# Alex Interview 1 - 20 Nov 2017

(officer, 17 years, married, no, -6)

## C

What job are you doing now?

## Alex

Do you want me to tell you what it actually is or the ridiculous title that means nothing?

## C

The go on then both.

## Alex

So, my job is called SO2B Exercise Team 3. Yeah that's descriptive.

## C

Is that at PJHQ then?

## Alex

Its Joint Warfare which is an element of Joint Forces Command.  No one ever really knows what Joint Warfare is.

## C

No.  Can I just check you have got a degree?

## Alex

yes

## C

What was your degree in just out of curiosity?

## Alex

Sports Science. Very useful.  I've got 2 PG Dips now as in the Masters without the dissertations in logistics management that we do and I have just finished one in defence acquisition with Cranfield.

## C

Not the most exciting one though is it.

## Alex

No but I quite liked all the commercial stuff in the acquisition thing though it was something I quite enjoyed really but, bizarrely I quite fancied being a commercial officer in defence if it paid better but as such probably not.

## C

*(Checks/explains understanding of participant in respect of the research) 05:18*

Why did you join the military?

## Alex

yeh I sort of came to end of my degree and I thought shit I am going to have to get a job.  I hadn't really I hadn't done much work at university I wasn't I wasn't a brilliant student, lots of friends of mine joined the Army I had a bit of I had done the OTC but I hadn't really liked the Army particularly much I thought they were particularly horrible people at the time especially in the late 90's early 2000 I mean if I were to relay some of the things that were said to me and that happened now it would just be horrific what these women are complaining about what happened to them in parliament is just fucking absolutely nothing compared to the way the Army used to treat women.  So a friend of mine joined the RAF and he said oh its really good you should join the RAF it’s not all about fighting so I went along to the somewhere in York or maybe it was to Linton actually to one of their pre-interviews got on the band wagon and that was it really so I had a job 6-7 months after I finished university.  I did like the whole military kind of style of things but I wasn’t convinced the Army was for me but this was definitely a good fit as well I'm no I'm not an Army standard person I don't think I would conform to rules like the Army require you to as well as other people.

## C

And yet you spent that time in the OTC.

## Alex

That was a massive party though really.  Wasn't it, it wasn't I couldn't see it being a lifestyle choice let’s put it that way.  It was good for weekends and earning some money and all my mates did it so I think that is why I did that in the OTC.

## C

So, what was it really that appealed about the Air Force then, if not the military in general because you could have looked elsewhere for a job.

## Alex

yeh I guess so it was the military lifestyle I think that whole having your friends around you all the time I think that you know you live with your friends at university, or I did anyway, I just it sort of felt like an easy transition really to go to a similar, similar setup I knew I would be living in the mess that kind of thing so I knew there'd be people around I liked the idea of travel I did quite like I don't know some of the more challenging natures of what the military had to offer you I quite liked at the time going on exercise you have bizarre as that sounds I wanted to do something that had that challenge to it that had a bit of a physical nature to it.  I think yeh that whole family structure that the Air Force provided was  something for me I don't come from a big family I am an only child and I loved being at University around people of my age and you know having friends around you all the time and I think that is what  appealed to me in the military and the RAF's ethos over the Army's ethos appealed to me a lot as well and the range of jobs available.

## C

I just want to explore that a little bit, I obviously have my own ideas about the Army but I really want to understand your position and what you just said there the Army Versus the RAFs ethos and the fact that you didn't fit in the Army but you possibly felt you would in the Air Force can you just explore that a little bit for me?

## Alex

yeh I think that the Army requires you to fit very much specific packages if you see what I mean, friends of mine that went through Sandhurst they all came out as the same thing on the other side.  I feel that they were very much given a corporate identity that they had to follow and stick to I sometimes like to do things my own way I'm not particularly good at not voicing opinion and I felt that the Ari Force was a bit more liberal in that sense and I still do now definitely it doesn't require you to fit a particular mould.  Maybe it was just how I saw women in the military in those days, you know they all went to Sandhurst and they all bought the same suits and they all came out the other side with this set view of values and opinions that were almost given to them and I sometimes don't really want that level of direction of my personality and who I should be and what I should wear and I think it is I think the RAF are a lot more easy going in that sense you are allowed to have your own views and opinions and don't have to fit the specific mould.

## C

That is really interesting so you felt in the Air Force that you had the freedom to be yourself?

