# Alex[[1]](#footnote-1) 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.*

# Amy   Interview 1 - 30 Oct 2017

(officer, 9 years, married, yes, +5)

Introductions - 02:30

## C

Do you mind if I just get some background information?

## Amy

yeh that's fine yeh

## C

For the interview, can I just ask how old you were when you joined up?

## Amy

Erm I joined in 2008 in July so I would have been 22. 22.

## C

Ok, and your out of service date is June, yeh?

## Amy

Yeh.

## C

June, this year.  Your husband is... you met in the Air Force yer? But now he is out as well?

## Amy

yeh, he flies for a commercial airline.

## C

yeh.  You are in your own home, one child, one on the way.  What branch were you?

## Amy

Pers Support.

## C

And what was your last job?

## Amy

Er I was SO3 Assurance, so I was going to all the PSFs in auditing, basically so it was on the road a lot.

## C

Where were you based?

## Amy

High Wycombe.

## C

So, you worked out of Hurricane?

## Amy

yes.

## C

And do you have a degree?

## Amy

Yeh, I have got a geography degree and an HR Masters which I did through the RAF.

## C

ok, I was going to say geography and HR a natural...

## Amy

Yer I just wanted to go to Uni, I had a lovely time but yeh looking back I should have done something like business. I was very poorly, careers advice wasn't great when I was a school.

## C

No, no we were the same I think, although I am a bit older than you so ..it was still pretty Naff.  Do you mind if I just launch into it is that ok?

## Amy

No that is fine.

## C

Is there anything you feel you need to ask me about the research?  About why I am doing it.

## Amy

No no you sent the leaflet it’s all quite it’s all quite clear.

## C

Ok, I'll just go straight for it then.  Erm can you explain to me why you joined the military in the first place?

## Amy

Erm, I was quite sporty, outdoorsy quite fancied something adventurous.  Erm I was applying for graduate schemes while I was applying to the RAF and I wasn't feeling I was I was successful in getting a job with a recruitment company at the same time I found out I'd got into the RAF but I wasn't excited about it I couldn't imagine just being in an office for the rest of my life erm so yeh I looked into the RAF when I was about 16 17 that's when I first went to the AFCO because I was very sort of sporty and liked the opportunities that the RAF gave so I'd say rather than wanting to do a specific job in the RAF because I I didn't really care I just wanted to be in an outfit which meant I could travel and do something a bit different.05:57

## C

So, it was the opportunities the Air Force offered really rather than the job itself.

## Amy

yeh and the whole life style so I liked the fact you know you move a lot I liked the fact that you gout of area I liked the fact that, I was running quite seriously at the time, I was on the RAF cross country team and I liked all the adventure training opportunities erm I liked the I liked  the erm from the outside I liked the look of the camaraderie, I liked living in the mess and had ready made friends that were quite like minded and sort of to be part of something whereas whereas when I got this recruitment job I went along to the first sort of ><><>< day sort of thing, I didn't feel part of anything it was very much, you are just there to turn up to work and go home again and it was just sort of an empty existence I could see myself having the recruitment company.  So yeh.

## C

So, when you say part of something can you just sort of describe or explain that a little bit more?

## Amy

So, I definitely thing that when, especially when I first joined the RAF I felt like I had found my family.  Because I had a bit of a well obviously a bit of a shit upbringing and I no longer have family really for various reasons so I sort of felt, I found my place which was lacking before and actually I literally ended up finding my family in the RAF because I am now married.  Had my son.  So, it was like a place where I could belong.  You know they do provide accommodation and when you arrive on IOT you are given clothes you are given food you are told what to do people look after you.  You get disciplined as well but your flight commander is there for you and it just felt like that I sort of belonged.

## C

And you and you really responded to that, that’s….

## Amy

yeh I, I was the weird one who loved IOT. Because I just thought it was fantastic you got paid to just do loads of sport and go the occasional lecture.  Fantastic.

(laughter)

## C

It’s not quite how I remember it but yeh.  Oh, that is really good, so when did you start thinking about leaving the military?

## Amy

Erm probably if I am honest about 4 years ago when I worked with the Army for a while and that was shit.  I saw a lot of bullying I, I was at \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*.

## C

Right

## Amy

Saw a lot of bullying, a lot of unfair treatment.  I mean I don't know how the Army get away with operating how they operate to be honest.  And I just I just had enough and I spoke to my desk to get out of there quite quick cause I had volunteered for it.  So that was the first time I had thought of leaving then I had a great tour at Lossiemouth back in my RAF role and really enjoyed it. So, it sort of left my mind again.  And then I married and we spent a lot of time apart and then I had my son when I was quite keen on it, giving it a go but I got the idea for my business which I am now running and I got that idea probably 20 middle of 2015 so from there on in I started to think right I do need to leave the RAF at some part and I started building my business and then obviously it is a year’s notice so I put in my notice thinking if I changed my mind if the business doesn't look like it’s going well I can retract it.  But I kept it in er, because actually my job started to frustrate me immensely and promotion in my branch is quite poor and also I felt like it wasn't really a meritocracy I felt it was a case of oh your old enough it’s your turn and that was really starting to frustrate and I have seen some I have seen some fantastic people get promoted because they were just a bit <><>< and some very mediocre people get promoted and it was doing my head in.  Erm and actually, sorry I am really waffling on, and actually since leaving I am a lot less angry I realised how angry it was making me erm and how annoyed I was that my chain of command weren't listening to me erm and a lot of politics at Air Command which I am sure you have experienced so yeh I didn't retract it because yeh simultaneously whilst my business go I got more and more frustrated with my job.

## C

There is a lot going on there isn't there?  If I can just go through it again so that I have got it clear.  Being separated from your husband.  Was it difficult to get co-locations?

## Amy

erm yer ...  it was difficult to get co-locations but then so he was at RAF Leeming and I was at High Wycombe which is a bit of a bitch of a commute and then he left the RAF so it wasn't all the RAF's fault but he was \*\*\*\*\* airport with \*\*\*\*\*\* and I was still at High Wycombe and erm I couldn't really leave my tour and go anywhere nearer to him because  I'd only been in that a job a year and then he was getting posted to \*\*\*\*\*\*\* and the closest I could really get was Shawbury but unless I got a promotion it would have meant a huge step back career wise I would have just gone and into a Flight Lieutenant job backwards from the one I was in.  So, yeh it wasn't really the RAFs fault erm but yeh being together was really important.  Being together as a family.

## C

But there was, obviously you had a little boy as well you were with him by yourself I presume?

## Amy

Yes.  So, I was down in High Wycombe a lot on my own with him but my job took me on the road as well so my mother in law stepped in as a nanny, we did pay her, she had to give up her job. So, I've spent sometimes 3 or 4 days a week away and he'd come back and he wouldn't want to know me. It was just like I want Granma I want Granma so he was only one and a half two when I started going away a lot.  And erm my husband, his company are quite generous so he would be back every 3 or 4 days then off for 3 or4 days but he was having to live out of either hotels or like friend’s rooms and stuff because he didn't have a property up there, we did own a flat but then we sold it so he lived in our flat for a little bit.  But then he was in hotels and whatever else because he knew it would be a short-term thing.  Yeh I was on my own a lot with him.  Erm or on the road.

## C

And how did that make you feel?

## Amy

Erm when I was on the road actually I quite enjoyed the, seeing all the different bases and speaking to all the different people cause the people were fantastic and the actual job on the road was ok and erm I quite liked and erm it was an advisory role and I quite liked giving all the advice and you know station commanders would  look to you for there for HR advice and it was quite good in that respect erm but then every time I came home I would feel quite guilty and I was aware that I was missing out on my sons life and I I was even when I was working full time at High Wycombe and I was at home I was picking him up from nursery and just putting him to bed and I didn't really feel like I knew him.  Which is quite sad and I realise now especially how much I was missing out on because I spend a lot of time with him now and I yeh I hardly spent any time with him at all it was it was pretty bad.  But yeh I did feel quite guilty.  And I'd be quite sad to leave him when it came to going away.

## C

But there was frustration with the actual job as well and the way the military operated, the RAF operated.

## Amy

Yeh so erm my boss was very political and really didn't want to rock the boat and the nature of my job was finding the errors within PSFs throughout the RAF, of which there are lots. And you know a lot of the errors or some of the errors were quite large they were damaging our branch they were making us look like unprofessional idiots basically so I was getting quite frustrated and wanted to make the branch more professional and improve things and it wasn't really met with I can't tell you the amount of things I set up but just nothing ever got done and I am not convinced PSFs improved that much under my tenure th the new incumbent she has been messaging me she has had the same problems.  But nothing is really improving.

## C

Can you give a very an example, I know it’s difficult I don't want you to I know it’s, just a very generic example of the kind of thing you are talking about?

## Amy

erm so an example would be erm you have to do financial checks of allowances so if you get like home to duty or get you home mileage you need to make sure you have got certain things in place to make sure the person is eligible and we would turn up to units and it just wouldn't be there and it’s in the JSP it’s you know the national audit office would have something to say about it and I'd go on and on and on ad nauseum to the stations, to Air Command to my boss that we need to sort this out because a Flight Lieutenant shouting about means nothing whereas certainly  AMP or somebody who well not even him but just somebody a bit more important than me at Air Command saying something about it would be good.  And so erm its stuff like that really it just got a nauseous, policy wasn't changed for the better when I asked for it to be changed erm policy was obviously very slow to change anyway, tri-service go to the counter parts try to get agreement erm yeh my yeh I just I felt like I was making no difference and felt ... you see like I said earlier seeing seeing some very mediocre people getting promoted year after year just started to make me think I'm you know I I don't want to be a Flight Lieutenant for the next 3-4 years just because that's just my time, I'll go mad.  Erm so it was that as well and seeing all the different OC PSF's some of them were fantastic and some of them were bloody awful and some of the bloody awful who basically just warmed the chair for 2 years they did very little, they get promoted and you just think cause they have got a boss who they've sucked up to and that's it. So, I saw a lot of that which is frustrating.  And my boss didn't do anything about that because towards the end I got very honest because I had nothing to lose and I and I really wanted to stick up for the good people who were really working hard and doing some serious hours very talented people who were just being overlooked because they had a a crap boss for that tour you know.17:29

## C

So, what was it about your business idea then that gave you that sort of enthusiasm and drive?

## Amy

It was a bit it was a bit strange but bear with me.  I saw an article, it was on Facebook actually, about a child in Africa who had been kicked out of his village because, it was in Nigeria and they thought he was a witch, and there is a big problem over there a superstition of witch craft and so these so called witch children being abandoned, being abused, being killed sometimes and erm it is only getting worse actually as the rest of the world becomes less religious for some reason Nigeria is only getting worse.  Anyway, I saw this article and it was this 2-year-old and my son was 2 at the time, had been kicked out of his village.  And had been abandoned for 6 months on the street and it really like I was really sad to see it erm and before I became a mum I'd see African children on TV and go oh that is sad but go about my day.  And I saw it and it really stayed with me and it sort of stayed with me to the point where I thought I really need to try and do something about this and then simultaneously I'd had a few brain storming sessions of trying to come up with a business because my son get really chapped lips and he gets very sensitive dry skin, we are always outdoors when he is out and about. So, I sort of started making my own baby toiletries, so like lip balms, sun creams and hand sanitisers that didn't dry out the skin and were really natural. So, I thought I can't remember when it happened but I sort of came to the conclusion I could set up a business and raise lots of money with a view to creating a sustainable business so I can't give all the revenue to charity but erm I would like to give a substantial to a charity working in Nigeria.  I did toy with the idea of setting up my own but that is a whole a whole business in itself and actually people like UNICEF and Save the Children are working specifically with these so-called witch children.  And they are doing a fantastic job and they don't seem to waste money like some of these organisations.  so, the money does seem to go to the people that need it.  Erm some some my motivator was seeing that little boy really.  I am really surprised at how much it affected me because I don't know him, he is ok now, erm like I said before I became a mum I would have just seen that and said oh that is sad I'll give <><>< erm you know you know I'd like to help and my dream, my ultimate dream cause you have to have dreams <><><><><><><> a difference, erm would be the dream.

## C

Mmmm that is really good that is really good really interesting.  Personally, I find it really difficult to watch the news full stop.

## Amy

yeh, I’m glad it’s not just me.

## C

yeh and I think again it it yeh I think you watch something in a more detached way before you become a parent.  Erm I don't think it’s just women either my husband er I often see him crying sitting there watching the news.

## Amy

yeh well I tried to show my husband the article of the little boy cause he’s tearing a coke can this boy, and he is two and he has a scrap of bread on the floor and he is walking through this town and everyone is ignoring him and erm everyone sort of beats up these children and ignores them and says which children? we don't go near them.  And my husband refused to look at the article because he knew how much it would upset him, he just refused. So yeh it is powerful stuff but you know what that is my motivation cause it is just so much bigger than having to make money.  I don't have I don't have trouble with motivation I just get on with it now.

## C

And did you struggle before when you were in the service?

## Amy

Oh yeh, (laughs) yeh yeh especially at Air Command.

## C

yeh a difficult place to work.  Yeh so there are lots of reasons you left which is really interesting but if you had to give me an example of perhaps your most vivid memory of your time in the service what, what would it be?

## Amy

What? what like my best memory?

## C

yeh, or your worst.

## Amy

Erm ..... I've got loads.  Erm it would probably be sporting related cause I ran for the cross-country team and I loved that.  Probably when I went to Holland with the RAF Cross Country Team erm cause they are a really lovely bunch we all bonded really well and you know we were staying on an Air Force base just on the edge on Amsterdam so we went into Amsterdam and stuff which was really cool.  The cross-country race went really well we all performed really well we did some really good training out there together probably that.

## C

Was that the sense of team?

## Amy

Yeh, yeh we were we were really good mates.  We'd go away a lot together we went to Germany, we went Cyprus on an Athletics tour em yeh races all over the places but that one in particular was really good fun we performed really well like we beat  a lot of the other European Athletic teams like the place we stayed in was fantastic it was really really cool, you were in the middle of Amsterdam you could just walk in.  And then you are at work, you are being paid you are not on leave.  Erm yeh so that was really good.

## C

I there anything that, we have talked about it a little bit anyway but is there anything specific that really concerned you or worried you when you were in the Air Force?

## Amy

Erm I when I was working with Army at \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\* the job I was doing was for the Defence Intelligence Unit erm specialist debriefing.  And the job on ops would have been the job out on ops would have been a moral dilemma for me.  It was all properly Geneva Convention stuff don't get me wrong it was all above board do you know what I mean but morally I really think I would have struggled and  when then that was the time I was most anxious in the military because fortunately we didn't get sent to Iraq or <><>< they stopped using the facility but yeh I very nearly went and I was very nervous to go and do it.

