who is terminal and that is weeks literally to go and that will be the first sibling that my mum loses but you know mum is still there and we almost lost her years ago so it is putting it all into perspective for me really.  You know you only get one chance at this life is quite short I have an ongoing heart condition that is not improving.  It is not getting worse but it is not getting better and in 5 years’ time I would still like to be here for my children and fit and healthy and happy and its managing my expectation and manging my position and knowing that how I feel impacts upon my children and how they feel and it’s trying to teach them positivity and not negativity and if I am being negative about things they pick up on that very quickly and copy and they have got nothing at all to be negative about and I want them to embrace every opportunity that they are given and I think that it has been a really challenging ride but it is back to the one step, one stroke one footprint at a time and just taking in and looking back every now and again and seeing how far you have come when you have got  land mark to look at.  I think the initial challenge was there was no landmark.  40:02