## Alex

yeh definitely and to question which I don't think the Army at the very early stage particularly really want you to do.  I still find these days at work where you know I will question what a Lieutenant Colonel has said and there will be just this "oh my God you can't ask that" you know or you know you can't say that, because I work in a very joint environment and for joint read Army. So, I think there is still that level of control in the Army I know the Navy have a similar, not a similar ethos to us but there are certainly taught to question decisions certainly over matters of safety and things like that as well so I just thought the Army was a bit too over bearing for me. And it was the right decision definitely having seen, still working with the Army I think God yeh I am glad I didn't join the Army.  Seriously glad.

## C

So, when did you start thinking about leaving?

## Alex

So, my husband must have left about 18 months ago and that is when I was doing my command job at TSW and I didn't want to leave then definitely because that is the job you know that you have always wanted to do although it’s always a tad disappointing. It was great I loved being on TSW I'd been there as a junior officer as well but so I didn't want to leave then but it was certainly in this last job that I really have been thinking about it.  We bought a house and I don't really fancy any other postings after this.  I think there were particular things in this job which just made me think ughh I don't want to do this forever I don't want to be battling with the finance people permanently, there was a particular incident over money for tea, coffee and biscuits that made me think that is it I have just had enough of it. So being able to live at home I found some bits of this job quite stressful and I've never been stressed before so whether it’s just I'm getting older and don't cope with some of the things in the military anymore I don't know but I just felt really stressed in one particular period and that had never happened to me before and I thought maybe this isn't good for me anymore.

## C

ok so can you go into that a bit more, was it the tempo of the job, what they are asking you to do was it just

## Alex

So, we do a really random job, so me and a couple of SO2s and we had an SO1 for a little bit are organising a major exercise which I don't know if you remember the last one, so we are the team organising that so like the exercise planners for it.  Now it is absolutely massive beyond belief and we had a SO1 for a bit then he got posted so with just 3 SO2s very little direction and this huge, huge event to be the lead planning organisation for it, 3 SO2s, 2 are in the Navy and I am in the Air Force we are supported a little bit by our full colonel or we were supported by out full colonel, but some of the I feel that I can see the big picture and I care and the big picture was just absolutely fucking massive I just kept thinking how on earth or we going to do this, this is just ridiculous.  All the other organisations are not interested in planning it because it’s too early but because of the nature of defence engagement which is what this exercise is we were having to ask for a lot of decisions at a really high level that I just though shit surely somebody more important than me needs to needs to be thinking about this. SO I think yeh the lack of leadership and support in that area and because I care I think it was stressing me out whereas the boys they were just like whatever, they don't care about the bigger picture I don't know what it is they don't they are quite happy just on the little bits they are doing on a day to day basis or they are not they don't want to see the bigger picture.  I mean one of the guys was due to leave but he was going to transition to the same job but on a FTRS basis and the other one will go back to the Navy or whatever yeh I just found that really, really stressful for a period of time and the fact that they didn't care didn't seem to care didn't seem to worry about the big things used to make me worry even more and I don't know it was all just too much at some point so trying to organise some money for teas, coffees and biscuits for when the hosts come over and another day you would be trying to get the Army to agree which Force Element they were going to commit to this exercise and then trying to plan the whole ABC18 submission for the total cost of the Exercise and I was just like for Fuck Sake this is just one extreme to another.

## C

So why is it you cared so much, what do you think it was that made you care?

## Alex

Well I think that is a really interesting job actually and I think the product, the exercise will be pretty immense. But that is just the way I am I just buy into stuff if that is my job then I will buy into it I couldn't do something on the periphery and not care about it because if I didn't care I wouldn't do a very good job I think it just the way I am wired I guess.

## C

What is your most vivid memory of your service life then of those 17/18 years?

## Alex

Wow, I was on TSW as a junior officer and went on Op Telic right from the very start so into Kuwait and then up into Iraq and stuff and crossing the border into Iraq and you know taking convoys of people  and setting up refuelling points for the helicopters and stuff that was, that made me grow up actually so that was a big a big period in my life I think doing that. I visited the Falkland’s 3 times and I vividly fricking hate that (laughter) that damp windy island that stinks of geese shit that is a pretty vivid memory. There is some people that I have worked with that have been pretty er pretty immense people that I have learnt a lot from I guess.  There is a lady I used to work for at Corsham17:05 she is married to an ex AVM no they are not married they are just partners but she was a Squadron Leader and I used to work for her and she was an absolute nightmare she is an utter friend now we are ever such good friends and I learnt the art of patience from her so seeing her hissy fits and trying to conform to all these tiny little miniscule requirements she wanted with everything that is a really vivid memory of her having mental fits  and stuff and me thinking right ok just keep clam just keep clam, keep her happy we can deal with this so.  That is a good memory I guess.

## C

You said you had to grow up when you went over the border into Iraq then, so what exactly did you mean by that.?