## C

And what can you just explain a little bit more why that was a moral issue for you?

## Amy

Erm well they basically you had to persuade people to give you information, so it was erm basically lie to their face but but some of those lies could be you have got a very very poor person ..... who has got nothing and you are promising them the world. <>><>< Tell me this please knowing full well you are not going to give them anything.  You are not going to sort their kids out, you are never going to give protection bla bla bla. So yeh erm also being incredibly false and pretending to be people’s friends, erm which I found very difficult to act anyway.  Er so it was emotionally a very tiring job and the hours as well were so 8 erm I did 18 hours on erm with no days off for 4 months.

## C

On Ops yeh

## Amy

And a lot of people came back broken <><><>< and the jobs and the hours so many of my friends who did go and do it were just absolutely ball bagged they were just so so tired.

## C

And so that was part of the reason why you wanted to get out of that job?

## Amy

yeh yeh and the bullying.25:46 erm there was a lot of, there wasn't really erm like when we went on exercise there wasn't a Master Exercise List, an MEL so there was no here's what is going to happen and when and here's how we will evaluate what you do.  there was no evaluation criteria there was no set exercise plan, it was all very unprofessional and ad hoc if they didn't like you and I saw them treat some people they didn't like just really badly they they put loads of pressure on them specifically they make them they made them do all the difficult stuff they would make them work longer hours while some people sailed through and they were really nice to them and they didn't give them any of the tricky interviews or any of the tricky exercise scenarios and then the evaluation was  yeh you have passed or you have failed no criteria of you failed at this specific thing or that you succeeded in this or that it was like the RAF I imagined 20 years ago whereas I think the RAF for its faults is very good at training and evaluation, auditing itself following procedure.  I have always felt with the RAF I know exactly what is expected of me so it was a very stressful place to be because you just had to make sure you were on the right side of these people who were very power hungry.

## C

And that was very much an Army led environment?

## Amy

yeh so it was predominantly, they said it was Tri-Service but you know what that is like?

## C

Yeh.

## Amy

Erm there are a spattering on Navy and RAF there but some of the RAF that had been there a while had got a bit power hungry as well so they were just joining in as well erm yeh they just made it up as they went along basically.

## C

And how how do you feel that you have been out only a few months but you have all had a little bit of time to adjust you are in your own home you are seeing your husband and your son hopefully more.  How does it feel to have left?

## Amy

Erm do you know I really genuinely thought I'd miss it and I was quite worried cause like I said at the very beginning I came from like a not very nice family and the RAF gave me a sense of family it was, gave me a sense of purpose, gave me discipline I'd never had discipline before, I even enjoyed that you know someone cares enough about you to discipline you is actually a nice thing and it gave me all the sports and the opportunities and great friends some wonderful memories and I really thought I'd miss it but do you know what it gave me what I needed at the time and now it is just what I need anymore and I hadn't realised that until I left.  And I am just so much I feel at the moment anyway so much happier like I said I am not angry I feel that all my efforts are going into my business and I see a direct result, I am not having to persuade somebody that I'm performing well or trying to persuade someone to take my ideas forward <><><><><> erm  I make a decision and get on with it if I think it is right and if it is wrong I get the ramifications of that so and I love seeing my husband with my son and excited about having another baby on the way, I love living in my own house which I was also a bit nervous about cause I've never, it sounds crazy but I have never lived in my own house so I didn't know how I would feel about that.  Erm yeh I really, really like the fact that I can't get sent away anywhere it was looming over me.  Yeh I know desk officers would have given you a decent amount of notice cause mine was quite good actually but he could have just sent me away to the Falklands for 6 months, you know I could have just been sent and that would have been it I'd have to be away from my little boy for 6 months which was looming over me more than I realised and now that that pressure is off I'm yeh I am very happy.

## C

So, is there anything that concerns you now, anything that keeps you awake at night now?

## Amy

Erm

## C

It's great if there is not you don't need to

## Amy

Yeh I suppose I have still got this small part of me that's aware that I might miss it especially if the business isn't going very well but it would take a hell of lot to get me back in the RAF now.  Erm so no I think I am quite fortunate in that we've we've moved to quite a cheap area of the country we are in the middle of Wales and houses are quite cheap and my husband’s wage can cover us I mean it would be nice to have a bit more money from this business but we are not destitute I think it would be quite different if I was the main bread winner and I had left the RAF, which is a well-paid job, and I was setting up a business I think I would be very stressed now but I am in a very fortunate position.

## C

So, if there is one thing you could change about your RAF experience, would there be anything?

## Amy

Erm I think the way my branch promotes people because I think had I been promoted I wouldn't have got so, I wouldn't have got as board as frustrated as angry I think I would have felt like it was, I am very ambitious and I felt like I was losing my ability like I was losing part of me by just settling into erm I'm a Flight Lieutenant and that is just what I do and make the most of it.  It just wasn't me erm so I think yeh I think if I have to change anything it’s that the RAF supports ambitious people who, I mean I have got friends who work for civi companies, they have been in their companies for 5-6 years and they have been promoted 3 or 4 times.  One particular friend  he is on a £100 grand, he is a year younger than me he has been promoted 4 times and he is head of marketing for \*\*\*\*\* USA because he is very good at what he does and there is none of this oh you have got to do this and you need to do 4 years at this rank and 4 years at this rank they just don't do that they want the money in civic street and you are going to get that kind of money because you are good and they will promote you and I think that is what the RAF, the RAF is losing not just me way more tonnes of people than just me especially some engineer friends I know who the RAF have totally fucked it up and they left and now they are doing much much better so I think I would change the promotion structure I guess. <><><

## C

You have said angry a lot so it must have really got to you.

## Amy

yeh, yeh it did and I didn't realise how angry til I left. Erm cause I am not angry any more, I'm quite placid now.

## C

So, if you had to describe life in the RAF to someone outside who'd never experienced it how would you do that?

## Amy

Erm ...it’s funny because at the beginning  I sort I would almost describe it in two different halves like at the beginning of my career it was just exciting, there was so much adventure to be had, I went I went sailing and that was great I learnt how to windsurf I travelled, I you know you volunteer for out of areas you volunteer for things and you go and do it it was great.  You have got the mess life and make loads of friends so I'd say it was exciting is how I would describe it and then moving further on in my career especially as I became more office bound which naturally happens in my branch the further up you get.33:39 It just became frustrating which you know I mean working for government anyway is quite frustrating because of the bureaucracy but it’s like the RAF got in its own way as I often described it, it’s quite frustrating and also I think as you naturally get older you lose a lot of that sort to camaraderie and that sort of fun you had in the beginning.  Because you do you do move out into a quarter and it becomes more of a job which is probably natural cause you want to spend more time with you family but you lose some of the perks and the nucleus of it I think.

## C

So how would you describe your life now in comparison to that?

## Amy

it’s very I feel very autonomous and very ambitious and it’s not held back by anyone or anything if I want to do something I just go and do it.  So, I love the autonomy but I feel very driven though.

## C

So, when you finally made that decision to leave was it a decision that came quite easily?

## Amy

yeh I think I think by the time I do give things a great deal of thought so by the time I actually arrived at it, yes it felt it felt natural it felt like the right decision.  I did have my boss, my Group Captain, get me in for a chat and they said all the right things and I did start to think maybe I have made the wrong decision after I had spoken to them for 2 or 3 days after I spoke to them I sort of wavered a bit but actually I my I so I had my OJARs I had some excellent OJARs and they I had 3 RO's on all of  them they were As/A- my last 3 years’ worth of reports so I should have gone to the promotion board and stuff and I found out I didn't even get read because I didn't get any feedback at all from my desk.  And so, I spoke to my Group Captain, I'm just curious I've PVR'd anyway so I am on my way out but I am curious why I didn't even get read. And the Group Captain was actually on the board and he said had you been on the board you would have come first because I was on the board and there weren't any this good.  And I said why wasn't I read then? And he spoke to my desk, who was a Squadron Leader, and this Squadron Leader thought I wasn't ready.  He'd never seen me operate he just thought I was young and actually my one star said but you are young Amy and I said well I am 30 and I have got a child and he was like Oh! He thought I was a lot younger, I'm quite short, but he thought I lived in the mess he thought I was quite young and no I live in a quarter, I'm 30 and I have got a child and I am pretty sick of being a Flight Lieutenant now and he looked a bit shocked. So, he had just taken one look at me and thought she is just too young, she is excellent on paper but she is not quite ready.  And I was fuming at that and that is when I really thought I had made the right decision and I couldn't wait to get out of there.  So, when you are told you would have been first off, the board and they promoted 15 people and you weren't even read I mean that just sums up the RAF for me.

## C

yeh

## Amy

So, I did wonder have I made the right decision but the business grew and the more the RAF pissed me off the more I just thought I've definitely made the right decision.

## C

So how did it feel when you made that decision.

## Amy

To leave? I'm excited, yeh cause by that point cause I did think the RAF is my identity and it is who I am and its <><>< somebody but like I said before it helped me when I needed it and I'd grown out of it really by then I had come to that conclusion and realised yeh it’s just not me anymore it helped me when I needed it so I was alright.

## C

And do you think because you sounds like you had your business idea and you put quite a lot of thought into in and things in place so that when you left you just moved straight into that.

## Amy

yeh, yeh so I left in I physically left in April, I was paid by the RAF until June so since April and it’s been, it’s been as full time a job as I can make it while sort of managing family and stuff.  My son is in nursery part time and my husband cause he flies with a summer airline so in the winter they hardly fly at all so I have had a lot of, some days its 9-5 I am doing the business.  In November and December, it will be full time pretty much so yeh I have had a lot of since April I have had a lot of time.

## C

That is really good so that for you has been the biggest change?

## Amy

Seeing my family that is probably why I am happier I'm yeh seeing my family properly not trying to squeeze it in around my husband job and me being on the road and yeh.

## C

And is there anything else you would like to add cause that pretty much draws it to a conclusion really.

## Amy

Yeh I can't think of anything.  No, No I think I think part of the reason I don't quite miss it like I thought I would is because we have got a lot of really good RAF mates some of whom are still in some of whom who have now left as well.  And we all make a really good effort to stay in touch so we have had quite a few visitors up here already and we have travelled to see friends so proper friendships are sustained cause I was the people that made it for me so yeh it’s nice that that is still there.

## C

Good thank you so much and would you be happy if I interviewed you again in about 6 months.

## Amy

Yeh I will have had a child by then. yeh that would be fine.

# Emma Interview 1 - 18 Oct 2017

(officer, 16 years, married, yes, -1)

## C

You were in the UAS and you were sponsored?

## Emma

I was so yeh

## C

So, what were you then? 18 when you

## C

So, I went through I went to Cranwell OASC when I was 17.

Recording Interrupted – Check tape.

## C

So, it was just something that really appealed that Air Traffic Control.

## Emma

Do you know what, I couldn't even tell you why. I I literally couldn't tell you why I wanted to be an Air Traffic Controller and I wanted to join the Air Force.  And everyone was like why you want to do it and I was like I don't know. I just do (laughter) So my parents weren't in the military er none of my friends were I wasn't in ATC that was just what I wanted to do.

## C

It just came out of the

## Emma

Erm I figure I must have seen a TV show or something or something along the lines but I always knew that is what I wanted to do.

## C

And you never had any doubts while you were at university or

## Emma

No

## C

You were quite happy then and one of the richest students on the block as well with a bursary.

## Emma

Well yeh, well sort of. (laughter) Bursaries weren't worth as much then.

## C

alright

## Emma

yeh I was quite happy, happy with Air Traffic.

## C

It was just ok

## Emma

It was just what I was going to do.

## C

yeh

## Emma

If I had my time again would I do it? I don't know. Knowing what I know now.  But I enjoyed it so.

## C

yeh, so so when did you start to think about leaving?

## Emma

I'd always, I'd always always said that I didn't think having children and being in the military was compatible.  Erm so erm I'd al (dog barking) I'd always sort of said that as soon as I'd had children I would probably leave and obviously I anticipated having children slightly younger than I actually did so I remember speaking to Sarah actually and just saying that because I've only got a couple of years left now it’s not worth while leaving so erm yeh I only had children by the time I'd done mat leave I only had  a year to do to get to 16 years so

## C

But you still ended up PvRing and that is because of the contract changes?

## Emma

yeh so we sort of looked round it obviously when the NEM extensions came out I wasn't pregnant at the time so I was married but I wasn't pregnant, and erm we had IVF and I don't think we had started the IVF yet so I sort of I looked at it and it their didn't seem to be any disadvantage by signing on to the contract extension because I could still PvR and I could still take my option point.  So, I think there was a very slight penalty in my pension but it was like, minimal from what I could work out. So, I took it thinking well if I can't have children then at least I've got a job for another 5-6 years.  So, I kind of did it through that sort of way of doing things.

## C

ok.

## Emma

Er and then yeh it was it was actually an old desk officer that told me about the 16-year thing when I was pregnant he was like "er you do know you qualify for your pension at 16 years it’s not the 16/38 that people think it is" I was like "Do I?!!! So yes so and its as I said earlier not many people seem to know about that so I knew that my 16 years, well 16 years would have been up in August however because I took 3 months the 3 months additional mat leave I then had to count on <><><>< which hopefully I have done properly and worked out the date properly (laughter) otherwise I will have a really nasty shock in November.

## C

yeh, you could put your uniform back on for a day or something, you would turn up and then they would send you away

## Emma

I think I think I will have something like a week slacks so I'm I am pretty confident so

## C

ok

## Emma

The pension forecast has it on the right date so yeh so erm I think we I played around with multiple different options because obviously I wouldn't of counted as a PvR if I had left on my option point next July but my husband I sort of discussed that and said well the children are going to be 3 by the time or nearly three by the time I actually finish work so for the additional 6months in work, well I haven't really got them so here I've got essentially a full year with them and then pre-school so they are still doing a bit of nursery and things but I've got more time with them which is why essentially I am leaving.  Cause I am leaving to be a stay at home mum I am not leaving to go into another career or anything so yeh its it just all ties in.05:20

## C

so why, you said you have always thought that erm having kids isn't compatible with the military can you just sort of dig into that a bit for me?

## Emma

I personally, I guess, I guess it depends on your upbringing so my mum was always around to take me to school to pick me up for school to do packed lunch to be around for school holidays and half terms, take me to after school clubs, come to sports days, plays and things like that and I guess I kind of I never thought that that's would be something I would be able to do really in the military whilst delivering what I want to do through my job if that makes sense.  Because I know they have got flexible working times and things like that but part of me thinks that I would never be able to fully commit to doing everything that I wanted to do by staying in so it was kind of one or the other very much for me.  I I didn't want to do a half-arsed job staying in and I definitely didn't want to do an OOA and again I know you can avoid commitments and things like that but that is not why we are in the military.  We are in the military because we go away and do things, yeh, yeh.  I might as well get a different job that is more compatible to it than being in the military but not being in the military.  Does that make sense?

