# Sally Interview 1 – 23 January 2018

(officer, 26 years, married, yes, +28)

04:11

## C

Why did you join the military?

## Sally

I joined the military because I grew up in a military family, my father served 38 years I was born in Cyprus and spent most of my younger years in Germany, Belgium I thought it was a phenomenal family, the support was amazing all of the just the whole family and support environment at that time that I experienced was phenomenal. I'd popped into the careers office in Leicester, on my way to a meeting at the university to see what I was going to do after A ‘Levels, because I needed to speak to my dad I didn't have 10p so I used their GPTN phone and whilst I was there they said we have started recruiting for female aircrew are you interested and I thought well I have got nothing to lose I can just defer my place at university for a year and see where it takes me, which is what I did.  And I felt that if it didn't work out it would have been a pretty interesting life experience prior to starting a degree so I suppose it was almost an alternate year out.

## C

That's just happen chance then really, you hadn't really thought about it before that?

## Sally

Not really, I was scoping as you do at the age of 17/18 what I was going to do the next steps and it seemed like a really good opportunity and some of my friends were taking a year out doing travelling and other activities and so I was offered a permanent commission when I first joined and I fought tooth and nail to have that reduced to a short service because I didn't want to commit to 20 years it would have been if I didn't like it.  So, I was almost doing the opposite of what most people were doing at that time, fighting to get their permanent commission and not just except a short service.  But I knew so much about the Air Force from a dependence point of view and from a family side of things that I thought it would be an interesting opportunity.

## C

And it was aircrew selection that got you through the door?

## Sally

yeh, absolutely.  I failed pilot I was accepted as a Nav but I decided I didn't want to be flown into a hill if somebody got it wrong so I opted for Air Traffic which I also passed with a high score. So, I thought I will sit safely on the ground and I will do the directing.  Which is what I did.

## C

Cool, so when did you start thinking about leaving the military then?

## Sally

Well initially because I was on the short service commission my first opportunity to leave would have been at my 6-year point, which would have been 1997.  I had a cadetship offer with Euro control and also with the civil aviation authority and I think I was 3 weeks to going when the desk rang me and said look we like you we would like you to stay would you like your permanent commission? And I really enjoyed the Air Force at that point and while I was probably turning down better opportunities financially I liked what the Air Force had to offer so I excepted my permanent commission and was posted to Scotland.  And that was the day after I signed my mortgage paperwork to buy my first house. Which I don't think I lived in for 6 months in 20 years.

## C

So, you took the permanent commission and you went ...

## Sally

yeh I took the permanent commission and then I was offered, so obviously then that took me up to the 55 point so I agreed to stay in at the 38 option, and I as I was approaching my 44 by then we had 2 children my husband was in the Army so there was very little opportunity for colocation in fact officially I think it was 4 months in 7 years we were at units which could be classed as co-location units.  My husband was starting his Advanced Staff Course I conferred with my desk officer to see whether I could take a sabbatical I was told actually I had an  out of area coming up and I never thought I would be  that person but I thought no I'd got to that point that as we discussed earlier it is not tenable I cannot possibly expect my husband to look after a 3 year old and a 2 year old whilst I am out of the country for 6 month plus PDT and everything else that follows, effectively 8-9 months of his course it just wasn't fair on the family it wasn't fair on the children so I elected at that point to say well I am going to take my 44 option and I think part of the catalyst for that was being removed from post twice on pregnancy.  Two pregnancies two removals from post well you know what I don't think that is particularly strong people management.  And looking at some of my colleagues and counter parts who hadn't necessarily put themselves out there, who'd had the flexibility to be in one unit for 5 years it’s difficult to quantify but I just felt my children need me and if I want to keep my marriage then it is time to go.

## C

So that actually were you removed from a post or where you removed before you got there. 10:00

## Sally

ahh my first post was with <><>< which was only 5 team members and during that time when I announced my pregnancy my Group Captain at the time said "Well Kate I thought you were a career woman" yeh I was 40 when I was pregnant with my first child so I thought I'd had a pretty long career already she doesn't have an children or didn't she has now left

## C

and that was a lady who said that to you

## Sally

sorry

## C

It was a female Group Captain that said that to you?