## Alex

well you just couldn't piss around any more could you.  Everything meant it meant people’s lives, it means peoples safety it meant it just meant so much I think it was real. It wasn't just playing around in training and I think you were very on a limb out there, we had no comms, you literally we had to leave at 1000 o'clock and drive up this road and when you get to the border turn left and drive down and yeh you know so I just felt a lot of responsibility so I took a convoy of fuel tankers so probably about 25 lads in fuel tankers behind me which don't have great manoeuvrability if they you can't just stop in the middle of a convoy. SO you know we stopped because we had passed the turning point I think it was and we were in a town further up the road and we needed to turn round and everyone was kind of shitting themselves a bit and I thought yeh this is actually this is quite this is the real thing I need to grow up and look after everybody and people were actually looking to you, where actually on a unit on a day to day basis you have always have got people that know better certainly when you are a junior officer they had been there and they have done that but nobody had really been there and nobody had really done that so when the shit hit the fan they did look to you for what to do and that is when you realise that Christ yeh this is important and it’s not just a game, it’s not just training, there is no support there its, its just dealing with this on your own and I really enjoyed that looking back on it, it was a great learning experience and something I am quite proud I did.

## C

So that experience how did that you make you feel, when you look back on that now do you feel that you were ready for that experience?

## Alex

Well I guess it is what you were trained to do so you couldn't say you weren't.  But I think I don't know if when you went through IOT anybody envisaged you as a Loggie doing something like that I don't know.  TSW do their own training course you are a bit of a family unit to some extent so I suppose you were trained to do it but I think maybe I am a bit blasé about stuff I never considered the full enormity of it and it wasn't that I didn't want to do it and it wasn't that I was scared of doing it I was actually quite surprised of what I pulled out of the bag when I needed to.

## C

Is there anything that worried you when you were in the service?  Is there anything you used to lose sleep over when you were serving? 20:46

## Alex

I am struggling to think about that I always used to say I wasn't a great worrier this current job really worries me because it’s just like bigger than Ben Hurr and there is not enough there is not enough clarity and there is not enough resource and there is too much complexity and I am comfortable generally with all this ambiguity to coin a little Loggie phrase that goes on but I guess I didn't worry that much when I was younger you didn't really worry you just sort of worry about personal things like, oh will I ever get married, or will I will  get posted somewhere I want to, I think that is always something I wanted like you know when you are on courses like the movements course you used to think oh please let me be posted somewhere good please let me be posted somewhere good as it was I was posted to Honnington which was not good, it was fine in the end yeh the postings always worried you, you know where are you going to go next and stuff.

## C

What was it that worried you about that?

## Alex

Well I just worked really hard on the course and I wanted a really good posting I didn't want a shit posting or a desk job and as it was I got a shit posting and a desk job, so.

## C

How did that make you feel?

## Alex

I was pretty pissed off to be honest I was not very happy because 'd done really well on the course, I hadn't come first but I had come like second or third and I just thought I've worked really hard on this course and I've had really good scores for all the practical stuff and now you’re telling me cause I am a year or two more senior than other people on the course I can bypass doing the practical bit of the job and just go straight to a desk job organising people going out on air transport and all that stuff but without any of the real life practical skills behind it.  So I did my year in <><>< at Honnington then went to Sarajevo for 6 months and then I got posted to 1 AMW ad it was right you need to write a trim and I'm like I don't know that was 2 years ago, so I knew that would happen I absolutely knew that some retrograde step would be required which would I would not be equipped for I guess or not practically equipped for so yeh that was a bit of a tough time I felt.

## C

As you are approaching your out of service date, your new exciting life is there anything you are concerned about as you approach that date then?

## Alex

I've got to fit a few more bits of training I want to do, I've got two more  weeks of resettlement to allocate where I want to do my on line training for project management, my APMP, I've got Prince2 ages ago but it is out of date so I need to fit that in somewhere, but my current job are really like they don't want me to go they have asked me to extend to stay and do the job and see the exercise through and I gave it some considerable thought but it is such a big decision to go that I felt that I couldn't go back on it and I have had things like you just need to man up and sign on for another 6 months.

## C

Really!