## C

It does it is all those extra commitments and that flexibility that

## Emma

yeh yeh its its the extra commitments that whilst I know there are methods of avoiding those extra commitments to me I just don't think you should.

## C

yep. I understand I think that is pretty much where I was actually, yeh.  So erm can I ask you then, 16 years plus this 3 in the UAS what would be your most vivid memory of the military of your military experience?  I big question I think but what's the one thing that pops into your head?07:37

## Emma

Do you know what there is just so much that tying it down to just one thing I mean like the two OOAs that I did were amazing and hard in different ways, so, they are very vivid memories but so I was visiting officer for a erm the wife of a serviceman that died and to me that was still one of the proudest things that I ever did in my time in the military so yeh

## C

can can you talk to me about that?  What was it that

## Emma

yeh so that that was er so th the just after I had been posted to Lossiemouth so second tour so I did first tour at Leeming went OOA to Basra erm which was difficult came back and was posted to my second tour had only been at there for two or three weeks and then had this phone call saying oh could you do this minor admin task for me er yeh oh you need to report to the station commanders office tomorrow ok I am off sick but I can't control but yeh sure. Thinking it was something like photocopying like, yeh, an admin task, no! No thrown in, thrown into, so he was a SNCO who died at another camp and his wife lived in the local village, so he he he also was relatively close to the station commander who had been the boss he had been on prior to becoming the station commander er but the station commander was OOA at the time so OC Ops was acting stache and yeh it was just, his wife who so she was I think early 30's they didn't have any children and his family lived in the North East her mum lived in Scotland and yeh they just sort of met young had been married a long time, I have got a feeling they had been married for 13/14 years so a long long time cause they had been quite young I think when they had met and got married. and it was er really interesting and it was really good to see how the military dealt with it er it was so he died on the Monday night and the Nimrod crash was the Saturday previous so erm it there was quite a lot of challenges in terms of support

## C

ah hence why you were called in off sick do you think?

## Emma

Yeh well they had basically decided that they needed to find <><><><><><><officers training they volunteered because it was a young widow they wanted a female visiting officer they didn't want someone who was going to go out of area, who was going to be posted there for quite a while and that they managed to release so I think it came down to about 2 or 3 of us all within Air Traffic and because I was off sick and bran new posted in they kind of opted for me, cause I think one of the girls was due to go out of area, someone else was due to do something else and there had just been a few bits and pieces as to how it got to me.  So erm so yeh it ended up with the station commander's PA did all the admin side of things she was the only admin person left so I had no admin support apart from her, she'd she'd had quite a lot of experience think she had worked at JCCC previously so she had quite a lot of knowledge of it and bits and pieces and generally was brilliant and we actually got on really, really well and have stayed in contact ever since so I I we went up a couple of years ago and we met up just for dinner and things so erm so it definitely had its challenges there were definitely things that could have been done better, yeh, and I think I was I was quite lucky with the family and bits and pieces and I met some interesting characters along the way er there was an incident that I had at his home base when I went down well a couple of things happened there when we had gone down to see the body er I ended up having to ring the station commander, well acting station commander to go could you ring this person and tell them to back off please.

## C

Really

## Emma

yeh so, but that was good I had quite a lot of support from one of the Wing Commanders there who had actually not long lost her husband who gave quite a lot of support and things and ye her it lasted longer than I thought it would and it was more intense than I thought it would be but yeh it was good to see how the Air force can do things and it was interesting meeting some of the visiting officers who were doing the Kinloss side of things because they had a very different experience to what I's had so yeh, she she was very pro-military she came to speak at visiting officers courses afterwards and bits and pieces and things like that and very much worked with me from that side of it.

## C

yeh yeh that is quite a big job for a second tourist to

## Emma

yeh especially as it is, remember you used to get that blue folder at Cranwell didn't you at IOT of stuff and visiting officer covered about 3 lines of it and that was the sum total of what I knew of being a visiting officer so I texted my friend and said what's this about and  she was like oh its supporting the bereaved family and I was like 'oh!' but there was very little insight apart from that.

## C

yeh

## Emma

But I think in the years afterwards the Ari Force learnt quite a lot.

## C

yeh but you found it a rewarding experience?

## Emma

 I did, I did find it rewarding actually it was it yeh it was in it was in a weird way nice to see how we do things or can-do things.  If they are done well.

## C

OK I am going to pick up on something else you said you mentioned Basra, you did an Out of Area in Basra and what you said that was difficult what was ... that about?

## Emma

er do you remember the Lynx that crashed or got shot down.  I was controlling that.

## C

oh gosh

## Emma

so, it had been quite a difficult time.14:55 shall we say

## C

yeh I bet

## Emma

But that shall we say is an example of how the Air Force treated me particularly badly erm my boss at the time was a complete arse hole for want of any other word what so ever.  Erm and about three days after it happened he said "you seem a bit out of sorts"

## C

Oh my god

Emma

yeh so I am at this point a first tourist newly promoted Flight Lieutenant I think I had only become a Flight Lieutenant in the February and this happened in the May so I or I might have become a Flight Lieutenant the year before I can't quite remember the exact timings.

## C

yeh

## Emma

and he'd so it happened at lunch time I was the only person really in the tower apart from a brand-new SAC, who actually was a really switched on SAC but she was brand new 2 days in Basra brand new and they were all at lunch at it happened. and erm yeh it was that was very strange because I had literally about 2 minutes before we had had the phone call from helicopter ops who said I've not spoken to that aircraft in a while and there had just been a few things that had happened yeh the boss had come back I'd been sort of left to stay on console for a bit and then he had sent me up to the tower, I don't know if you had ever did Basra but obviously

## C

yeh I did

## Emma

its flipping miles to get up to the VCR side of things and he basically left me up there for the afternoon.

## C

After it had happened?

## Emma

yeh and then I'd erm come back down at 5 o'clock and he went well you need to write a report on what happened and I was like .... by 5 or 6 o'clock whatever time it was shift hand over time I was like but the entire time I had been sat upstairs thinking what is happening? what is going on? have they been found? that side of things because we didn't know.

## C

you knew the aircraft had gone in but you didn't quite understand

## Emma

No and he'd sort of said you've got a report to write I was like alright what do I need to write? what do I need to do?  Expecting that my boss would kind of go well this is it, look I'll sit down and help you. and he said well you are a Flight Lieutenant you know where the documents are.

## C

Oh, my goodness

## Emma

and I was like urrrrr ok so I stayed, so this has happened at 6 o'clock at night you need to get it done straight away, the taped transcript needs to get done which the night shift will do and I sat in the tower didn't go back then cause I need to write this report bearing in mind dinner time and you know what mean times were like in Basra erm and at half past ten that night the flight sergeant said, the night shift was Flight sergeant a warrant officer and another sergeant that I got on really quite well with and they were like you need to go back you are back in work at 6 o'clock tomorrow morning and you have not eaten any dinner yet.  They were really good and they sort of chatted through a few bits and pieces with me and dropped me off at the pizza hut to get a pizza and bits and pieces like that but not once did he come back to the tower to check on me not once did he mention anything until three days letter when he said 'you seem a little bit out of sorts'.

## C

Oh my God.

## Emma

and I'm urrmm I wonder why that is?  and then the first person, the first person that actually mentioned anything was the then station commander of Leeming who saw me in the erm you know the rear garden outside the bar at Leeming?

## C

yeh oh yeh gosh

## Emma

so there is like a bar and a bit of a beer garden right next to that and I think I might have been I think there was like a happy hour and it was the weekend I was moving out or something so I had been flitting in and out and he sort of collared me to talk to me and went by the  way I hear I hear you were controlling I don't know how he found out I don't know how he found out whether  it had just come filtering back to him but he was the first person to go 'how are you? how was that' sort of thing, so. and that was like 2, 2 and a half months later. So.

## C

I am just really shocked at that really shocked.  an example of how the Air Force can do things badly compared to.19:25

## Emma

yeh

## C

Cause I knew Sar

## Emma

So, then it was quite nice then almost to go straight in and do the visiting officer to see how they can do things really well.

## C

yeh, cause I knew Sarah Jayne cause I was at Northolt with her.

## Emma

yeh I was on IOT with her as well.

## C

yeh well that is even worse cause you knew her personally.

## Emma

yeh but no never once I, I don't think it really <><><on me19:54 like the <><>< flight commander he came up a couple of days later and he was really shaken up but obviously SATCO is supposed to be in charge of them and he was sort of describing what had happened at the scene and things like that.  And I just don't think he gave any support to anybody I don't think he ever checked on the SAC, I know she wasn't controlling but she was still sitting there when it happened and I don't think she ever checked or sorry he ever checked on her to check that she was alright.20:21 or anything and there had been a lot of faff and things because there had been a bit of confusion over POBs erm so like the number of people that were on board because they had warned out of something they had checked it on our tower frequency on something else and they had checked on with me with something else as well.  So, it they'd all been a bit of faff over everything but yeh I just thought it was exceptionally bad.  But hey ho he got promoted to Wing Commander.  He was also the person that told me I would never ever get promoted to Squadron Leader, which obviously I haven't, because I wasn't prepared to stamp on anybody.

## C

Ohhh

## Emma

He also told me I was really, really girlie.

## C

Right

## Emma

Which anybody who knows me would and that was because one night myself and a female SAC so there were only the two girls in the tower so we had decided we were going to have a night of sitting with face masks on, filing our nails and watching friends. Because we just wanted to do something that wasn't wearing ... yucky deserts and he and I think like the boys were taking the piss out of us the next day in work about it and that was it yeh he decided I was really girlie and I was like ok.

## C

Obviously, you can't actually be a girl and be a squadron leader.

## Emma

No, no I wasn't going to be a Squadron Leader because I wasn't prepared to stamp on anybody.

## C

Oh nice!  Yeh oh nice, my God.

## Emma

Anyway.

## C

(laughing) I don't know what to say.

## Emma

Amazing isn't it.

## C

These people you meet occasionally in your career who are just who just appear to be on a different planet.

## Emma

the funny thing was so one of my my best friends, the person I class as my baby brother in the Air Force erm so we were on IOT he was like 18 going through IOT so he was the same age as my actual baby brother.  We had always had that sort of relationship erm this particular person had been his boss at another camp and erm they got on really well and he got married er about 6 years ago he got married and this squadron leader now wing Commander, who is not actually out, was there and I was like "how are things with you?" and he was like "I think I've met you previously haven't I?" And I was like "yes, we were in Basra together" thinking you were my boss!!!

## C

my God he didn't even recognise you

## Emma

for 3 and a half months

## C

He didn't even recognise you!

## Emma

Apparently not.

## C

Mind you maybe you were all glammed, were you all glammed because it was a wedding?

## Emma

Apparently not, but I was like you were my boss for 3 and a half months. I remember people I have met for like a week on a course.  Or if I can't you you kind of oh I recognise you type for thing but when you have worked with someone for that period of time so anyway I was just like it just kind of shows what a complete arse hole you really are. So.

## C

yeh gosh.  Still, I am just still appalled that they didn't ..... that there was no proper care.

## Emma

No but it was 2006.  What care? we didn't really do it.

## C

I know but just on a there might not have been an official package in place back then because what happened was very unusual wasn't it? But still that there wasn't somebody who ..

## Emma

And I and anybody who I have ever told that story to like it’s come out a few times over the years to people that have been my bosses or that I've worked with they are like I'd like to think that as a boss I wold have sat down with you.  Not written your report for you but just sat there with you or taking you to dinner and said we will come back together and write it together.

## C

Yes.

## Emma

And that was all it needed it didn't really need anything else.  I it I probably didn't need anything else I just needed somebody to check. And Mary just needed somebody to check on her but he never did.24:47

## C

Ohh my lord, ok.  I despair sometimes, ok. So, I kind of, I kind of erm I'm trying to <><>, the answer to my next question but erm ..... I am going to ask it anyway because something else might come to mind.  Is there anything that when you were in the Air Force that worried you about erm how how your life was if you know what I mean was there anything that you thought oh I don't like doing this, I am not happy with this?

## Emma

No I mean obviously that but I don't think it’s easy to look back now where I am 16 years down the line and think oh well actually we really didn't do lots of things very well when I first joined up I mean there wasn't the safety culture there wasn't any side of that side of things but at the time I didn't really know any better, whether I was just naïve whether we just didn't do it I think it was probably just a mixture of both.  Where looking back no I think Woooh we got away with quite a lot of stuff when we were when I first joined up.  So, I do think we do things I do things we do a lot of things better now I think we have the tendency to go the other way but, yeh.

## C

So yeh but there is nothing that er there's nothing that ever made you think oh this is wrong this shouldn't be happening

## Emma

not really no

## C

outside of that particular incident.  Is there anything you are particularly concerned about now as you are sort of in that resettlement phase?  You are is there anything that springs to mind where you think oh I am a bit nervous about something.

## Emma

Erm, no I don't think so, sorry I just need to grab my phone and text my mother in law back.  Er, I am like no <><>< erm I don't think so obviously I think it is going to be a massive change because for me I have spent the better part of 20 years being in the military because even when I was at university I was very aware that actually I was joining the Air Force, I had I had a job because you were sponsored type thing so I think that for me it is kind of a little bit strange and a little bit of a loss of like oh it’s been this massive part of me and everything but at the same time as I said to you the other day my husband is still in so there is very much an element of I am going to get a lot of erm those side of things erm from him. So, I don't I won’t really know until I am out I guess but I am still going to have that sort of connection.  Erm I guess, yeh I don't really know it’s kind of   ....       yeh I haven't really thought about it if that makes sense cause although I'm leaving and I know why I am leaving so

## C

and you are content with that

## Emma

yeh I am content I am not I am not I guess a lot of people when they leave are worried about if they are going to find a job or whether  the job that they have got  is going to work out or anything along those type of lines but I am not finding a job I am going to be sitting at home with my children which is ultimately what I wanted to do. So yeh

## C

So, it’s all coming together really, I suppose isn't it?

## Emma

Yeh

## C

Ok the next question is erm it’s not that I want you to go over everything that happened in Basra again but if that is the thing that springs to mind then that is fine erm but the question is If you had a magic wand and you could change one thing about your Air Force experience what would it be?

## Emma

Hhmmmm, (long pause) oh that is a difficult question because I wouldn't necessarily change anything in Basra I just wish he was better. So, but I (long pause) oh I don't know.  No.  (big sigh) part of me wished that I had done more and made more of my time if that makes sense.  So, I wish I had done more AT I wish I'd done things like ski champs or something along those types of line because I didn't do them and I've wasted quite a lot of opportunities that I probably had. Erm

## C

So why, why didn't you do those things do you think?