## Sally

It was a female Group Captain who said that to me and my male one star whilst I was pregnant was commenting on one of his other female Group Captains who had just gone to a post and arrived pregnant saying I can't believe it and you know dudud du was making very derogatory comments within ear shot of me sat as a squadron leader pregnant and knowing that I was going to be removed from the team and not be able to go back to it because they said they couldn't carry my gap with being such a small specialist team.  However just after I left one of the other guys was deployed for 6 months, well if you can deploy somebody for 6 months you can absorb maternity for 6 months.  So I went on maternity leave not knowing where I was going to, went up to Scotland, I then went to Abbey Wood in Bristol my husband was still in Glasgow so that was out weekly commute and then thereafter I fell pregnant with our second child and my husband had already gone to Norfolk by then and I had come of the command board to have SATCO at Marham the individual posted in on promotion to replace me arrived pregnant in fact had her baby 2 days after I did so they were taking a gap anyway but then the station commander at Marham, because I announced my pregnancy early, because I felt it would have been wrong to go I went to do my induction at Marham but I felt it would be wrong to hide my pregnancy if there were any complications or problems that went with it and be open and honest yes I am coming but then I am going to be taking some time off. And he said we are all a very small station we can't afford to take the gap.  That is exactly the words that came from my desk officer so I said ok what happens next I don't know was the comment we will find you a post at Marham, literally thought 2 days before he then rescinded that you know the comment saying well you can still go into post, well you have already said I can't you have already said the Station Commander doesn't want me how is that going to go down, literally turning up to a station and going onto maternity leave.  It’s not I'm sorry that does me no favours now and it does the station no favours because you have almost now black listed it from his decision he first made. So I went to speak to OC PMS at Marham he put me in touch, he was incredibly helpful he put me in touch with the Group Captain heading up the Lightning team, I went to have a chat with him and because of my skill set I suggested to him what I could deliver the team they created a PIC for me and they put me into post which was wonderful and I actually saved the team more than £40 million pounds on the project so it was worth me going in there.  However, I think 6 weeks after I started my role at Marham my husband  was the posted early to Shrivenham which you know again another 4 hours across  country it just it just reached a point Caroline where it was completely untenable both holistically mentally, financially and for the children the key thing was it was crazy and indeed when I came here to start my terminal leave at Shrivenham and my husband went to work on the Monday morning and he came back again Monday evening and my then 3 year old said Daddy why are you home its Monday you don't come home till Friday and just that transition for her having to share me with Daddy during the week as well as having to share me with you know a little sister etc was quite a hard transition because we were finally living together properly. So, I left with quite a heavy heart but for the family the right reasons I felt.

## C

And do you think if the Air Force had been more supportive, some of those key people in your chain of command had been more accommodating, more understanding do you think you would have stuck it out a bit more?

## Sally

I think in the previous jobs, the lighting team were as helpful as they could be they were amazing, Marham was phenomenal in its support apart from the previous station commander, it was my desk it was my desk and manning who needed to wake up and have the support I think is what it came to.

## C

What would you say was your, you did a fair while, 26, 25

## Sally

25 years, 6 months short of 26 years actual service

## C

So that is a long time, what would you say is your vivid memory of your service life?

Sally

Distress and diversion, dealing with military crashes and also, I guess the mountain rescue side of things, being part of a team that made a difference.  Saving lives. Yeh making a difference was my most vivid memory.

## C

And is that something that you miss now, being involved in that team?

## Sally

Erm making a difference I guess you know I was sitting in front a radar having a pilot talking to you, you know that they are not likely to land their aircraft, military or civil, you know the aircraft may not land they may not walk away from it and being as calm as possible and as concise and as controlling as you can be humanely knowing what the consequences are very much likely to be and if one person walked away from that incident safely then you know you had done your job you had kept people safe you had worked a what had been an instilled in me from day one at Biggin Hill, at Cranwell during my controller training at Shawbury you know we were there to save lives and to do and that was the most vivid side and I think collectively having been at Wittering where we had had a fatal crash, having been on mountain rescue, having DnD it was phenomenal the feeling you got of achievement from that and making a difference and of being part of a team which yes as you know I.

## C

Could you give me an example of that, would that be ok could you give me one specific?