## Alex

from my SO1 yes and I said I just don't want to I've always loved to finish the job cause I'm half way through something but then in some respects this could be a monumental fuck up so I am better off out of it.  And I have said to them if they want to employ me as a contractor to finish off the exercise then they are very welcome to at which point there was  a bit like but why should we pay you more and I was like well that's the offer, your struggling to replace me and the knowledge I've got, I don't really want to you know it’s not best for my career to stay in as a contractor.  My hear says it would be nice to finish it but my head says I have made a decision to go and do something else so I need to go and do something else not hang on off the back of this but if you want to pay me 80 grand for 6 months work then you are very welcome to and that is the offer so I feel a bit pressured to kind of like take a bit more time off to do my resettlement when they are saying we really need you we really need you and then on the other hand they finally go oh well we will have to shift you around and you will have to do some work for another team so we can get somebody else in to do your job so I am kind of like well what do you want to do you need to get on and decide because I am just going to keep working and its quite hard to take your foot off the pedal so to speak I hold a lot of the corporate knowledge and I am not being stuck up but I know more than the 3 boys on my team do put together generally and this has been acknowledged but there is like no there is nobody desperate to take these pieces of information off me and often when I am doing stuff now this is what I have done this is where this information is stored, this is where you can find it this is who you need to speak to on an e-mail with links to absolutely everything saying you will need to take this on so yeh its just kind of that hand off I am struggling to do and fitting in the rest of  my resettlement.  Fortunately, I have booked the majority of my resettlement training a long time ago so it has been set in stone and that is quite good because there is no going back on that I have paid my money the dates are all booked and I can't change them cause its quite a full course if you see what I mean.  So that is quite good I just need to I just need to back off somehow and somehow not leave people in the lurch or just you know sacking it off to some extent and waiting for them to go oh shit I don't know how to do that.  So yeh I think it is just that backing off the work bit.  My husband says  just let the boys do it but they don't, they don't that could be my own that could be my own fault to some extent I could be holding on to too much but I am very open in everything that I do and I always always document what I've done, cause the project is so big you just can't remember all of it I guess.  The rest is fine we are handing the quarter over in a couple of weeks even though our house is still a bit under construction. yeh so the quarter is going back, I'll be living in the mess that is like a proper retrograde step I feel, I've got to live in the mess for the last few months but it won’t be very long. Its fine it’s a nice room so that is sorted already. yeh most of it is fine really, I will have to get a job at some point I don't need one straight away so my husband and I need to spend some time finishing the house together.  It’s a proper rip down the old building and put it back together, so he has been doing that for a year generally on his own with me at weekends and things so that has been quite stressful I think on top of the job so yeh we want to spend some time doing that together otherwise I've missed out on most of that and only doing stuff at the weekends when I am generally tired and knackered and like ohh now you want what. So yeh so we will spend some time doing that so I guess if I was on contract for Joint Warfare would negate doing that but it would give cash if that is what happens.  Everything balances doesn't it?

## C

it does it does. So, if you had a magic wand and you could change anything about your service career what would you change?

## Alex

Ohh change something I'd done, because a lot of things you can't really change at all. What would I not do, I don't now, what would I do.  I did have a mega strop when I got posted to Honnington that probably wasn't a good idea so I probably wouldn't do that. I probably wouldn't refuse to go to, I refused to go to my Movements graduation (laughter) it’s really embarrassing but I'd probably not do that.

## C

Did you see it as some kind of punishment tour? 30:16

## Alex

yeh I took it really personally, I was like why would you fucking do this to me.  I worked really hard I always had an appropriate attitude got stuck in and now you fuck me over with this, that is how I felt about that. So yeh I was a bit gutted by that, The OC that is who I blamed entirely so yeh I probably wouldn't have a megastropathon about that really.

## C

What about the Air Force itself and the system and it how the Air Force operates is there anything there that used to just drive you nuts.

## Alex

Money, finance, so difficult.  If you have it organised well so I worked in, so TSW is part of Helicopter Command and they had a really well articulated system for finance as in at the beginning before the beginning of the year you did your screening process and you said what you were going to do and that was my job at the Squadron at TSW so I spent the time ascertaining what we were going to do that year and what resource it would need and the cost you know even down to what AT money we wanted and you put that in the system and it all got screened and agreed to so that when the  time came you said we want to do this AT that we said in this we would do can I have the money, yes you can cause it was pre-authorised whereas my parent unit had nothing, had nothing so you would go I need some money for this oh you need to write a business case oh now you need to fill in this  <><><>< system, oh right ok that is exactly the same as the business case yeh I know right so who is our business manager there is nobody currently I post so you get some like phantom person to sign off a business case then you have to transpose all that information that has to go through joint force command scrutiny which only happens once  a month then it takes about 6 weeks to get back to you and then they tell you that they haven't got the money and you go well we kind of need to go to there to see the hosts so what do you want us to do? Well there is no money for the Exercise, well hang on this has been planned for the last 6 years did you not put it in the budget at all? No? You didn't include any money for this exercise?  No, ok so that is really useful.  So if I could tidy up the finance process in Joint Forces Command I would be very pleased because it’s just not user friendly  and I know we are not supposed to spend any money but we need to spend money to make things happen and I've just find it horrific from one moment to the next just the lack of clarity and organisation in how we are going to divvy this money out cause there is money there it always comes but we literally have to write a business case 8 or 9 months before we even want it and it is just ridiculous.  And a lot of people are not financially savvy especially Army people for example, what do you mean I have got to ask for the money do I not just go and see the RAO? No, it doesn't quite work like that in the staff environment.  So yeh I would like to square away some kind of, if you have money everything moves for you.  But to get the money you have to do all the paperwork but because nobody did all the paperwork for years and years and years it’s just an absolute mess so nothing moves and people go I can't do anything cause I haven't got any money. Well you have got money you just have to write loads of paper work for it and you should have done that 8 months ago but don't worry. So yeh that is one thing I would like to sort.