## Emma

Mostly because I could never get time off work to do them, being in the environment I was working in, but I might of tried to kind of fight a little bit more to get those type of things.  Erm I don't know it’s kind of weird, I sit here as a 16-year Flight Lieutenant, kind of going well like our promotion board got released yesterday and it is all people that where I've mentored going through their first tours that are getting promoted.

## C

yeh

## Emma

as a third tourist and I think well cold I have done more but I was always quite I think I was always too honest with all of my reporting officers that I wanted to leave as soon as I had children.  So, I always worked hard, I always did everything that was asked but I never really got written up for that. So I was always written up quite well but reporting officers were not very good at writing the reports but then I always said I didn't want to be a squadron leader so and they were all quite aware of that so maybe I should have kept my mouth shut a little bit not that I would have taken the promotion if I'd of been offered it if that makes sense.

## C

yeh, why not?

## Emma

because I wanted to be a controller I didn't want to disappear into the deep dark hole of

High Wycombe.

## C

That's fair enough. 31:32 yeh

## Emma

unintelligible

## C

You liked being in the tower that is where you wanted to be.

## Emma

yeh.  I enjoyed doing the job that I was doing, so, yeh

## C

that’s' good

## Emma

It was funny because I always sort of said I wouldn't do anything to harm being promoted but I didn't but I wasn't I was never oh my god I want to be promoted, like 3 or 4 people that I was on IOT with are no Wing Commanders but I've done exactly the same jobs as them so I've done tower exec jobs I have done themes committee jobs I've done the organising functions I've had AOCs commendations I've been a flight commander I've done all of that side of things but it  is marketing yourself isn't it.

## C

That is an interesting way to put it, and you didn't think you did that.

## Emma

I don't know no definitely not.  I haven't been helped by bits and pieces like really bad reporting officers but yeh.

## C

But ultimately it wasn't your goal anyway so

## Emma

So, no no yeh

## C

That is fair enough I think if you were happy and you were doing what you wanted to do I think that 's

## Emma

Exactly, in some ways its weird cause in some ways it would be nice to be recognised for everything that you did but at the same time I am quite happy with the lot that I got. So

## C

yeh that is fine. SO erm how how would you describe military life, this is the question is really just for me to try and get to the bottom of how you perceive military life and how you perceive if differently from civilian life is going to be.

## Emma

woooh, erm I think it is more disciplined than civilian life in terms of like say for example resettlement33:44 the course I was on was a mixture of civvies and military.  Whereas I would always be there 10 minutes early while they would walk through the door at 9 o'clock when the course started and things like that.  So, I think it is going to be little things like that er like haircuts <><> my son is going to be short none of this really wild hair that my nephew has got (laughter) that type of ingrained sort of, have to iron your clothes, be early type side of things which I don't really get from any of my civvi friends that I have got.  So, I think that yeh

## C

That is quite interesting.  I think Steve is the same with Toby's hair.  He is right like hairdressers.

## Emma

My son has got this tiny it it comes down like that and his hair is like really, really short and my husband went I hope you are going to go and get his hair cut this weekend.  I was like really? he needs like half a millimetre off it.  So yeh I can't what was your original question?  What is military life like?

## C

yeh how would you describe it? yeh

## Emma

(sigh) do you know (sigh) you know I just think, I just think it is going to be really different in how things operate and how just in terms if I do go back into the work place like obviously we have obviously got a very clear rank structure and we do this and we report to this person and there's all of this side of things and I talk to my brother who works in the construction industry and it is a completely different kettle of fish when he is like talking to his managing director or anything along those types of things and it’s all and I guess a lot of it is back to the discipline side of things it’s all first name terms it’s all jokey friendly type side of things which we never really have, we are very structured.  Cause it is a very structured type of existence.

## C

ok.  Erm so how long have you not been at work now, how long have you had off?

## Emma

so, June 30th was my last day at work.

## C

so, 2 or 3 months now so how do you feel you are settling into it?

## Emma

Its good I guess it’s been quite weird cause I had sort of a month at home when I finished work and then I went to Devon for 4 weeks to do my first complete resettlement course and then I was back home for 3 weeks then I've had 2 weeks on my next resettlement course then I have been back home for a week now so it has been a bit all over the place.  And then I have been doing a few other things as well so I think it will be a few months before it settles down a little bit.

## C

yeh so you are not actually in a steady routine yet cause you are still taking off for your

courses and stuff?

## Emma

yeh I mean all of that has finished now so yeh I, I am enjoying that fact that erm yeh I am enjoying the fact that I can do what I like and I can commit to things that I couldn't commit to before.  So if I want to go and do something on a Thursday I can go and do something on a Thursday so I have been doing huh so I volunteer for a premature baby charity and erm part of being involved with that I've got involved with essentially NHS STANEVAL so I am a parent representative on the STANEVAL team that they run through the <><>< neo-natal units and they like rank me up yesterday morning going "any chance you can come and do a review the parents just gone sick?" Well yes, I can as long as I can sort my baby sitters out which I could do.  And it is quite nice to be able to do that side of things and then erm there's a world prematurity day fund raising event at the local hospital happening I've been able to go and do that, I'm going my friends starts back from maternity leave next week in work but we are going to soft play on Friday where I was having to miss all of that side of things . So that is nice being able to do that.

## C

yeh ok cool.  So that that decision to leave, the actual decision when you made it how did you feel about it, that?

## Emma

Quite relieved I think, so, it’s kind of strange because we talked about it for so long and it had been it was just a question of when I left as opposed to a precise date as to as to I was definitely going to leave. So I was quite relieved erm I definitely I felt really relieved in June when I finished work because I think the last few months I didn't really enjoy the last year that I was in work erm a lot of that was due to the personalities that I was working with but at the same time a lot of it was I was just waiting to finish, so.  yeh I didn't particularly enjoy controlling I didn't enjoy going into work.  I enjoyed adult conversation cause my husband was Out of Area at the same time as well which probably coupled in quite a lot of things I had post-natal depression as well so that probably didn't help matters either but yeh I just felt kind of relieved that it was all happening. But it was kind of a fait a complete really because I'd gone in we had sort of talked about it I'd made the decision, I'd told the new SATCO that is what I was doing, this was months in advance I rang the desk officer and said this is what I am doing, he spoke to me, he tried to encourage me obviously to stay and I was like at the end of the day my child care bill is £1700 a month and that is with my husband’s parents taking them for a day and a half a week.  I only take home £2500 so it’s just not worth it, so, even taking out any other sort of reasons so I kind of done all that and I was waiting for my pension forecast to come back before I submitted the final clicks on JPA as it were saying yeh so it was a bit kind of like yeh it’s been done but everybody knew that is what I was going to do beforehand.  And then I definitely felt more relieved I think when I finished in June I was like huhh this is better but I think it had just been waiting to leave at that point.  My cousin has just PVR’d as well erm I was chatting to her and its similar sort of reasons.  She finishes March/May I think, also Air Traffic.  Also working at the same tower.

## C

(laughing) That's nice.

## Emma

Well we never actually worked together weirdly she was on the school and has just been out of area and come back and moved across to the Tower and PVR'd at the same time.  It’s quite funny. (laughing).  They were you like your family doesn't like this place does it.

## C

So, a relief well that is nice feeling, isn't it to me it was almost like well now I can move on with my life now.  I can go to the next stage.

## Emma

I think for me it was now like I can really enjoy having the children and spending time with them, and don't get me wrong they do my head in looking after little ones, my husband is like you are more shouty since you finished work, and I'm like hmm you trying bargaining with 2 children all day every day.  He said "you chose to leave you can go back if you want" (laughter) so yeh so yeh it has its challenges but no I think I don't if I had enjoyed the last year would I have felt differently?  I don't know.  But but it has been in the back of my mind for as long as I can remember.  I mean I remember this is going back a long time going on holiday with Steve, as in your husband Steve, and the others and we we went to Egypt.

## C

yes

## Emma

And I remember Louise and I sitting and talking about having children and leaving and what we would do.  And things like that so that is going back a few years (laughs).

## C

But that is interesting isn't it because even back then there was a realisation the two worlds of being a mother or a parent, it’s not necessarily just being mam is it, and er and that Air Force career aren't necessarily ...

## Emma

No, and I like I sat I sat in Bastion and I watched my room rate and the DSATCO both had left their children a t home and I thought I don't know how you can do, I just do not know how you can do it and my cousin had just come back from the Falklands and she really struggled with it and I thought I can't I can't do that.  So

## C

No no it was fundamental to my decision as well if I had stayed in I would have gone away.

## Emma

Were you Admin? Supply?

## C

Logs yeh yeh, logs and the only reason I hadn't was because my kids were so close together that there wasn't time to fit an out of area in between them so yeh.  So, I just from your point of view again just for the tape just to sort of contextualise it, what exactly cause I know my thoughts, but I am interested in yours.  what exactly isn't compatible between the family and the Air Force Career.

## Emma

I personally don't think you can fully commit to doing both and doing a good job of both.  I think you can be a really good mother and be in the Air Force erm but I just don't think you can fully commit without sacrificing a huge amount and it is not something I am prepared to do.  So, my God Daughter her mum is at ACSC at the moment so she is there Monday to Friday and erm my friend is coming back at weekends.  Well I did 4 weeks of that and I wouldn't want to do that for the better part of a year to get on. yeh its I I just couldn't give everything to my career and the Air Force and ultimately, I guess to the people that were working for me as a flight commander and things like that I just couldn't do that without sacrificing something of my children or I would sacrifice that they would need.  So, I didn't want to ever be in the position where they needed something but I couldn’t' t give them it because I had to go and deal with my children, type type thing.46:03

## C

thank you that is fine that is fine.  Erm so what do you think is going to be the biggest challenge you are going to face after you have left?

## Emma

ohh, I think just getting used to not being in the military as I say its 20 years virtually of my life, you could I know UAS is UAS but it was still a commitment and a way of life even back then of things that I could and couldn't do like can't have weird haircuts or weird hair colours or have a glass of wine at lunch time or any of those type of things wear what you like when you want, do what you like when you want without trying to think about necessary consequences and yes I know there are consequences over actions that I do so the type of person that you are is still very it’s not going to change a huge amount but there are still subtle things you don't walk into a shop and think ohh well that is a nice top and that will work well in an officers mess type if you get me that side of things.

## C

yeh yeh I do yes, yeh ok happy with that and you you have chosen to live in your own house and your husband is doing the commute.

## Emma

At the moment, yes.  yeh so like I said to you the other day there are reasons why we are doing that at the moment so how long we do this for I don't know, a lot depends on where his next job is. whether he gets promoted, bits and pieces.  He is fairly disillusioned with life at the moment.  So yeh I think he is almost at the point with the desk officer, send me back I don't care about a career anymore I just want to go home.  Erm and I think if he does that he won’t stay in that long. so yeh what we do or where we do or bits and pieces I don't know.  We have always said he will do this tour and because of the reasons I was staying where we were we would probably move as a family after that if we needed to until the children got to nearly secondary school age and then we want to sort of give them a good foundation and things but I guess we are still relatively flexible to what we are going to do.

## C

So, is where you are now close to your family?

## Emma

So erm my Dad is about 2 and a half hours, my brother is about an hour and a bit and my husband’s parents are about 40 mins away.   So ironically, we are living in the same town as they were when they first got married, ironically.  (laughter)

## C

I suppose it is see what happens next, see how this weekly commute impacts on family life and see what happens.

## Emma

mmm yeh and it is definitely impacting cause my little boy is massively "my daddy" and gets really upset when he leaves, yet it is definitely impacting on him.  My daughter is not quite she seems a bit happier with life, yesterday she was like "is Daddy at work?" "Yes, Daddy is at work", "Daddy back later back later?", but I know by later she kind of means in a few days while my son was like "my daddy I want my Daddy",

## C

yeh its tough.

## Emma

So, I think she has adapted more to it but he is very much a daddy’s boy.

## C

yeh its interesting I think we, I mean Toby gets a lot more upset when Steve goes away than Connie does he is a lot more visibly I mean he is 7 now but he still doesn't like it when Steve is away even for just a night and that is why we ended up moving back to Wittering.50:51 with Steve.

## Emma

yeh, I think as well because I think I think we will move after this because I know my husband is finding it quite hard and definitely the kids are finding it quite hard but it just because of the timing of when he started his job, and the children's medical care and things like that it it just wasn't feasible and my husband was like well you could move down now but he he wanted me to give living here a bit of a go and get to know people and its quite hard getting to know people when you are 37,

## C

you have got to make new friends

## Emma

I know, so especially when you don't really work and the kids don't go to school yet so yeh I I need to work on this which I is guess going back to one of your previous questions probably one of the things I will really miss about the Air Force is the camaraderie and not really having to, it sounds really bad but not having to make an effort to make friends.  Because I haven't spoken to your husband in years but I still know I could sit down quite happy and have a brew with him and catch up and it would be like we spoke 2 days ago so that is what I miss which I don't think you really get in civvi life like my best friend from school it is always quite difficult in some ways when I see her because neither one of us are particularly good at keeping in contact but it is always really awkward for the first hour when we chat because oh ok I don't really know that much about your life anymore whereas with military people you never really get that.

## C

Why do you think that is?

## Emma

I don't know whether it is just because we're so used to moving around and so used to doing a course there and working there for a couple of years and bits and pieces you just have this really wide network don't you of people? Everybody knows everybody who know somebody type scale of things so you very much sort of pick up and move on again so I don't know I guess I guess there is a common theme between all of us and you do get hugely different characters within the Air Force or the military but fundamentally we are all very very similar we are all very similar people in your mindsets because you are in the military so you kind of need to be.

## C

yeh, good point right I think, I think that is all I have got in terms of proper questions is there anything you want to say about this transition experience that sort of comes to mind.

## Emma

No, no I think I am going to be a nice easy case for you. (laughs)

## C

It's all its all really fascinating and I think I have done a dozen or so interviews now and everyone they are all slightly different but some common themes do come out.  Some people have PVR'd like yourself some have actually retired cause they have hit 55 some were made redundant ..

## Emma

You get quite a even amongst the people that have PVR'd though I suspect you get a lot of people that are very bitter and the people who are very happy.  I know there is another girl who said she would do an interview, I don't know if you are doing an interview with her who was Air Traffic now ABM who I was actually on IOT and JASTY with and I expect she would be quite bitter about it.

## C

yeh

## Emma

Even though she PVR'd

## C

I am getting the sense that people are either quite cross and angry or just content and there doesn't seem to be any middle ground.

## Emma

Have you got anyone who has been medically discharged?