## Sally

there was a there was a day in DnD where we had 4 crashes and 5 fatalities in one day a mixture of military and civil but there had been some survivors we had got a couple of aircraft down to where they needed to be I guess it was that understanding and awareness that you can't always make the difference you can't always get it right but when you did it had the real benefit and the real bonus that you had delivered a result I guess that would be one key thing for me.

## C

What is DnD sorry, distress and diversion we dealt with all military, civil diversions all over the UK so we were the  initial call for maydays, emergencies etc so civil military over the whole of the United Kingdom so for example I was there on 9/11 getting all the aircraft back across the Atlantic finding slots yeh you the initial instruction you give to an aircraft could potentially impact they walked away from it or they didn't.

## C

And what where were you based when you did that?

## Sally

West Rainton LATSIE, so London Air Traffic Control Centre.  And I went there after Leuchars because I had been on mountain rescue at Leuchars then I went to distress and diversion and then I went to Wittering and it was at Wittering where we had the Harrier T10 crash where a very good friend of mine was killed so it was it was almost a collective picture so I guess for me in my military career there was no grey it was very much black and white because there was a procedure we followed for a reason and I am very much still a realist and a proceduralist to that effect I guess.

## C

Is there anything that worried you while you were in the service then, that niggled away at you while you were serving.

## Sally

No I don't think so because my parents were still serving I had some fabulous roles, I did 14 postings you know with 17 roles in the 25 years I had a phenomenal exposure to different roles, I knew that, I think there were one or 2 times when the redundancy elements were coming up oh gosh ok how am I going to be fared how am I going to be viewed on this and I had always worked in a male strong environment and I never felt that being a female was a disadvantage until I was pregnant. That was the first time it really showed itself.

## C

So, to dig into that a little bit, why do you think pregnancy made the difference, what would you say what was it about being pregnant that caused issues.

## Sally

I think partially you are not able to do PFT any more or do activities at the drop of a hat and as soon as you have that child your primary loyalty isn't just to the RAF anymore it is to your children which I think is natural its evolution but it is I think every woman is different but I truly believe some of my colleagues who stayed in, you know we didn't want a nanny we didn't want our personal life to be intruded up on in order to facilitate I guess me continuing with my work with my husband away you know at some point something has to give and the children deserved me to be with them.  We had them very late and we were very lucky and I think that mindset that preconception from people around you then well your primacy is not going to be to your job its now your family and I even had that when the first role when I said I can return I may not take the full6 months maternity I can do x, I can do y I can do calls and conferences and I had a female Wing Commander at the time and she said well you won’t do that Sally I had children I can assure you won’t do that so it was almost that somebody had decided for me that I was going to be incapable of delivering because I now had a responsibility so I guess it’s a bit of a mixed message but if you are told you can't possibly do x,y and z now because you have a family you believe it but actually I guess hormonally my first port of call was to protecting and looking after making sure my children were safe and when they were much younger it was much easier so I stayed in till my 44 point and they were 3 and 2 by that stage now they are at school it becomes much more challenging for childcare during I guess summer holiday and so forth that is where the real challenge for the matter of providing a stable background for them and being there at the 3.30 pickup and for 8 weeks of the summer holiday because there is only so much you can cover with child care and grandparents and annual leave and I guess regular service does not facilitate that.

## C

So how did all of that make you feel when you came to that realisation that not only was the organisation not really supporting you but also that you were almost being forced into a box whether you wanted to or not but also you were heading into that way of thinking anyway? 23:52

## Sally

I guess to a point when I first had the children and I was Abbey Wood if I had meetings, even overseas meetings I was still breast feeding I took my daughter with me and my grandparents would travel with me and I would book a suite at whatever hotel was closest to wherever I needed to be my parents would have the children, my daughter between 0830 to 5.30 I wouldn't go to the social events in the evenings and I would get home say at 5.30 and pick up my little one and off I would go again.  I would take my expressing bottles with me and just squeeze into the loo for 5 minutes and make sure I had breast milk to give her the following day and you know so I found a solution with parental support and which was incredible and very useful but I think I was slightly frustrated looking at some of the American facilities that were available on some of the bases where I grew up which had 24 hour child care on military bases which had these schooling and afterschool clubs immediately set up for serving members and I don't think the pastoral care or the appetite for it exists in the UK military which is the why the RAF well not just the RAF is haemorrhaging women of our age who have a wealth and skill set who can deliver so much but the support just isn't there to continue I guess was the most frustrating thing.