## C

I am picking up on that frustration definitely.

## Alex

uggh immense.  What would I like to sort I don't know, I think for me one of the things for leaving, I was saying to the desk officer the other day, is the lack of opportunity once you get to be a 6/7-year Squadron Leader.  The chances of promotion seem to be like I don't know 4 in 200 every promotion board, so it seems to be sort of quite I mean I have got great reports but I don't seem to make it into the top 4,5,6 or whatever so for me there is very little opportunity there now, and he was like well do you not want a job nearer to home but I think I have lost my love for the Air Force a little bit because I don't fancy working at Brize Norton the thought of it is just like oh really.  I could do some crappy job at Shrivenham I guess but I don't want to teach that is not really my bag at all so just where I have chosen to live and the lack of opportunity I am probably being a little bit closed minded about it but I don't I just don't think that there is anything there for me now.

## C

What do you think you are looking for then? What is the Air Force not giving you?

## Alex

Choice, sort of future opportunity.  It just all seems a bit bleak future posting I can't think of anything that would really excite me the thought of going to staff course really seems a little bit like urr not sure that is really what I would like to do.  I would quite like to work with normal people erm and I am sure the frustrations will be exactly the same but I think what I have always liked about the Air Force is the product so I like what we do and I do it goes back to this identity thing I do like being in the Air Force and I am a Logistics Branch Officer and all that kind of stuff but I think I can find that with another product.  Quite randomly I was looking through jobs and they wanted a head of logistics and it wasn't massively massively paid so it wasn't above my pay scale I don't think for Radley handbags and I thought I could do that I would like their product and I would quite happily say I was er a logistics director for Radley handbags so I know there are other products out there I could identify with and would like to be part of.

## C

So, what is it about that gets you excited a little bit? That makes you go ping! Radley Handbags, Air Force Officer.

## Alex

Oh, just believing in what you are selling and maybe I don't really believe in what the Air Force is selling anymore.  Not externally but I don't believe what they are selling to me internally anymore I think it is all becoming too difficult, slightly stressful and therefore not really that enjoyable and I won’t find it enjoyable having bought and rebuilt a nice new home not to be there during the week because I have got to live away and stuff.37:26

## C

So how would you describe military life then to someone who has never experienced it, in just a few words?

## Alex

It can be its quite encompassing so it’s like all-encompassing I guess it’s not just a job it is a life style. It can be a bit bi-polar it can be a bit all or nothing I feel so it you know you can be absolutely maxed out doing some stuff and then in other jobs just completely mundane run of the mill stuff.  Yeh its difficult I am not very good at these questions.  It depends whether I was trying to sell it to them or not either. I mean if I think if I look back I have always loved being in the RAF and loved what I have done so I would always have sold it as being really exciting, interesting never a dull moment, that is a bit of a lie really because I have been board at time but you know on the negative side of things it can be just too full on it can be all encompassing and take over every aspect of your life.  I don't feel that that is a satisfactory answer I don't feel like it is.

## C

No, its fine.  It’s not an easy question it’s supposed to make you think about it.  When you made that decision to leave did you find it a difficult decision to make?

## Alex

No because I think there were a series of things leaving up to it like we bought the house my husband had left, we talked about me leaving at some point you know we will see what happens on the promotion board so that, nothing had happened off that so it was kind of like lots of pointers to I don't want to do this anymore and I think I could go and do something else. and in fact I was away, I was away in Oman we start really early so like we start work at 6 in the morning and that is  early for me and we finish at about 2 and then we normally have a couple of hours before we do evening meetings in the UK and I think I was just looking around on the internet and I found a university course I would like to do I found some other jobs and I though you know what I am going to leave because there is loads more out there that excites me. So I think that was it I had to look externally so see if there was stuff that would float my boat and there was stuff that would float my boat and that I think combined with being a bit stressed at work combined with wanting to live at home and not having that eternal challenge of postings every 2 years or whatever yeh I think all of that finally led me into thinking yeh I can do this I don't need to do this for ever there are other things  out there.