## C

Erm I think I might I am still teasing it out,

## Emma

Cause I think medical discharge would be quite interesting.55:16 She's left, when are you looking for people to leave?

## C

Well I have kind of opened it up a bit I found that when I got speaking to (*continued to discuss other potential participants and giving birth) 1:13:48*

# Jessica – Interview 1 2017

8 Nov 2017 Length 59.26mins

(officer, married, kids, 17 years, -1)

## C

How cold is it there is it ok?

## Jessica

Actually, at the moment it's not too bad. We have had a couple of really lovely days; the days were probably well it we were up at sort of 16 or 17 so today it’s probably down to 8 or 10 but

## C

Mm

## Jessica

but yeh you know its ok it’s alright.

## C

Falklands

## Jessica

you just get used to it a bit.

## C

You do yeah

## Jessica

You get used to the fact that one minute its sunny the next minute it’s snowing and you are just prepared for all eventualities.

## C

yeh, are you enjoying it

## Jessica

yeh definitely really am we are so glad we came there are just some many things we can do here that we can't do in the UK and we just view that as a big adventure, so.

## C

yeah. Exactly.

## Jessica

We are enjoying it.

## C

That's fantastic

## Jessica

It’s strange at times because the going from the Air Force to erm not being in the Air Force and coming here in the process is kind of crazy, but yeh

## C

It is a bit.  But we can get into that, we can get into that.

## Jessica

Yes

## C

Can I just can I just get the boring bits out of the way, which is the actual

## Jessica

Absolutely

## C

Erm. Are you happy with why I am doing this?

## Jessica

In broad terms yes.

## C

Have I sent you a have I sent you a consent form?  I don't have our e-mail address I don't think.

GIVES - EMAIL ADDRESS

## C

Basically, it’s about identity, it’s about identity transition and how people transition out of the military and how they we their post, their pre and post military lives as they sort of move into a new world really, I suppose.  Erm how old were you when you joined?

## Jessica

Oh, crickey so I'll of been 22, I think? Is that right? yeh

## C

And you are now ..

## Jessica

I am now 39.

## C

39 and your Out of service date was?

## Jessica

well it’s the 31st of December this year.

## C

Oh, so you are not even out yet, even better.  What was your last job?

## Jessica

I was in the Armament Role office.

## C

You are educated to degree level, aren't you?

## Jessica

yes, and I am part way towards a masters, I've got the PG Dip I just need to finish my dissertation.

## C

Oh right, what PGDip?

## Jessica

yeh I did the MSc Logistics Management through the RAF I just haven't done the dissertation yet.  I will get to that at some point.

## C

yeh, get it out of the way. That's it, that's all.  Right what it is I am going to ask you about 10 or so questions.

## Jessica

Oh, you have frozen

## C

Oh, you are jiggling around a bit as well, do you find Skype better than this?

## Jessica

We don't tend to use it to be honest we tend to do WhatsApp video calling.

## C

Lets just give this a go then and hopefully it will be be alright.

## Jessica

I have got Skype.

## C

I think it’s if I can't hear anything I will just ask you to repeat and vice versa.  Nice to see you though you look really well.

## Jessica

Hhhh Well, so do you it’s been a long time since we have seen each Coningsby I guess wasn't it?

### C

yeh, it does seem like a long time ago, well it was a long time ago.

## Jessica

A life time ago.

## C

It was (laughs) I don't miss Coningsby though I never liked Coningsby.

## Jessica

No, I didn't mind it but I hated getting to and from.

## C

What I have got is about 10 or so questions as I said about why you left and why you joined and all that kind of thing and just about what you think about the military and I will just sort of go through them cause I am conscious of time cause I have got to go and do pickup.

## Jessica

Absolutely

## C

So 'll dive straight in by asking erm why did you join the military?

## Jessica

Can you just repeat that?

## C

you are frozen completely frozen.

Pause

06:05 Repeats question.06:10

## Jessica

Ok so erm. A number of reasons part of it is possibly because my <><><><>< because he was always he was an air scout and he was an air cadet and all that sort of other stuff and I can remember and this is going to sound a bit, I'm not sure you can hear me, I think I'll keep talking and see where we go.

## C

It’s good

## Jessica

Erm I really liked the idea basically when there was a Remembrance Parade at the guild Hall in Portsmouth my brother was there with the Air Cadets and I was there with the Girl Guides and I felt really ashamed that the Girl Guides weren't marching and I wanted to look like my brother in a uniform smart, marching and proud and it didn't  occur to me at the time that I wanted to join the military but I wanted to do what he was doing  erm so as time went on and we got a bit older and he did join the Air Force I started  having a good look at it and got some careers information and you know I had never done Air Cadets cause that was my brother’s territory and I kind of left that to him.  Erm but there was something I am I like the erm what’s the structured environment, I thrive quite well with structure and erm I respect the idea of discipline and hierarchy and all that sort of thing and erm and I also loved the idea of serving Queen and Country.  I am very much erm very patriotic and loved the idea of doing something that would I could feel really proud of erm and so once I got more information and sort of went to some interviews and things kind of never looked back and it wasn't an easy journey I didn't get in straight away but nothing despite how many times I got knocked back I never gave up because I knew that is what I wanted to do erm

## C

Hmmm

## Jessica

and it was quite strange cause when I was at college I was one of the few people that actually knew what they wanted to do everyone else was a bit you know well I am going to go to university and I'm going to study this and you know I am not really sure what I want to do but I might do this and I just had this really set idea of what it was I wanted to do and I just pursued it until I achieved it basically and erm and yer here we are.  (laughs)

## C

So, it was it was the organisation itself how it worked that appealed as much as

## Jessica

yeah

## C

serving Queen and Country

## Jessica

discipline and erm I suppose at the time I probably didn't actually even know about all the opportunities that came with it that that was just an added bonus when I discovered all that but yeh very much about erm I suppose that's the only way to say it really, it’s about liking the the structure and knowing that there is there is a <>< and erm there's a a disciplined way of achieving it. It’s not that I never had a particular desire to tell people what to do and that has never been my approach but I I liked the idea of the environment where there is a certain degree of there is a way of doing things and that's how we do it kind of thing.

## C

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

## Jessica

When did I start thinking about leaving? Erm PAUSE I I  I Suppose that that started when we had our first child because you obviously consider am I going back to work? Am I not? and erm whilst I didn't come close to leaving at the point I kind of knew I wanted to stay and see if I could make it work and see how it went erm but I suppose that's when the seed was planted because obviously your life changes doesn't it when you have a family and your focus is elsewhere and you know so from that point I accept when I knew I wanted to have children I accepted that the career would take erm second place and I was fine with that.  So that meant erm from the point of view from both of us trying to juggle military careers <><><><><><><><><><><><><> that took sacrifices and in some respects sought the jobs that would make my life a bit easier and not entail ridiculous amounts of extras so that I would have the time to do what is required with the children but I think once we had our second child I kind of knew at that point I would only stay until my 16 year point.

## C

MM

## Jessica

So I suppose that is when I started to think about it and it sort of slowly you come to the realisation that yeah I am only going to stay until the end of my commission and then that would be that erm and of course then the closer I then got to that point gradually I just started thinking about it more and more erm then you are in the pension trap at that point you know I had contemplated, I I did consider what would happen if I left sooner and I think the pension was quite a big motivator to stay but again in my certainly in my last tour I I I was not necessarily able to hand pick my tour but I was given a few options and I deliberately avoided the option of being time away and long hours, you know I was, certainly by my last tour I was very ready to leave and was literally just hanging on because I knew I wanted to walk away with the pension that I had earnt.

## C

yeh

## Jessica

you know, I think it got harder as time went on towards that end point to make it work erm and to not feel well to not feel well erm I think it is impossible to not feel guilty but but the those feelings started  getting more you know as time went on so erm you know when it I remember about the last 3 years I would say of my time I was very much focused on exit,

## C

Really?

## Jessica

very much that yeh erm and that's that kind of <<<>< is part of the reason I started <><>< 2 and a half years ago because when I got to that point I was fed up with not being promoted so that effected my self-belief and about 3 years ago I almost had a bit of an ephiany that I didn't need the Air force to validate me.  Yes, promotion would have been nice and that recognition was really what I wanted but it dawned on me that I validate me not the Air Force or not anyone else in fact.  So at that point I kind of took the bull by the horns and whilst I knew I was going to stay until the end of my commission I started my Master’s Degree I started my business and I erm started the erm annual charity overnight bike ride that I do because I wanted to do somethings for me, erm the business in particular knowing that I was building that as my exit plan from the Air Force so that was quite deliberate that I started the business so I could build it slowly knowing that I then had something to erm to go onto once I had finished.

## C

There are a couple of really interesting things there, so you mentioned guilt but I just wanted to be clear about what exactly you felt guilty, what was making you feel guilty?

## Jessica

ok, erm its things like erm things that you can't do so it might be going to go to a Christmas play at school it might be lots of the other mums going to the school <><> with the children and they would ask me why I couldn't do that my daughter would ask me why I couldn't collect her from school.  you know why I couldn't go on the school trip, you know it’s all those things that you want to do with your children and they want to do with you and you have to tell them no I can't because I have to work and then you feel you are having to choose between your job and your children and yeh that that definitely caused a lot of guilt.

## C

did, yeh. Did you feel guilty the other way around? Did you ever feel guilty about work did you ever feel when you didn't do the extra stuff at work?

## Jessica

Erm yeh definitely I I I have always been one to go above and beyond even when I'm paring it back I will still go above and beyond and I suppose the guilt that comes  from that or feeling that you can't fit everything in the thing that would make me say at work and you know I can remember times on a Friday afternoon when everyone else in the team had gone on the tour previous you know even the Wing Commander would have gone and I'd still be there knowing I had childcare till 6 o'clock I would stay there way past everyone else because not wanting to feel guilty about my duties you know I always felt very strongly about doing the right thing erm and not wanting to feel guilty about not having done it and erm you know

## C

mmm

## Jessica

and so, you then find yourself in a position where your well you are choosing between work and children and sometimes I would choose in favour of work but I wouldn't feel good about doing that cause on the one hand I think was doing the job what the job required but I would feel bad that I wasn't at home at 3o'clock on a Friday afternoon like a lot of other people to play with the kids

## C

yeh

## Jessica

and you know <><><><><>< lots of guilt in many ways I suppose going both ways.

## C

Could you I think that is a common feeling for most parents isn't it?

## Jessica

yeah yeah definitely

## C

Can erm can you give me a really one of your most vivid memories of your military life that springs to mind, good or bad something that ...

## Jessica

Ok erm I suppose some of the good things that spring to mind erm graduation day at Cranwell I er just that that was just incredible I felt just amazingly proud like I could of erm taken on the world at that point other good things erm I I I did some jobs I was very proud of erm in particular when I was out of area in Al Udied and doing basically trying to keep Herrick supplied with LOX which was a real issue erm I felt I I I a lot of it comes back to pride I think erm I I felt very proud I was doing my bit even though I wasn't in Afghanistan I was doing  my bit to keep them going and that was great erm I did when I I held for a year before my specialist training and I spent er 10 months of that working in <><><><>< and I absolutely loved

## C

In where sorry? I didn't get that

## Jessica

I spent 10months working in P1 ceremonial

## C

Oh ok

## Jessica

yep so I was working directly for the Wing Commander and we had events like you know there was a Bomber Command commemoration at erm St Pauls Cathedral and Prince Charles was there and Royal Visits to stations erm Air Force dinners you know I was involved in organising all these things and erm meeting there was particularly when I did the Bomber Command commemoration I got to meet a lot of the veterans and spend time with them erm and again found that found that a very humbling experience and felt incredibly proud to be you know representing the Air Force and representing my country to I suppose 20:00

## C

mm

## Jessica

to those people  <><> the currents of the Air Force, you know

## C

yeh

## Jessica

So those there are some of the stand out great memories but I am sure there have been plenty of others as well erm I I suppose the from a negative point of view was the big thing was as they years went by and promotion seemed to get further and further  away despite the fact that I had worked my nuts off the entire time and often gone you know <><>< onto the more than the people who  were promoted and thinking what am I doing wrong?  There was a period of years up unitl about 3 year ago that built up and really got me down cause you start to doubt yourself and think well what am I doing wrong then maybe I am just rubbish. Maybe I am not good enough erm and you know erm I think now I am almost in hindsight a bit cross with myself for letting myself feel that cause I have always been good enough it just didn't work out for many reasons you know is not erm no one ever sat and said you hey you are not good enough you are not going to be promoted it’s just one of those things and the way it panned out but as the years went on that did have quite a negative effect erm on me and to a degree on my opinion of the RAF as well erm and whilst I definitely left on a high I am quite glad to of left and in some respects I feel like a rat leaving the sinking ship because I am not the only one that's kind of had those issues  but also manning and everything the way it is now everyone is just working so hard and there is just no and I worry for the future of if you like of sustainability of of what we are committing to and what we do erm and so I think that  I guess that is probably another negative erm that that's that I feel now, it’s not negative as such it erm but its maybe more negative than positive so that kind of made me <><><>< that I had made the decision to leave because <><><><<><> you know all the things that you can't change because there isn't the money and there isn't the people and you know.

## C

MMM

## Jessica

lots of frustrations I guess.

## C

So, would you say that is your you know would you say was there anything that concerned you when you were in? would you say that sort of lack of confidence if you like in the system would that be the major thing that concerned you while you were serving?

## Jessica

Erm probably erm yeh erm yeh erm yeh that probably sums it up. and I suppose adding a bit of sometimes a bit of a lack of accountability because senior officers move on and just leave whatever behind and you know erm yeh I think the system has got some benefits definitely but I think erm is also got some distinct draw backs you know the very very senior people are all air crew I suppose as you see more and you spend more time in and you see the filtering that goes on you know these are the grass root problems you feed it up to middle management and they filter it and then it gets more filtered as it goes up and up erm to the higher levels and so I suppose that that probably did lead to a bit of a lack of belief in how business was done and you know how how things operated erm I I think that has to be set against the back drop of some how things are always achieved which I think says a lot for the people still that just make it happen erm despite the issues and the lack of people and the lack of finance to put in place what you really need but the spirit of the people and the can do attitude still makes it happen anyway so I think I had erm sort of a a degree of lack of belief if you like in the system but belief in the people, certainly at the lower level.

## C

yeah, yeah Ok so if you had a magic wand then and you could just change anything about the Air Force what would it be?