## C

That is impressive I am impressed that you did that that is dedication.

## Sally

Well I was lucky that I was able my dad had retired by then he'd had open heart surgery so they weren't working and that they together the pair of them could look after them.

## C

And of course, being ex-military themselves they

## Sally

they understood.

## C

So, is there anything that worries you know with the way that your circumstances are?

## Sally

I don't think I went through a period when I first left of feeling ohm what is next where is next, you know we had had 5 house moves in 4 years, what is coming? Not in control you know when you are speaking to Carillion Amy referencing housing issues and dealing with the husband you know all the name of the certificate it was almost a complete lack of empowerment having been in a position where you automatically you had the resect the authority the understanding and the appreciation of your knowledge and your skill set to then almost being nothing.  And just being a tag along, that I found quite challenging I think since then we have various coping mechanisms and strategies and activities which we get involved in, I returned to work in October as a senior consultant for a company that approached me and asked me to work for them on a tele working basis which is you know this doesn't happen but it did and wow its I am very fortunate I am very lucky and I have enjoyed and then I had a call towards the end of last year in support of the RAF 100 celebrations as ADC the VeRRs well yes I could do that for a short period I can give something back what a great opportunity for the 100 celebrations and I retook my attestation last Friday so yeh I am back in as a Squadron Leader ADC/ VeRRs RAF 100 activity supporter.  So yeh and I felt retaking my assertation it felt like being welcomed back into a family, in simple terms.

## C

So very positive.   Are you still doing the other28:19 job as well.

## Sally

yeh I am still doing the consultancy it is mostly working from home so I am doing 3 or 4 hours a day I maybe have 2 days a months out of the house doing which time either my husband will arrange to pick up the children or he will do the job but often I am back in time to do the pickup but if it’s a longer day my parents come up for a longer night and they do the child run. So yeh so we are fortunate enough that they are in health and able to do that.

## C

Cause I remember when we chatted back in Oct, so this would be before the job offer. I wrote it down because it was quite a powerful way to describe how you felt and you said

## Sally

sitting in a boat

## C

yeh stuck in a dingy and I can't see land

## Sally

yeh that is exactly how I felt.  And I feel like I have got a paddle now, I've got a point I am triangulated but yeh I did Caroline I felt absolutely adrift and the crickey I can't even start walking somewhere I am just here I've no man’s land almost you are just

*(interview interrupted*)

## C

What is it then that these jobs and joining the Air Force, it’s given you a paddle but what does that actually mean to you?

## Sally

Its planted my feet firmly on the ground again I have a bit of responsibility I have a duty to do something other than the mundane, I say mundane but I don't mean mundane the day to day running of the house, making sure there is food in the fridge making sure there are clean clothes in the wardrobe making sure the children are developing as they need to.  I felt I had no self-worth and I think it’s given me back my self-worth and reminded me that I am a person who is capable who can deliver not just everyday activities I guess.  Its reminded me of who I am, and sometimes I'd look at my CV and think really! I did that? And now its reminding me that I can do that.

## C

I know exactly what you mean that's what this research gives me as well that mental, intellectual release.

## Sally

But I think almost even in a relationship it does that because I don't know your husband <><><><>< doing your research but sometimes what do you want to do now? why can't you? what do you that is more important? well actually it’s not more important we are equal,

## C

Well it is you came together as equals.31:53

## Sally

That is exactly it. And the dynamic changes.

## C

And its, it’s very unsettling. I don't know about you but I had had a job since I was 14 and then all of a sudden, I had a pension but I wasn't bringing in any other money and that was a bit strange for me.

## Sally

yeh I'd always been self-sufficient and all of a sudden, I wasn't yeh because my gratuity went on various bits for the house and everything that we were buying it just changes things doesn't it.

## C

ok so if you had a magic wand what would you change, is there anything you would change about your military experience?