## C

So, when you finally made the decision then put the paperwork in so to speak, what was your overriding emotion?

## Alex

I bit of relief really that that was the decision made so it was kind of like I don't for me decisions have come to me so I will be thinking about things for a bit <><><>< if I have got time little bits of the jigsaw will fall into place and at some point the right decision will come to me and maybe it’s just waiting for that time for the decision but all the pieces of the jigsaw had dropped into place and I was quite happy that that is what I wanted to do and yeh I just did the bit on JPA I think I waited for everyone to go to lunch and then put it in on JPA and yeh that was that really.  It was quite disappointing really because we didn't have an SO1 oh this is a funny story I forgot about this actually, so I wanted to put in my PvR for quite a while and I'd gone onto the system em because we didn't have an SO1 allocated to us the computer said no because I have no JPA hierarchy, so it was it was a massive joke between me and a couple of the girls that I am friends with on the floor plate that yeh Alex is trying to leave but she can't because computer says no and I'm like I can't even fucking leave cause the computer won’t let me (laughter).  So you kind of wanted to go to the admin staff and go look you need to put me on JPA assigned to a hierarchy because I can't PvR but in some respects you didn't want to make that announcement so we kind of asked the question to our up to the full colonel saying we are going to need an SO1 for reporting purposes can we can please get someone allocated on JPA and they were and they were iffing and jiffing about our reports for ages and they kind of gave us somebody in the end so I was finally able to put my PvR in and he was so and he was leaving as well anyway so he was only there for a couple of months, left in Aug wrote our reports in August and he was like "er right have you got some plans" he was in the Army er yeh yeh I think I'd maybe like to go back to university and maybe get a job but both options are perfectly ... "well that's good, good, ok well yeh you just need to sign here, cause you just need to tick this box to say we have discussed this" and I was like ok we have discussed this then brilliant. So that was that really.

## C

That is a strange little story really isn't it because ..

## Alex

yeh because everyone on my team knew I was leaving and then one day the full colonel come out and said "Has Alex PvR'd?" and they were like "yes she has PvR'd" and he was like "oh right ok" and then he came to me and said "well you have done really well on or grading board and you have PvRd" and I was like "And. What are you going to put me to the bottom because I have PvR'd?" and he as like "well, but you, there is no point in giving you a top slot if you are leaving" and I said "Well I will still be read" "Oh in the Army we don't read people if they have PvRd" he said. So, I was like "no, no, no you can give me this last chance on the board"

## C

Would it have made a difference? would it have made a difference so you think if you had been offered promotion?

## Alex

I said to the desk that if I so I go in May so I still see another board through, if I do get promoted I'd be stupid not to for another three years for a bit more of a pension if you see what I mean, it would be one of the bitter sweet sort of things.  If I do get promoted I will be like for fucks sake, it kind of happened to me when I was a Flight lieutenant I wasn't that bothered about getting promoted to Squadron Leader and got promoted and had to go to the Falklands I was like for fuck sake this is just you know I'm sure I didn't ask for this so yeh it would be quite bitter sweet because as I said to your earlier it is a bit of a psychological decision to go and to start facing things that you have to on resettlement like going to CTW and looking at your CV and you know it is all extra work around work isn't it so yeh I think it will be, if it is a shit posting as well I don't want to do it will be really hard to suck it up I'd have to think about this.

## C

I find it interesting that you waited to lunch time and everyone left the office to try to PvR.

## Alex

To really do it yeh (laughter)

## C

Why did you have to wait until everyone left why do you think that was?

## Alex

because I didn’t want everyone else staring over my screen, so erm there was this gut, this is after I had done it but this is a bit how it is a huge open plan office that  we are in, there was this guy the other week, he was trying to ET and he couldn't he was doing something wrong with pressing the buttons so he called our WO2 our Q over and said "Q can you help me with this?" and Q is like you need to do this and you need to do this and somebody said "Oh are you PvRing Smithy" and everyone went "oh no look look he is doing his PvR come on everybody have a look" (laughter) and fuck <><><><>< this poor guy his a commissioned WO from the Army so he has probably been for about 50 years and everyone is there staring at him at what must be an absolutely huge decision and that is the kind of thing that would have happened to me I can guarantee it and also we are quite, we chat quite a lot so you would be trying to do something and I don't want somebody butting in going "oh Alex where do you find the file on so and so" I guess maybe I just wanted that bit of privacy to make that final decision really, to press the button because you don't know whether it is going to flash in lights or a big alarm is going to go off on top of the computer do you. (laughter) Whether you suddenly grow green hair I don't know what it would be because it is quite a personal decision really although clearly not in my office it is something to be shared and laughed at by everyone.