## Jessica

(laughs) ok so if I could change anything I think we need more people and a refocused approach of what we need as in erm you know if you are going to contract some things out then fine if that is the way things are going but I think erm that is too often the quick response and it is not always the right response so I think we need a more focused approach but that probably needs more people and more money and I also think we should come into the modern era as far as non-aircrew and females getting into the higher echelons of power because until the higher echelons actually reflect erm the rest of the Air Force then you are not going to get a rounded approach I don't think. And I I know there are from the erm from the female point of view I know that is happening I know there are people there are women out there who are doing very well and are getting promoted erm and up in the air ranks which is fantastic and my 2\* when I left was a female and erm she was great but I think until they get rid of the requirement that it is all aircrew in the top positions then I think nothing is going to change, you know change happens so slowly in an organisation erm and I think someone needs to have the kahunas to say actually if you are good enough it doesn't matter if you flew an aircraft, fixed it, got the parts for it from one place to another you know it doesn't matter where you came from or what you did if you are good enough you should get there and in America I am sure I heard that they they have had the first female Chief of the Air Staff or whatever their female equivalent is

## C

mm

## Jessica

Erm, or it was either that or the first non-aircrew.  Well anyway they are more liberal anyway with gender and background as to what they will promote to the top and I think there needs to be a shakeup erm in the higher echelons we are a bit dinosaur like I think still in that respect.

## C

So, do you think then that your gender and your specialisation effected your promotion prospects? Or is that

## Jessica

Erm, I am not sure particularly that it did my branch change went against me because I spent 5 years in one branch then changed to another and I was always warned and told to my face by various deskies ah well you branch changed you know that's you haven't got the experience as your peers ignoring the fact completely that I had already been a flight commander and done various things in my previous branch that all seemed to be swept under the carpet and irrelevant which always seemed crazy to me. Erm then I was also told that age was against me because of the relative seniority I had as a Flight Lieutenant when balanced against my age and my level of logs experience that that meant that I couldn't compete with my younger more experienced peers which again I find crazy you know if you are good at what you do and you work hard erm I don't yeh I don't quite get why that should be why you can't compete its its I think there are lots of occasions  and I am sure it is across the military because of the way we do reporting and promotions erm its always been strange to me that the Air Force, you know I never even got boarded once.

## C

Your joking. you are joking.

## Jessica

No, I am not joking and I don't think I have been this year either because I think my report was too late so you know the Air Force as an organisation shows numerous times with numerous different people not to board me yet I have got Warrant Officers that erm worked for me saying you are the best flight commander I have ever worked for, hang on a minute that that doesn't match <><><>

## C

they wouldn't say it would they, they have no need to say that to you

## Jessica

Excactly, they have reached the pinnacle erm they have no need toile and so that was always quite hard to, oh whats the word I am looking for, er not assimilate erm I can't remember what the word is I am looking for.

## C

well yeh to get your head round, yeh

## Jessica

yeh yeh erm

## C

I can't believe that Jessica I'm absolutely gob smacked and do you do you put that down to the branch change do you think?

## Jessica

I think it is a number of factors I think its the branch change I think it is the breadth of logs experience for the amount of seniority and I also think it is also down to reporting officers as well.  I was very unfortunate in one of my tours erm I was in an ops chain of command not my branch so my one RO was erm SLOPS and then 2 RO was OC OPs, neither of them well there were a number of different people in those posts in the 2 reporting years I had not one of them had any clue about my specialisation and in the reality was that I might as well have been the SO2 plans.  Because I was the one that I knew what was going on I had to grab hold of all the other people in the office there was admin and ops people as well and run things because the people who were in charge of us didn't have a clue about what needed to be achieved.  they didn't understand deployment, they didn't understand what was required for equipment and roulements people you name it. they just didn't get any of it so when that then came to reporting they knew what  a good job I had done and they told me that to my face and they got me a third RO for it however, the reporting wasn't specialisation centric they didn't really understand what I do its a black art so  they wrote some wonderful things about me but I feel it wasn't related enough to my specialisation and then unfortunately the third RO the stache changed over a few weeks before I left so the third RO I got was a guy who didn't know me so it was a waste of a third RO so there has been a number of things like that that have happened to me in reporting which are out of your hands. So the previous tour I did erm the guy I worked for my 1 up erm wasn't a people person in the slightest, so that was <><><>< he was in charge and he basically liked people, never went out to the Squadron to see the people who worked for him erm I I was the face of the Squadron from a management point of view I went and did all of that and whilst he reported well on me that wasn't really reflected in the second RO I don't know he just hadn't but it well across enough I had even done some extra  work for the second RO and one of the other Squadron Leaders and that wasn't it didn't seem to be bourn in mind that I had done all this extra work as well and I had juggled the whole thing and juggled the family and juggled my husband going away all the time erm and because erm because basically this this extra project was looking at internal <<<><>< and I ran a CI event and I did all sorts of research and all sorts of things because I didn't have enough time to put lot of things in motion before I left because the CI event was not long before I left erm I think they saw that as not having achieved anything and I was like hang on a minute I have achieved loads here I've done all this research and I have told you where all the issues are and what needs to be done about it and then run a CI event to come up with a load of actions that can be done but because then I have got to hand it over to the next person because I am posted

## C

They will get the credit

## Jessica

yeh yeh so I think there has been some bad luck there has also been I haven't pushed myself or my case enough, hindsight is a wonderful things and I think there were a number of situations that I would have tackled differently that had you know given a second chance, erm because I a lot of the time just blindly accepted what was written in my report and didn't really argue my case  I guess er so it is a bit of all sorts I think.

## C

So how did all of that all of that how did that make you feel about the Air Force?35:15

## Jessica

Erm yeh it lost my confidence in the promotion system and made me realise you really are just a number you are a bum on a seat and they don't look after you individually.  You know and the the work load the desk officers have these days it’s kind of not surprising cause they have so many people to look after they cannot actively career manage everyone or help mentor people maybe that is something the Air Force could have done better is give me some mentoring changing from one branch to another I was always on the back foot I suppose

## C

MM

## Jessica

And there was no format of facility to do anything about that so I just kind of went on my merry way erm I suppose just thinking that hard work was enough and looking after the guys was enough and it wasn't you know erm so yeh that was quite hard to take but I am quite philosophical about it now cause erm someone said to me last year and it’s an ex-serving female just remember Jessica it’s not personal and when she said that me actually yeh you know what its rubbish and I haven't had the recognition I have deserved  on a number of occasions for a number of things but no one has singled me out and said that it has just been bad luck and timing and you know whatever you name it all sorts of things erm but at least that made me realise I've done nothing wrong and actually I can still walk away head held high very proud of what I have achieved knowing that you know the respect of the people that have worked for me is probably actually worth more in a way  than promotion because I was able to sleep at night knowing that I had done my best by them and that they like working for me and you know that means a lot so while the recognition would have been nice along with it it is very nice to know that erm what people think of me people that know people that have actually worked for me rather than a desk officer who has never met me.  And I think that is another thing, my erm networking within the branch all the desk officers that boarded me never knew me, you know I wasn't a known name in the branch cause I didn't grow up in the branch, I grew up my formative years were in a different branch so if I had been sitting there that might have been a very different issue because I knew all the people while in the new branch I was always playing catch up you know.

## C

mmm interesting yeh I don't know if it is good enough though, I this is what I get frustrated about I don't know if it is good enough for me for an organisation to demand so much and then ultimately just to treat you like a number.  For me that is not good enough I get very cross when I hear stories like that.  Cause I am absolutely gob smacked that you were never boarded there is no reason, no reason.

## Jessica

yep, I know.

## C

Right Ok. Ok So when you finally made that decision to leave can you describe to me how that felt cause I know you obviously you had planned for it but there is a difference between planning and committing.

## Jessica

yes, very much and erm I I I faffed about for a couple of weeks or maybe a few weeks because I knew basically I had to I had to PvR because I had accepted an extra year so I could get the tour to High Wycombe but I never really wanted to serve that year.  So when it came time you know it was approaching the erm basically this time last year really it was approaching the 16year point or the year prior to the 16 year point erm and so I knew I had to sort of take some action so I wrote to the pension society to get a forecast so I was waiting for that to come back  I did a lot of talking to my husband and well looked to the the future and because I was PvRing lost pension and lump sum over x number of years  and l l of it just paled away you know I said to my husband but it’s not about the money I am not leaving because I'm getting a pension I'm leaving because I want to spend more time with the children so if you tell me if I'm going to lose a million pounds between now and the age of 80, presuming I live that long, erm it wouldn't be enough to make me stay because I might go under a bus tomorrow.  So, I want to spend all the time I can being with the children and not sacrificing so much anymore from their point of view erm and so this had gone on and I was waiting for the pension calculation to come back and like literally the next day 2 people independent of each other will your pension calculation make a difference to your decision? No, it won’t (laughter) well why don't you PvR then.

## C

What are you waiting for?

## Jessica

I don't know what I was waiting for. There was a distinct subconscious hesitation to do it because it had big ramifications but I got on the phone to my husband and I said we have discussed all the figures and we have talked all this through erm an you now my boss and someone else had said tome will all the calculation make any difference to you and I said no they absolutely wont so why aren't I just doing it, what am I waiting for, shall I just do it? and literally I shared my screen with him on communicator the messenger things, shared my screen with him and did it there and then.

## C

Your husband? (laughing)

## Jessica

yeh yeh so he watched while I did it which was quite nice actually. It was quite nice erm and I kid you not I was so excited I was like a giggly child erm I found it a very nerve racking experience doing the clicks and filling in the right things.42:11 but once I done it I could not wipe the grin off my face I felt absolutely elated and just I I guess release just the pressure off the shoulders and just gone

## C

yes

## Jessica

and it it just felt amazing I never expected it to feel like that but it just felt incredible.  Absolutely incredible and of course from that point the countdown was on because I had an exit date so I had squeeze all my resettlement into a year and that was exciting I knew what I was going to do and you know it is a shame I had to squeeze it all in but that's alright so I then quite enjoyed all of that because I was even more than ever focused on the future and you know I was still as always doing my best and then some in my day job but my focus was elsewhere and I was like this is exciting I am going to be doing the school run every day and erm I am going to be the one that can go on the school trip and you know choose my working hours around what I want to do to suite me and the kids. you know it was all very exciting.

## C

So, what was that how would you describe that then if what did making that decision represent?

## Jessica

Freedom, that is probably the biggest thing in so many ways.  time freedom erm freedom to choose erm what I do with my life you know freedom to erm just all sorts things related to the children so erm freedom to be able to show them they can achieve anything they want to do erm and and to to I I I have always kind of hoped I've been a strong example for them in what I have been doing since they have been in the world but equally I want to show them that there are numerous ways of doing things numerous ways of skinning the cat and actually if you put your mind to something you can do it yeh very liberating.  Freedom is definitely the theme, the yeh.

## C

So how would you say your life had changed I know you are obviously not officially out but I know you are not working

## Jessica

It has changed massively already, I literally I finished work on the Wednesday and we flew here on the Sunday.  Erm So it all came all quite suddenly in some respects and there it’s been an interesting transition there have been some quite tough moments erm you know initially it was just really exciting doing the school run erm and then some of the realities start kicking in and you know when I started chatting it all through with my husband I said to him bear in mind I have spent this many years doing what I have been doing in the Air Force where my opinion was respected people would listen when I spoke people would come to me for advice erm and I you know I was happy and confident at doing that I know spend a lot of my time (laughing) with two gorgeous little people who half the time don't listen to a single word I say so there the difference between the 2 is absolutely immense you know and polar opposites so it has been strange because I have achieved what I wanted to which is having  time to do the school run and to go on school trips, I have already been on one, you know to be able to take the kids to park when they finish school or the soft play in the families centre erm you know I can take them for a piece of cake in Oasis café on the way home from school you know I can do much more with them so that is  unquestionably mission accomplished and its brilliant it’s just its almost everything else that is the issue.  So, housework you know I <><><><

## C

sorry you are breaking up a bit

## Jessica

Its rubbish I hate it.

## C

you are breaking up a bit

## Jessica

Housework is a necessary evil and it has to be done and the expectation is that I will do it because I am the one that is at home  but its rubbish and I hate it and it does not fulfil me in anyway shape or form and there is lots of things like that so the the administration of a household which I always did most of anyway when I was working full time but you just kind of fitted I tin the nooks and crannies I suppose whereas now erm you know when the kids are at school that I the obvious time to get on and  do those things but they are not fulfilling to me as a person and I don't think I had thought about that side of it and I I do all the trips to the store the day after the air bridge has come in and you get some fresh fruit woo hoo, you know I do all of those things and grease all those wheels to make everything happen erm but yeh it’s a weird one because I have achieved absolutely <><>< but it comes along with some other stuff that isn't quite so wonderful erm and add into the mix that I have had some mixed behaviour from the children at times because of course they are transitioning as well to having me around all the time erm and there has been times when I've gone Oh My God this parenting is awful they are not listening to me at all this is terrific erm.  (laughter)But you know I I think because I am around so much more that is so much more obvious now or it has more opportunity to manifest perhaps so yeh its been its been a strange transition and it does make me realise that I do need to work cause I need something for me that fulfils me as a person erm and I suppose that is why I stayed in the Air Force as well because I love my children dearly but I needed something that was me being Jessica rather than me being mummy so I think I will always work but now I have made the conscious choice to arrange my work around the children rather than I am a working person and they fit round me sort of thing.

## C

yes

## Jessica

Erm so yeh its its been interesting to get used to but overall it has been great because I have achieved the thing that I wanted to achieve which is time with the children.

## C

And you are going to be out there what its a year? yeh?

## Jessica

yeh we are out here for 12 months so we will go home next end of next August

## C

so that will be another big change again wont it because ..

## Jessica

oh, very much very much.  Yes, it will be the first time not the first time because we haven't always lived in quarters but we won’t be going into quarters so I won’t be on a married patch which I have been for the last 4 tours erm so that that will be a big difference getting to know people that don't necessarily have anything in common with you.50:17 i.e.  that is we are all in or married to the Air Force erm so that that will be strange and someone did say to me a few month back that they thought coming here was actually quite a good transition because I am very much still ensconced in the RAF environment but erm not having to work in it but still being surrounded in it and then after that then make a move to you know being completely out of Air Force life, a normal person. (laughs) a normal person in a normal house and get to know the neighbours in the old-fashioned way you know. 51:00

## C

mmm that will be interesting as well

## Jessica

yeah

## C

Erm I just want to wrap it up really because you have answered a lot of the questions in what you have talked about anyway while while we were chatting.  But erm

## Jessica

Oh ok.

## C

Which is fantastic. I don’t really need to go over then but erm what just going very quickly back to the Air Force what do you think was the biggest challenge to your career and what do you think is the biggest challenge now to the life outside?

## Jessica

Oh, crickey.  oh, that is quite a tough question.