## Sally

I think I would I much had the feeling that I wasn't never part of the group the gang I wasn't one of the hangers on and I think I'd been stronger to say you don't need to be part of this group this gang and if you as a leader are facilitating it then you are in the wrong position. So, there were sometimes environments developing that I felt I should have or could have been stronger about putting my hand up about that is what I would change.

## C

Can you give me an example I'm not quite sure?

## Sally

So there were some roles I went into, individuals who were heading up those teams that very clearly kept there close group around them and it was very clear that when they moved to their next role 3 months down the line their supporters whether it be the SO2s SO1s, SO3s would all be following them into those posts so they had their team around them who would be yes men and saying isn't everything wonderful as opposed to standing up and saying this is wrong for these reasons.  I think that is something I would identify or could should have identified at the time but it was easier just to get on with things.

## C

There is a word, a word to describe that sort of thing and I can't quite think of what it is at the moment, I have seen it happen in my branch as well not quite a team but individuals would follow each

## Sally

They would have a mentor

## C

Not so much a mentor more patronage

## Sally

yes, and yes and they would be protected by that individual sponsored almost.

## C

yes, because their reputations are not hinged

## Sally

interlinked

## C

and they would go up the career ladder together.

## Sally

And that was quite rife and I think to a degree had I had the relationship with my desk officer that I knew a lot of people had or a number of people had within the clique then I think the outcome would have been quite different.  But when you are on the periphery that is not always the case. But yeh that would be my only observation.

## C

So, when you actually made that decision to leave, did the deed on JPA how did that actually feel, what was your overriding emotion?

## Sally

A little bit liberated, a little bit unsure a little bit frustrated that you know that time was coming to an end but also bracing what was going to come I think.  And I think people have this anxiety of what is coming and at least we had the benefit of leaving with a pension and knowing that my husband wasn't changing at the same time that we had a home to go to, we still didn't have a family home at that point we had a small home that we were looking to sell so that we could but a bigger family home so I think part of the anxiety is that when you went into a new role you automatically went into a team and that team you clicked into and therefore you had the interaction the conversation the engagement on a daily bias and at home you don't get that unless you are part of the coffee morning clubs, the flower arranging clubs, the nursery clubs and that has never really been me because I've sort of been on the other side of it then again that is part of why I felt afloat I don't think I cut myself loose but I don't think there was anything to hold onto.  And it was, excuse my language, it was bloody awful for the first 18 months 20 months it was absolutely awful.  The first two or three months after probably felt like a holiday as we were getting jobs sorted into school and my husband was going on his course and so there was a lot of social interaction and so forth but as that finished and he then went to another station, we didn't move to that station because there was no housing a new course has started but you are not on the course so therefore you are not part of what is going on I joined one group but I left because one of the key co-ordinators of the group I felt morally and she was fraudulent in some of the activities she was undertaking with the group and morally I couldn't be akin to that and so you almost set yourself aside without meaning to and just in line with that at the time I couldn't look for another job because we didn't know how long we would be here everything was so fluid and I couldn't establish myself with an employer and say well I might be here in 6 months I might be available for 18 months I don't know.  Nobody would want to employ you on that nature which is why I said it was so phenomenal when the company who I now work for contacted me and said would you like to following.  I was very cynical at first I was like really what do you want form me but ultimately we met and I delivered and I wouldn't accept payment for because I wasn't on their books and I wasn't paying tax independently and they came up with a formal contract so in that respect that was great but it was not something that I engineered or facilitated it came it delivered itself to me through my linked-in profile which I hadn't updated in 6 months.  That is how they found me So I feel very, very lucky very blessed very fortunate that I've been given the ability to utilise my skill set and to start scoping and find what we can deliver and where we can deliver it and move into new fields and maybe bringing in an injection of enthusiasm into the company which is mostly about 70% are retired military but they are 50 something grey haired men, and I don't mean that rudely but they have all had got into their comfort zone and that is where they want to stay with it while the director of the company is a civilian who has worked with the military but he has always been quite dynamic in his output and  I think he is looking to take fresh opportunities to see if the companies could go down other routes. So that has been a real we will see how long it works for and when it doesn't work I will move on. I'll stop but certainly the ADC role I already have got 2 commitments for that and one of them is for school children and hopefully I can envoi across to them my enthusiasm for mostly I had a great time, I'd say 98% of my experience in the RAF was positive.  It mostly was supper.40:48

## C

So, on reflection now, 3 years or so after leaving,

## Sally

2 and a half

## C

Do you think it was the right decision?