## C

You mentioned relief when you said you made that decision finally after what sounds like quite a torturous process managed to get your PvR through.  But relief because the decision had been made and the course of action had been chosen.  Would you say?

## Alex

Definitely, because when you are thinking about things and trying to put the pieces of the jigsaw together it, it’s not a decision is it, it’s like you are carrying on but it it’s in the back of your mind so once everything slotted into place and it’s the right thing to do then it’s kind of like done, it’s no more considering the what ifs and the should I's its now considering the practical other side of things I quite planning  like a Loggie so now I have got a date, I can start working on stuff around it and planning what I am going to do when and all that sort of stuff so yeh it gave me that fixed piece of infrastructure I guess from which to work from rather than before when you are trying to make the decision it’s like oh I don't know.  And also I had a long time with the previous desk officer negotiating my exit date as well which had to be done because I did this defence acquisition masters and I said I want to leave but I don't want to do three years of service so I said I will stop doing this when every you want and you tell me what kind of return of service you want me to give if I don't do the dissertation can I not do three years and I said also if you want me to stay you need to post me to an acquisition job because that is what you are making me stay for the fact that I have done this degree so that was a lot of tooing and froing to sort that out as to what they going to hold me too so that is why I ended up with Spring rather that any sooner but I was quite happy with that in the end but everyone was saying you know barrack room lawyers going they can't hold you to these returns of service do do do I think we came to an amicable decision in the end which kind of gave me time to finish what I needed to do on the Masters so I finished at the PG Dip level which kind of suits me and if I want to I can always pay, which I probably won’t, to do the dissertation.

## C

So how long have you had then between making the decision and your exit date?

## Alex

Probably a yea.

## C

Ok and do you think that has been long enough?

## Alex

yeh, I think I think so otherwise you just mull stuff for ages for me sometimes I feel like I need a deadline otherwise things will just go on and on and on because life happens and then you forget to do stuff and before you know it another year and you haven't gone anywhere different. So a year is good I think a year is really good I think like 6 months is the return of service, well not the return of service but the time they are asking for now so it is only a 6 months wait before you can go and I think 6 months I mean it could be good because you could you break away from your job almost instantly and be done so that could be a good thing but for me I think I wanted a bit more time to put everything in the right place and do everything at the time I wanted to do it so yeh its worked out fine really.

## C

And did you feel that you have had the proper support the support you would have expected?

## Alex

No not where I work, (laughter) resettlement centre is great so I have had all the stuff you could ask for in terms of CTW and where to go and all that sort of stuff but in terms of the line management no.  But then I've had officers leave that work for me, have a cared about them? yeh I have, yeh I have said things like you need to get away, let’s have a look at your plan whereas all I am getting is you need to man up and sign on for another 6 months.52:10

So, they don't really care and that is another reason that I want to leave because I can look after myself in there not particularly caring environment but some people would be utterly heartbroken working there I think.

## C

So just going back to something right at the beginning I am just curious because you specifically mentioned about the way you were talked to or other people were talked to back in the late 90's and how even back then the Air Force was different.  Would you still, am I summarising that correctly?

## Alex

yeh that is right yeh erm so I still think it’s different. Is that what you are getting at and maybe this is like a revisit of what it is like to work with the Army to some extent so I think when it came to my OJAR this year my second RO wrote something and I was like this is not very good as in its not very well written so I went to speak to one of the Wing Commanders, you know Pete, you probably do really well, and I said look I just don't think I don't think he has written this very well I don't think it is the way our service would write and I don't think it’s a full colonel Army Air Corps writing my report so I said can you help me with it and he said having been in a previous job he could so he was able to help with that and say had I been at Air Command or a light blue unit there would be more concern about your report and all that sort of stuff my branch have said I don't know why you are leaving you are doing really well all this kind of stuff but they don't really care they don't follow it up with taking time to write the report properly and because the Army is very much into their regimental system and it doesn't work in a joint environment because they are not promoting the officers of their regiment we are all just random people who will have no impact on their lives apparently in the future although we are all part of the same system in defence, I think I have lost where I was going with that but I think there is people aren't quite so rude in the Army any more, they are not quite as sexist as they were and certainly in the joint environment they wouldn't get away with being like that so you do find  a lot of them struggle in that environment but I think there is still that I just feel that the Army don't care about people generically they care about there one up and there adjutant works for them or whatever but they don't care it is not part of their little world or whatever.

## C

And you think the Air Force is better at that?

## Alex

yeh I feel well from my experience definitely.