## C

sorry! (laughs)

## Jessica

On no that is alright. <><><>< erm biggest challenge so I think probably in broad terms the biggest challenge from an Air Force point of view was juggling two Air Force careers as you can well relate to that can be very problematic.  We were pretty fortunate in our postings and in the way things went only because I made a conscious choice to accept whatever job erm and I did the less stressful one and so that was probably the biggest challenge and so what was the next bit the biggest challenge in the real world.

## C

If you can call the Falklands the real world.

## Jessica

yeh huuh yeh (laughter) Its not the real world, it’s something but it’s not the I think I think probably the biggest challenge certainly in comparison to the Air Force is erm being ...... how can I put it .... so in the Air Force you know it’s easy in some respects because I have stripes on my shoulder so that was instantly recognisable and it gave people an appreciation of what you do, not necessarily the ins and outs of the branch but you know she is a flight lieutenant and that is kind of easy to understand I think you don't have that luxury in the real world you have to make a name for yourself in whatever you are going to do that  and you just have to work hard to achieve it th there is no erm sort of automatic assumption of what you have done before because people just won’t know.  yeh erm so I think that is potentially could be .......

## C

I've lost you

## Jessica

quite a shock cause at least when you get posted you walk

## C

Hello, I've lost you

## Jessica

yeh I think you have to erm or you have to put yourself out there a bit more and almost prove who you are and what you do and what your good at which doesn't perhaps exist in the same way in the Air Force.

## C

Is there anything I mean I know you you have been working on this business as well, your business has that really helped with the transition?

## Jessica

yeh definitely because it is very much something for me erm and I have got some quite big goals for the longer term with what I want to achieve with it and it really has helped give me a new direction and I think to leave the Air Force with no plan I think that would have blown my mind I think I would have been very scared and may be not pressed the button. I don't know I you know I it’s kind of I suppose fate maybe that it has all fallen into place in such a way that you know I have already been running the business for 2 and a half years so I am more than comfortable with how it all works and and what I need to achieve to be successful or what you need to do to be successful erm and its now led me and my long term goal is I want to be a life coach so that will tie in quite nicely with what I want to do in my business but will also be a second and separate income stream as well and I never would have thought previously about doing something like being a life coach and I am very excited about the idea of doing that I do believe in fate and that things are meant to be and that is how I feel about the journey I have come on in the last couple for years to lead me to where I am now and where I want to be in the future it is definitely good to leave knowing that you have a plan.

## C

mm

## Jessica

That has made a big difference I think.

## C

Cool, I am going to have to wrap it up because luckily the school is literally 5 mins away here at Wittering but is there anything else you would like to add?

## Jessica

Oh gosh er I don't know nothing that springs to mind I think I have covered most of the things that I've felt very recently about transitioning I suppose the only thing I'd add which is a very trivial thing but when I got here because I am a dependent here I am not on the strength so I have an ID and I now have a dependant’s card.  When I first got here I was showing my ID my military ID all the time erm now when I come in the gate I show my dependent pass and that for me kind of sums up that I am accepting that I am now a dependent and not in the Air Force in my own right and that is ok. (laughs)

## C

yeh that is interesting, it’s a funny one because it is such a physical

## Jessica

yeh

## C

that you have carried with you constantly everywhere for 16 years

## Jessica

and yeh people do speak to you differently when you are in plain clothes if they know you are a Flight Lieutenant or they think you are just visiting they speak to you differently and that has been part of the transition has been kind of coming to grips with that I think.

## C

Thank you

59:01

# Karen Interview 1 – 16 Nov 2018

(airwoman, 37 years, divorced, no, +3)

## C

Why did you join the military, all those years ago?

## Karen

My Dad was in the Air Force, erm he had been in the Air Force for 40 years, me brother was in the Army my sister had been in the Air force it seemed  a natural thing to do erm I had no intention of making a career of it, I was going to do 6 years erm see the world er and that was it and I was going to join up as an admin clerk <>< my dad was but he said no join up as MT cause you will get your licenses if nothing else. <><><>< erm and the next thing I knew I had done 36 years it was like .... what happened thee then, I am not quite sure where all that time went you know.

## C

Was that an unusual trade for a woman to join back then?

## Karen

yeh, there wasn't very many females then erm and I have had I've got some good stories well I've got a very good story I'll tell you about when I was on detachment you know. erm but yeh it was quite it was still a bit well you know can you change a tyre? can you do this? can you do that? cause you are a female you know?  But it erm well I never had any problems though do you know what I mean there wasn't anybody that was ever, e there was one person.  Oh, do you want me to tell you that story now or?

## C

yeh, go for it.

## Karen

yeh erm I was a Cpl and I was I'd been in 17 years erm my out of area came up for the for Falklands so as a CBFs driver, so yeh not a problem, his PA rang me and said "Oh I believe you are coming out here to be CBFs Driver" I said "yeh", he said "Erm, do you not fancy Turkey or Incirlik or something?" I said "Why?" and he said "Well just because it’s the Falkland’s" and I went "yes but <>< what's the hidden meaning here?" and he said "well you are female." and I went "yes" and he said "what will you do then if you get a flat with the boss in the car?" and I went "ok, I've been a tradesperson for 17 years. If I get a flat in the car I will change it" "well are you capable". Well that was it.  Absolutely fuming and I said "Right" I said "Have you asked any male if they want Turkey or Cyprus or whatever they would have said yes as well but I said "you know I'm coming out there.  I'm coming out there to prove I can do the job." And it was really ironic cause I didn't have any issues the whole 4 months I was there the day I handed over to my male replacement we had a flat and it took us 4, between the 2 of us, 4 hours to change the damm thing, so you know and I told CBF in my departure interview and he sort of went "Really" and I said "yeh, do you know what I made it my goal that I was going to come out here and prove" and I just thought how that is the one and only time really I've had it when someone has been serious.  I've jokes where people have said oh you don't know anything about and I have gone in and said "Oh I'm going to go sick, get the ambulance I've broken a nail" you know what I mean sort of thing.  Erm But yeh I've had, during my career I did come across females that used to give the erm "oh it’s that time of the month I'm not very well" to my male counterparts and you know I used to say to them "what are you doing with so and so" and they'd say "well they are not very well" Horlicks they are fine erm let me have a chat with them, do you know what I mean, because they were just ... not all of them but the majority of the times they were pulling, swinging the lead because the men could not handle women.  And it was easier for the seniors to turn around and go "yeh go away go away" cause they couldn't man up and treat, they still saw females as little things that could be broken rather than a tradesperson and a I have another story when I was at Cranwell erm we used to erm take lots of the cadets on exercise and stuff and er back in them days it was just 4 tonners and 5 tonners drags drag units that we had.  Erm nothing easy you know you used to have to pick up the A Frame of the eh trailer hold it while the other person reversed back, when you think about health and safety, total <><>, you could have been crushed but you just did it and there was a young lad and he must have been about 5ft tall and 8 stone dripping wet and he jumped out of the 4 tonner and he sorry I was in the 4 tonner he was trying to left the A Frame, and I said right get in the 4 tonner I'll lift the A Frame and I did it because he couldn't and it was just it was those sort of things you know that I suppose when I look back on it we did get treated with kid gloves but not so much now people tend to realise they treat you like an individual and your capabilities regardless of what sex you are you know erm which I think is a good thing.

## C

yeh, yeh.  Ok so it was basically a family business which is not unusually for to get that in the forces is it, a lot of families.  But erm so why did you stay in what was it that drove you to stay?

## Karen

I love the com the camaraderie erm I just I don't know cause when I look back over those 36years you know and the irony is when I was younger I wanted 2 kids, cat, a dog and a gold fish.  Erm got married and it just never materialised because actually I wanted my career, erm when I look back it didn't mean more to me than my marriage but it meant as much to me as my marriage because I enjoyed my job and I liked helping people.  I felt that I could do that and it I I worked hard obviously got through the ranks to get to Warrant Officer and it was I just felt it was a real family atmosphere.  you know and you were looked after, I've had my moments don't get me wrong when they treat you just as a number erm but generally speaking that you know that camaraderie you get within the service you don't get anywhere else it is completely different being a family you know.

## C

So, for you then obviously you didn't choose to leave you have left at the retirement.  Erm but when did you really start thinking about that decision or that leaving was it ..

## Karen

Erm, about the 3-year point about 3 years ago.  When I got posted to Waddington erm I knew then I had 4 and a half years left so I knew that was going to be my end of tour but I wasn't worried about it, when I started wh what I was going to do about 3 years ago erm because of my medical I was permanently downgraded so I knew I wouldn't get signed on, and in all honestly I didn't want to get signed on I'd had enough and I didn't want to become the better  and twisted person you know erm and it I suppose everybody says you know that the Air Force has changed phenomably you know it’s not the Air Force I joined up you know but I just don't I don't particularly like what it stands for any more. Erm or what it is doing to its people and so it’s not it wasn't the Air Force for me.  Erm I thought I could do a lot better coming out and doing what I am doing at the moment erm than staying in and also, I for my health cause if I'd stayed in I probably would have been dead within 2 years because of the stress and the pressure.

## C

yeh, can we just explore that a little bit then, you said you don't like what the Air Force stands for any more and what it is doing to its people.

## Karen

yeh its I think we pay lip service I think erm they have cut us back so much there is no money there is no personnel but they want us to do twice as much work than we ever have done I mean when I think I I had been in the Air Force 17 years before I went on an Out of area   because there wasn't anything.  Now the guys are doing 17 months if that and going out and the pressure for us to get them qualified and experienced erm I mean when I joined up you did a year before you even went and touched a heavy goods vehicle because you could get the road <><><>< put that into , don't get me wrong we didn't have same trade training then and health and safety as we do now but you were still you were on the roads you were getting that skill before being thrown into a heavy goods vehicle.  Whereas now they go to Leckonfield and they can go from having no license at all to LVG license within 17 weeks.  And then they come to the unit and the onus is on us to give them that skill set if you like but we haven't got the manpower to do it to do it properly so I think we are putting a lot on our people and it’s not I used to go to the human factors you know courses and it wasn't just MT because of course we had the whole range and it I was I got quite worried actually listening to stories and fatigue and what we were doing to our people and thinking no one is listening.  Because nothing drastic had happened yet don't ask me how but I think we are on a knife edge, obviously when I was at Waddington we did the Bolt Hole for 3 years erm and every day I thanked my lucky stars that nothing happened.

## C

Really

## Karen

because you know how there wasn't a major accident and I I did everything I could feasibly about fatigue erm and I used to get the old shut up Karen stop panicking and it’s all about MT and I used to say it’s not just about its not just MT and about driving when when we're killing our people because we are expecting them to work 12 hours and then most people live off camp and then we are expect them to drive an hour each way.

## C

yeh

## Karen

And then have family time and  and its I think we were extremely lucky but its I just think as well they have taken so much away from us you know the benefits, all the nice things erm don't get me wrong there is a plus side like all the erm AT and the expeds the guys can go on but that has a knock on effect because we lose the guys to do that and someone has to do their work so there is more pressure on other people it’s just I don't know there I think the Air Force military at the moment are looking at short term contracts to save money so they just want people in just to do the job and then go they don't have to pay pensions the problem with that is of course you are losing all your expertise.  Erm and people, people are starting to erm not care because they feel like no one is listening.  And when I look, I always I I find it intriguing I used to say at CAS conference what are our medical stats like?  Oh, we can't share that cause it is medical in confidence, well surely, we must be able to see if there has been a rise in people with depressions, stress there has to be they don't have to name names but there should be able to see the figures and do something about it.  But I also understand the people at the top there hands are tied because they are getting beaten from above and it’s just I say it got to the point because I was they offered me and said erm would I er would erm sign on you know and I said no because there was nothing I could do to change the situation you know erm you know erm but the funny thing is I'm looking at going back on the VeRR,

## C

oh yes

## Karen

you know one of the ex-reservists erm work Cranwell has got a Base Support Wing Group and er they need loggies so I am looking at that because I feel that I can help there. If I can actually help take the pressure off somebody else. And use my expertise to maybe change things.

## C

yeh

## Karen

It’s worth a try.

<><><><><>

## C

that is always good, so if I just ask you what is your most vivid memory of service life.  I know that is a hard question after so many years, if you could give a specific incident but don't worry if you can't.  If it is more of a general …

## Karen

One that always sits in my head is I was on detachment in Italy in erm 1995, and erm in Gioa Del Col and my father unfortunately had a heart attack and I have never know something to come together so quickly to get me back home and that I must admit they were fantastic and it and it worked and I always thought wow they look after us, they look after us you know.  Unfortunately, they did twice because I went back to Italy and then he had a fatal heart attack you know but on both occasions that is what I think we are good at, we we when excuse the terminology but when the poo hits the fan, we just we pull together and we do and that is something that is something I did like.  Regardless of I used to feel that I couldn't help my team but I also knew that when we got into the thick of it we would pull together and we wold do everything that we were capable of to get it sorted.  You know erm when it comes to my best tour I have to admit probably in 36 years it was the 4 and a half years I spent at Halton on ACS as an Instructor because again I felt like a was doing something and it was working with 15 other people all mates and you know it was just brilliant brilliant time erm the other things that stick in my head really are the out of areas again because you pull together as a team because you are all in the same boat and it is amazing what you can achieve.  And what you don't need you know I come and you know if I miss my soaps that’s it, you know, I will probably go and watch catch up you, and yet for 4 months you wouldn't watch TV.  It didn't bother me, we just did you know.  So, its I think that as a generalisation.

## C

So, you talked a little bit out of the overstretch would you say that was your main concern while you were in the, whilst you were in the service towards the end.

## Karen

yeh definitely we I still think we live in a blame culture.  and I when I brought that up in Exes meetings I was told no its not but I said yes, it is.  Because if something goes wrong we immediately look to find who did it rather than really understanding why you know what it was ad I have got an example of that.  We had a, I called it Tattershall Gate, a young lad erm when we were on Bolt Hole he had gone to Coningsby to pick up erm some, I do apologise I've got messages coming up on my screen I don't know if you can see them of not?

## C

No, you are alright.