## Sally

yes.  yes I do because an Out of Area would have killed my family, maybe that is a strong word to use but I don't think that my husband and I could have sustained living apart again through that period of time dealing with the children or any it’s interesting when he comes home from work early and I am in my routine or the children are in their routine and Daddy interrupts that routine which again I don't mean to sound presumptuous not everything I do is right but it works for us and it works for us as a family and had that been, it wouldn't have been real life if it was on a weekly basis on the commuting requirement.  We had got to that point where we needed the support and stability with the family to allow our children to grow and develop so yeh I don't regret for one instance I left with the reason and it was the right reason with the environment that was there.  But delighted that I am going back into uniform.  It sounds awful doesn't it but I have been given that breather I have been given the sabbatical that I wanted that I needed.

## C

yeh and you can put your uniform back on and work

## Sally

on my terms.  and that is the difference.  I didn't want an FTRS post but on the ADC post it is up to 90 days a year in uniform you know if I can work I work if I can't I don't.  I guess it is almost you probably remember I don't know if it was still in place when you joined because you were slightly behind, or a reasonable time behind me but the locally employed airmen and airwoman, it’s the same the same concept effectively through the base support group but all for ranks as opposed to lower ranks.43:04

## C

And there is no commitment to fulfil 90 days is there it is just what is required?

## Sally

That is correct and if it isn't something you haven't considered it’s something you should because I know with your background and your skills the RAF 100 team would probably pick you up a chap called George Fornby is co-ordinating it, I don't know if you know George a regiment commander now who in fact I have known for 20 years so I think on the 12 February I am going to the national museum in Wales encouraging school children to consider the RAF as a career and they are doing a number of stands and innovative initiatives  building model aeroplanes, building hot air balloons etc etc and that will be a fun day with that activity and at the end of the day I'll come home I'll put my uniform back in the wardrobe and I maybe put it on again a week or two later.  I don’t know I am quite looking forward to it in that respect.

## C

So, going back to your leaving experience I am thinking more about your resettlement time here.

## Sally

Erm I did very little resettlement I went to the financial briefing and I went to the housing briefing and I went to the CV writing workshops I did no other formal resettlement I did no courses I did no placements I didn't have the flexibility with James being away and with my parents could at that point my mother was having some medical challenges so she could only do a couple of days at a time and I couldn't book I couldn't be away for 2 or 3 weeks at a time to do a residential course so I literally took it as individual resettlement time and I felt a bit frustrated by that.

## C

Yeh would so you would have done something had you been able to sort out the home arrangements.

## Sally

yes.  But with a husband not at home, not co-located it’s just not tenable. He was in London at the time as a fellow for Chatham House, placed by the head of the Army so he wasn't in a position not to be in work every day when we were in Norfolk.  And a lot of the courses weren't on your door step you couldn't commute to them daily.

## C

So was there anything specific you would have liked to have done.

## Sally

I think I was interest in maybe some of this new management side of things looking to see if I wanted to start my own business or a consultancy side of things that would have been interesting and you know something as simple as flower arranging and a cookery course just to improve my skill set but they didn't make it easy to get on those courses because there were none in the vicinity and the didn't class as residential courses and it yeh one of the would have been useful for career progression 2 of them were just have been for personal pleasure.

## C

Yeh ok, so frustrating would be how you described it.

## Sally

Like yours

## C

yeh a similar thing I did manage to get a week away, well 4 nights, I did a carpentry course.  We were planning to buy a house you have to pay so much money to these professionals to come in and well I thought I'll see what I can do because I didn't need to do any professional courses, I had project management I didn't feel that there were any professional courses that I wanted to do so I thought I am going to do something for me and yeh that was it, that is all I managed to do I cancelled, I couldn't get the courses organised ....

## Sally

*(conversation diverts to non-relevant other people’s resettlement experiences)* 49:37 .....

I hadn't necessarily realised how life changing having children was going to be all of a sudden you are a mum first you weren't an officer first you were a mum then you were a wife then third you were the officer and that is where the challenges come in I think.