## C

Is there, what do you think has been the biggest challenge to your Air Force career? What of you think has really sort of stopped of getting that Wing Commander that next level.?

## Alex

yeh I don’t think there is anything against me or anything I should have done differently maybe I should have picked some more light blue jobs I don't know, TSW is part of an Army set up in Joint Helicopter Command, so I don't know maybe I should have done a job at PJHQ this time round instead of because I chose this over PJHQ but that was for my own pure laziness because I did not want to work from 7 in the morning til 7 at night so I made that choice, I think where I have had the choices I have made the choices that I wanted and lived with whatever the results are I've always been I think quite savvy about what the choices entailed so I that picking a job not in PJHQ wouldn't afford me perhaps the er the prestige of working in PJHQ but what I would get is a more of a life style and I wanted to I was quite interested in working on the Exercise it was one of the very first things I did in the Air Force so I think yeh where I have not had the jobs I wanted I have made the most of them and done the best I could out of them I guess so I don't hold anything so if I have got a shit report from someone it’s because I've been a wanker probably so and that has not been for many many years you know occasionally you don’t get on with people you know I think I can be a bit like marmite for people that I work for you either like my style or you don't if you don't like my style there is not really much I can do about that cause that is kind of me so I can do my best to mitigate it or keep out of the way but I am who I am and I wouldn't want to be somebody different and I can't be I've tried that and it just doesn't work very well.

## C

That is intriguing can you give an example of that?

## Alex

of what so have you ever come across Tom Smith, you know in our branch.  So Tom, I worked with Tom a few times and he was my boss to start off with at TSW and I know what he is like and he knows what I am like and he agreed that like the options available I would be the OC HQ squadron that he would put up with as far as I can tell but I but I would be very restrained with him because he is very black and white and he likes what he thinks is the proper military person and I'm not the kind of person that he really warms to because I'm a bit too goby maybe out there all that kind of stuff so I would be more restrained with him and I wouldn't sit in his office and tell him the way I would think it should be I would say where I could in a measured manner and that would be about it I would not get too close is what I mean because he wouldn't appreciate that let’s put it that way.

## C

So how did that make you feel behaving that way?  Essentially not being .

## Alex

Not being me.  Umm I find it quite traumatic in a sense that but he can only see, I feel sorry for him, he can only see one way.  You know that is just his mind set  and you know anybody that had a bit of character of flare he thought  were, I don't know I think he thought it detracted from their military bearing to some extent, so you know they weren't proper military people if they smiled and had a laugh and went out and had a beer, you know you should have 2 beers and go home kind of thing and be very upstanding and forthright so I just to make life easier for everyone I felt that was the easiest way to deal with him but I knew he would be like that so I made that choice when I took the job and I knew that is how I would have to be with him. So that is how it works I guess and you know I wouldn't be different to the people around me because of it but just the way I way the way I deal with him I would just be a bit more careful.

## C

In those interactions?

## Alex

yeh just a bit cautious, and then my next boss was completely different and you could say what you wanted to him, without being rude don't get me wrong but yeh just different ways of dealing with people.  It was in everybody's best interest let put it that way.

1:01:26

## C

Is there anything else you would like to add about the whole transition process?

## Alex

The only thing, I think I remember Steve saying that your is going to be about identity and all that kind of thing and I had never really thought about it and I had dinner with my mum, my mum is apoplectic that I am leaving, she is like, she is really upset well not upset but I think she thinks I don't know what she thinks but she said to me this "But you won’t have an identity anymore when I left" She said and maybe it’s more for her maybe she won’t be able to say "my daughter is a squadron leader in the Air Force" maybe that is what it is and she said what happen to your career ..

*interruption*

that is the only thing that I thought was interesting maybe she is more upset than I am that's not to say she is going to cry over it but my mum is a bit odd anyway.  You know I'm fine and she's like oh what will you do!

## C

yeh cause we are so often what we do.

## Alex

yeh and my mum was a civil servant and she didn't stop working until she had a family so I think for her work has always been a bit of an identity maybe she felt that with me.  my husband suffered a bit when he left because he still used to announce that people would say what do you do and he would say well I used to be in the Army, well that's not what you do darling. you are having a year off doing up the house or whatever so that is interesting and I have seen that with a lot of people who have left they start with I used to be and I think to myself I need to find a way of saying that, that is not that. Yeh I do this why can't you just say what you do now rather than what you used to do and I was always a little bit grumpy a friend of mine left quite a few years ago and she used to always say I used to be in the Air Force and I'd be like you are not in the Air Force now so don't hang on the back of what you are not doing anymore.  1:04:30

## C

*Discussed the next interview.*