## C

So, I know you have kind of come back in so these questions maybe a bit odd but what would you say you miss most about your time in the military?

## Sally

I think I miss the instant recognition of a skill set and knowing where my place is in a team the moment you walk in the room.

## C

And this is a daft question because you have already said it but do you still consider yourself part of the military family, but did you in that gap between leaving and doing that attestation last week did you still feel part of it?

## Sally

no, I felt very much on the periphery and I think partly because my husband is Army and therefore slightly different mindset to the RAF and we are not part of a regiment at home we are on a satellite unit.  I know 3 of my neighbours and that is not through lack of trying.  On an estate of 400 houses.  I have more of a community with the school mums than I do with the military elements around me.  I think one of the most frustrating things is, even for my husband, sometimes we would have a discussion and it was almost like you don't have a voice, well you have left what would you know.  Well you know what you don't just lose 25 years’ experience.

## C

But you are in your own house now aren't you?

## Sally

no, we live in military quarters but we have our own home that we go back to at Weekends, we haven't rented it out we have chosen that will be our base as frequently as it can be so that they grow up knowing that they have roots somewhere. But my husband has just, it’s to be ratified in the March board but he has just told that he has been awarded an in-service PhD starting in September for 3 years through Kings College. So, he will start that from Sept 18 and I think that will be quite challenging for him, not so much for me now because I have made that transition of being on the periphery but he is almost going to find himself floating a little bit.

## C

Yeh he will, I found the first year quite challenging ...

## Sally

(*continues to talk about her husband*)  and what is good about that is that it allows us to have 3 more years at Shrivenham it allows the children to have 3 more years at the school we have chosen for them because we put them into a private school because we knew that if we had to move we could at least keep them in the school and they wouldn't have to move schools again.  So financially my pension goes on school so going the consultancy role will start paying for a family holiday, a new car, etc so in that respect I feel like I am giving something back to the family unit.  Sorry if I have digressed.

## C

No, it’s good, it just shows how much being in a military couple still impacts you even though you have left, there is still that connection and dependence on what your husband is doing to what your able to do.

## Sally

Yesterday for example we had his [work colleagues] for breakfast so I had 16 up to a brigadier general sat round the table eating bacon and avocado butties I thought I'd better make it a little bit up market and I think I was asked one or two questions but otherwise not.  It’s almost like you well a you're a wife so probably haven’t got anything to contribute to our conversation for 45 minutes so I said to my husband it is probably just easier for me not to be in the room so I will pop in have a cup of coffee for 5 minutes than I am going out again because a it’s not my meeting it’s not my brigade but if someone asks me a question and I give an answer they may not like my opinion so I don't want to impact in on you in your job I guess.  You have to be cautious don't you I think.

## C

You do,

## Sally

A lot of women and men who are partners aren't but I think that impacts down the line whether they know it or not.

## C

My husband has just taken over as PMC so I need to curtail my opinion s when I have had a couple of glasses of wine.

## Sally

When are you going to start leading the flower club?

## C

Oh, we don't do that here thanks goodness.

## Sally

reinstate one.

## C

No, we have a book club and we do coffee, we do do coffee.  There are certain things I can't quite see myself doing.

## Sally

yeh I thought about that but then I joined a netball club but then it clashed I think out of 7 weeks I could only make 2 because my husband had evening commitments or overseas commitments. And I don't want to get a baby sitter in to look after my children all the time I had my children because they are mine not to pay someone else to look after them so if I can't do it between 9 and 3 I tend not to do it because I still feel it’s an indulgence. yeh its finding yourself worth isn't.

## C

I feel quite lucky here because there is quite nice group of mams and 2 are ex-military themselves and the others are all ex-professionals of some sort or other there is a meeting of minds you know it is not just all chat about the kids it is actually *(conversation diversion)* you don't get the social interaction

## Sally

sometimes you go right I have dropped the children at school I have come home I've vacuumed I've dusted, I've done 2 loads of washing I've done the ironing I've been to the supermarket.  I've spoken to the supermarket assistant, you know at the checkout I don't go to the self-swipe because it’s the first conversation I have had of the day and then I pick the children up and I speak to the school mums for 10minutes then I come home and wow that is my day whereas at least and all of a sudden just yeh just so getting out and doing something now for me and getting the job is better.

## C

you do have to look after your own sanity.  Erm in the future in a years’ time or so do you see yourself continuing with the ADC/VeRRS?

## Sally

If it is open to me yes as I said my current commitment is limited until November but the Wing Commander I spoke to at the erm reservist group I went to believes he would have a role for me within the Base Support Group doing activities in Wales and we know we are only an hour away for the next 3 years so I would be keen if it works out to do that but I know that at any point if it doesn't I can terminate so and again at my work side  knowing that following march once its ratified we know we have got that stability I think it’s really calming actually its almost unheard of.

## C

yeh I have never stayed anywhere that long so it must be quite nice feeling.

## Sally

likewise, so we will be five and a half years by the time he goes so

## C

to know a long time in advance is quite nice instead of having the sword of Damocles hanging over you.

## Sally

well that is it housing wise at the moment we still have got the move out date of this house on 30 April because we should be at hermitage we are 2 miles to far away to be technically staying in this house so we've had 2 eviction notices so far that we have fought and got short term extensions on but I was talking to one guy yesterday and he said he actually spoke to the head of Carillion amen housing allocation and when he rang the desk and said I have the approval from your head to stay here hear is his written note the comment was he doesn't have that authority so we are not authorising it.  Well hang on a moment everybody is in the same boat and a challenging boat the same with yourself and quarters it gets frustrating it is ridiculous and it is a pain in the backside. So, all being well come April it will have been ratified and we can say well we would like to say here and they are not going to say well yours is one of the quarters we need to renovate you need to move again.  So, I am hoping the desk officer write Kings College brackets Shrivenham and not London so that they move us into central London.

## C

Well it makes sense to be at Shrivenham because it is cheaper.

(conversation turns to husband’s course)

## Sally

and I have actively encouraged him to do it [his doctorate] because it makes him more employable in the future and that might help his chances when it is his turn to go.  So maybe I am steering that boat with a little bit of a rudder as well <><><> I know where it is starting to head.

## C

That is, it I don't have any more questions as such is there anything you would like to add about the whole transition.

## Sally

No I guess in summary when we first spoke and I am feeling a lot lighter now, I've got a focus but I think a I said my initial feeling when I left was floating I was in the middle of an ocean some days it was rough some days it was calm but I couldn't see anything I couldn't see any point on which I could focus or aim towards I had no way of getting there and I felt  completely exposed and completely crap, sorry (starts to cry) but I feel so much better (laughing)

## C

I am so glad I am so glad that it’s a more positive place you are in.  It’s tough I don't think the resettlement process is quite clinical and I don't think it in anyway deals with the emotional side of leaving an organisation that has been part of your life for most of your adult life.

## Sally

I think the one place it fails Caroline is that is doesn’t address to women and again never been the feminist or you know on that feminist side.  You know I joined the Wings group but I do think that women leave we have different needs to when a man leaves because more often than not we are not about to be the bread winner we are not moving back into a role with the same responsibilities the same financial recompense the same I don't know self-worth and job satisfaction provider that we have had in the military and I really believe that there are almost is scope for there to be a 2 or 3 briefing day for women or for those individuals who are about to become the supporting as opposed to the sported element of the family if they are in that environment just to identify these are the potential pitfalls this is what you may go through these are the ways by which you may be able to combat if because it is almost you know PTSD it is almost, its post traumatic because you have had such a life changing experience and how do you deal with it how do you accept that your role has changed and all of a sudden you are subservient almost enforced as opposed to a leader which you have been trained to do for however many years.  I don't know I am over egging it.

## C

Actually a few people I have chatted to have said they have not really been able to access the resettlement opportunities because of childcare or time which is what happened to you happened to me and also people have said it should be offered after you leave. (continues to discuss resettlement).

## Sally

I thought CTP were useless I had an e-mail from them I think 12 months after I left to say well you haven't used us and we don't think you are going to need us so we are going to archive you so if you need us get back in touch.  And I said no don't archive me you are supposed to be here supporting me it’s irrelevant if I contact you back or not.  You have a responsibility and a contract that you signed up to I suggest you stick to it.

## C

*(wraps up interview) 1:10:00*