## Karen

Erm and er he went to go and pick up some er legs for the aircraft a really awkward load there was a lot of background stuff there wasn't a lot of help a lot of stuff had gone on.  But basically, what happened was he nearly lost the load.  He had gone round a corner and it had shifted but he didn't lose it, he knew something was wrong, he stopped, and he sorted it out.  But you would have thought e world had come to an end you would have thought that he killed 3 kids a dog a coat and erm <><><>, there was a big there was an OSI on it erm and a huge report that went on for about for about 5 months we never heard the end of it and thought ok fine not a problem. About 14 months after it was closed  we had a similar incident and my flight sergeant was asked to investigate it by the Wing Commander and I came out I'd gone to erm I'd gone to some meeting, but when I came back in again she was laughing at me and said "so then tab 7" I went "what" she said "it’s all your fault then" and "what are you on about" anyway to cut a long story short she showed me the report and at the end it said that the only person that was culpable was me.  Tab 7.  Now it was always supposed to be anonymous but at the front when it said 19:04that there was Tag 1 would be, erm I don't know er a driver, and it was so bad that it said Tag 7 WO with 34 years’ experience

## C

(laughs)

there is only you

## Karen

yeh there is only one WO in MT do you know what I mean and once this is ratified it would go on what's it called, there are not ASOS erm ahh AIMS er it would go on there so anybody if they wanted to could look at this report and see what had happened so there was my credibility then.  So, and what I was more disgusted about and I took it to the station commander was the fact that nobody had come back and fed that report to me.

## C

yes, so you were unaware of it.

## Karen

my Flight Sergeant was the one who read it and say to me "It was all your fault" I turned round and said how could it be all my fault when at the end of the day it is the drivers responsibility ultimately for their load erm and what had happened was command had issued this risk assessment erm and it was a new and it was about 52 pages long and everybody just do it and we hadn't implemented it but when the team had gone round

to different units 2 MT turned around and said "what risk assessment" Coningsby had said they knew nothing about it so it wasn't just Waddington that hadn't implemented it and in fact we were implementing it we just hadn't go to that yet erm so er I I understood that as the MTO as the WO it will always be ultimately my responsibility but it was just it was more that fact that nobody had said anything to me.

## C

And how are you supposed to learn and correct if you don't even know

## Karen

yeh I couldn't even defend myself it was even like I could turn round and say well actually I und the station commander ultimately if anything goes wrong it’s the station commanders fault.  But he isn't the one that has actually gone and done it he is just the head of the establishment.  But I didn't even have a chance to turn round and put my case forward or anything and it was just there for everybody I didn't know how many people had read it and my reputation and scarred erm and I just thought it was terrible and when I questioned it, they said oh we didn't mean that and what they said was although I was culpable no disciplinary action would be taken although it had been considered because I had done it for the right reason.  Excuse me!  So, they were thinking of disciplinary action and I didn't know about that you know and that is I to be honest with you that was the icing on the cake.  And I went you know what no.  I don't need this anymore and if you are going to treat your people like that and we are saying we are not in a blame culture but you are turning round and saying that it is you know and I thought No.

## C

Can you just, can you just describe how that made you feel then, how that ..

## Karen

Oh, I was to be honest I was in tears I was frustrated I felt that at that time I had done 35 and a half years and I was thinking so I I I felt completely ... as if they had ripped my heart out to be honest with you.  Erm because they had made a decision about me without me even having the right to reply or even knowing about it or and it was just so wrong you know and then to cap it off really which was another reason why I left I I why I was glad I left.  I've got through the post erm er summary of service and the hand writing on the front of the envelope, I'll have to get I'll have to find it and take a photograph and send it to you.  It looked like a two-year-old had written it. It was signed off by the Squadron Leader PSF and it was just a piece of paper in between a piece of card and that was it and it was like after 36years that was the Ari Force saying t-ra.  And don't get me wrong the station commander I had an interview with him and he gave me a set of Waddington cufflinks that was very very nice erm but I thought there is not that many WOs leave a unit after 36 years so therefore he could easily have signed that piece of paper and when I questioned it they said well he is busy.23:42 I said oh he’s not that he probably didn't even know that that piece of paper existed you know and I just thought what is it?  I understand that everybody is busy I understand that they have a lot of work to do but if that is how they are treating me after 36 years what are they doing to the  guys that have done 5, 10, 15 do you know what I mean and it’s almost like you are not worthy and I thought na and it and it that was the icing  on the cake if you like that was a em em the the fact that they just don't care but people don't care because they haven't got the time too.  Cause they are maxed out, I went back to a Top Table the other week and I was hearing they were telling me what was going on and I said you know it sounded worse than Jeremy Kyle to be honest with you.  Erm and I said can I tell you that I don't miss it, I do not miss all the welfare all the issues all the drama and I think people join up now because it's just a job and they know it’s for them.  I had two lads when I was in at Waddington who basically, lots of things happened, er and lots of disciplinary and I had them in and said look I think you need to look at whether or not this is the career for you, erm, I don't think it is.  I mean one of the guys every time he he was going to be deployed he just played sick and I said at the end of the day if you can't do your job then we have got to get rid of you, and I said you need to look "I can't afford to leave" he said I've just got married and I need to put a roof over my wife’s head and I said the Air Force they are not there to to do that they will pay you but you need to do a little bit in return.  You have to work, you know and I think people outside have just seen the military as a job to go to for a guaranteed wage and then when they get in  and realise actually you have to work for  a living like you do anywhere but once there in its quite hard to get them out, do you know what I mean cause we look after them very well in that respect, so.

## C

ok so ok.

## Karen

I'm sounding very bitter and twisted aren't I sorry and I don't mean to be

## C

No but its these things have an impact don't they I mean all of that effected your decision affected your decision not to sign on erm

## Karen

yeh

## C

And that's what I have found with a couple of people actually who have reached your stage and I mean were you asked to sign on in relatively good time another individual he was actually on his terminal leave and they asked him to sign on.

## Karen

yeh no they <><><>< to but I think that I had made it clear that I wouldn't erm I had gone for the Command Masters Drivers job unintentionally, an e-mail had gone out erm saying did anyone want it  and I replied out of curtsey curtesy cause there is nothing worse than sending an e-mail out and nobody replies and I just said look I've only got 2 years left it would have been my dream job you all know it would have been erm but I I can't do 2 years it’s just not enough time.  Anyway, they came back to me and said would you go for the job because actually nobody else wants it and you would be ideal for it.  Well I went so I thought by that time I'd I'd resigned myself to coming out and I was planning everything and I thought do you know what maybe I can do something here.  Maybe I can all these things that are going wrong within the trade maybe maybe I can sort it.  So then it all went erm and then all of a sudden somebody else had gone for the job but they didn't actually want the job they were just doing the project <><> and wanted another job that was going to be coming up in 2 years later er to cut a long story short even though everybody said the jobs yours the jobs yours the jobs yours I didn't get it and I was made to feel really small because everybody in the trade all the WO had said the jobs yours it’s got to be you.  And I thought you know what Na, and when they went they were hinting and the said oh do you want to do continuance erm cause you could stay at Waddington and I said you must be joking I'm not going to be treated like that and the only reason they wanted me to stay at Waddington was because Waddington was such a hell hole nobody else wanted it and I went na you know what get let’s get somebody else in and let’s see if they can make a difference and you know erm because again they used to use Waddington all the time and say Waddington has done this wrong <><>, everybody was doing the same thing but they would keep it quiet.  It just happened that I would turn around and say we need to look at this this is and I stuck my head above the parapet and I actually got another OSI raised because of what was happening within MT and I said I need a full investigation knowing that it could really damage me but I needed someone to turn round and say there is an issue here.

## C

You wanted to yeh

## Karen

It worked out when they did it yeh in their report they said yeh there is not enough manpower they need an extra sergeant they need I wasn't going to get it but it proved the fact that the reason we were failing was because we didn't have the manpower support. As it turned out we got the extra sergeant and and that came to fruition in the October the sergeant came in.

## C

Ok

## Karen

But this was 18months 2 years 18 months after the event but at least they had got it you know.   Erm and it was everybody said to me why are you doing it and I said because I just felt that nobody was listening and the only way to listen was to have an OSI where people have to do a report and it would go the station commander and something would

be done, you know.  There we go.

## C

yeh. And yet you want to your considering going back on the VeRRs contract?

## Karen

yeh yeh

## C

Despite all of this?

## Karen

yeh I think because maybe I can help when there’s loads of projects and stuff that and also, I know if I could have had when I was in, if I could have had a sergeant and a corporal on VeRRs two days a week oh my god my life would have been so much easier.  And I just think do you know what If I can go in and help somebody take a bit of pressure off them but also do erm do erm<<><><project manage to do with the cadets they are a bit worried with the driving part and the health and safety erm and if I can go away and take the pressure off someone but then also create a safe environment then I am quite happy.  Yeh your talking 2 days a week erm or you can choose your hours it’s not it’s not there’s never the pressure, there is no out of areas there’s is no welfare there is no SJARs.  (laughs) erm

## C

So, what would that give you then what do you think doing that role would give you personally?

## Karen

To me a bit of satisfaction.  I erm I like helping people which is why I do I'm what I am at the moment a I am a self-employed trainer er but I work for I don't know if you have heard of the Consults they do a lot of training and my my er er assertiveness, confidence that sort of stuff.  'you know so I go and deliver with them but at the moment I am starting my own business with the Princes Trust so erm I facilitate a day of talking about Tax you know National Insurance cash flows you know and it is great to be help to help them erm and I think because of my experience cause I know what it is like in the real world I could go into a job like that and be able to turn around right the book says this it doesn't work in reality what we need to do is this or how do we get that done as safe as possible.  And be able to maybe effect change.  Er without all the other pressures that are around.

## C

yeh yeh ok so in your in your new life in you like is there anything you are particularly concerned about now, now you are out of the service?

## Karen

No, not really I mean I am I'm lucky my pension although it is only half of what I was getting which took a little bit of getting used to do you know what I mean you could <><><> erm but my pension is equivalent to what some people bring home in a wage so my builder pays I have enough money to live so I am doing the beautiful thing is now I am doing work that I want to do.  When I want to do it and that is what I like and I vowed that I wouldn't I wouldn't go back to be employed where I have to sing to somebody else’s tune.  Which I know sounds a bit backwards with the VeRRs but the VeRRs I can choose whether you want to take the project.  They say right and it doesn't have to be MT it could be anything.

## C

yeh

## Karen

And they just look at you know you CV and actually we have go this project on can you do it? It’s not a problem or na the sun is shining I want to go out in the garden.  You know and there is no issue.

## C

yeh so you have go the control basically.

## Karen

yeh yeh and it   cause I think I didn't want to do Monday to Friday 8 til 5, I've had enough of that. Erm but I still I am too young just to be stuck doing nothing.  So, it’s quite nice in a sense to be able to go and do this work and I do some work at home.  I mark, I mark erm er ILM assignments

## C

Ahhhh

## Karen

and er I do risk assessments type stuff as well for training environments you know so its its as far as I can do it I can choose what time I am going to do it and when I am going to do it.  Hence why I am having building work cause I am having it’s not an office it’s a study.

## C

yeh, like mine.  My kids are sharing a bedroom cause I need a study.

## Karen

yep, will if I would show you round it but my there are just boxes everywhere and my printer is on a box

## C

yeh

## Karen

and I am like it will be alright in the end and I am one of these people34:13 I procrastinate, I need to be in an office environment to work otherwise I sit there and go oh that needs to be hovered, oh I'd better go and do that you know erm so my garage is being converted into a utility and an office so I can actually go in there, I've got a flip type easel I've got <><>< I'll be able to work and then shut the door and come out and and relax you know.

## C

yeh

## Karen

erm and I do erm I I am going on a retreat this weekend erm and I am actually delivering erm a bit of mindfulness cause I am into all that sort of stuff as well you know.  I know and it’s just and I would do everything for free if I could 34:54 to help people. But that that doesn't pay for a holiday, you know.

## C

No no it doesn't.  That is why I am doing what I am doing.  Ok brilliant.  So, if you had a magic wand and you could change absolutely anything about the Air Force what would it be?

## Karen

Erm sorry to take out of the Air Force or to give back to the Air Force?

## C

No change, if you had a magic wand and you could change anything?

## Karen,

Erm they need more people.  they need they need to have what we used to have because of the volume of work.  So, it will take the pressure off because then if you take the pressure of people they can get to do a 100% to their work rather than be jack of all trades and master of none.  Erm and it would give them a bit of you know there are some <<><>< not so much pride because they have pride we are not very good at saying thank you. And <><>< people there is a lot of lip service of nominate somebody for an award do this but all it is is that when you are really really busy giving you another report to write do you know what I mean so people go (sigh) I'll do it you know so although they want to do it they just don't have the time to do it so I think you know there needs to be more people but that is never going to happen.

## C

No

## Karen

And the scary thing is I mean it’s like when I was leaving Waddington and they wanted me to lose another 2 drivers cause of the civilianisation <><>< and I was saying <><><>< you understand we are struggles we are going through we don't like the support we are giving you and yet you are asking me to give up another 2 drivers, that sort of thing so I think across the board and that's only obviously I can only speak about my trade but across the board everybody was hit so I think we need to have if they were canny they could use this VeRRs very very very very well because as I said when I was at Waddington if they had given me a sergeant and a corporal to work two days a week that would have taken a lot of pressure off me, the niff naff and trivia that has to be done that never gets done because people are dealing with other priorities, you know.

## C

Ok so if you erm had to describe military life to someone who didn't understand it how would you describe it to them?

## Karen

Erm a big family looks after each other, looks after their own er a lot of a lot of opportunities to do stuff em and an experience that you won’t get anywhere else and I still believe that erm but it is a different Air Force, I wouldn't say that I wouldn't put somebody off by saying it’s a different Air Force do you know what I mean there are a lot of positives and I think when you join now you join a different Air Force  but what hasn't gone is individuals looking after individuals and that's that <><< I think when they look at us at the top, you are just a number and no one really cares about you and nothing has changed since WW1 and WW2 when it was the seniors that actually managed it and looked after because you look after your people and you look after your troops but I think people are tired of fighting erm and they just want to go which is why they are losing a lot of people  I mean when I look at my trade we had something like 13 flight sergeants and sergeants, 13 seniors leave within a 15 months period, that has got to be telling them something you know.

## C

yeh that is a lot. yeh

## Karen

So, and just because of the way things are you know it is still you still will not get that experience anywhere else, you will not get that comradeship anywhere else. Erm and when it comes to support welfare wise medical, dental and welfare you can't beat it they are there for you but that is probably their downfall as well because there is too much welfare now you know, cause it’s a little bit some of the people need to man up and that is me being a little bit harsh but yeh.

## C

ok, so how how do you think it has changed then ...being?39:45

## Karen

Well when I joined there was a hundred and twenty-five thousand people.  And we didn't have any wars you know 17 years 17 we used to have the cold war effect so we did the exercises and stuff like that but we didn't have anything, I was 17 years in before we actually started to do anything so we have gone from a hundred and twenty five thousand to 33 thousand and I know they say the whole force concept where you get the contractors and the erm the MoD civil servants and everything but what they don't see is for example when I was at Coningsby there was 9 I had a Corporal with 19 of us so 19 corporals shared all the service secondary duties that there were so they civilianised and we went down to 9 corporals and 10 civilians but those secondary duties that had to be done by a military person were then instead of being shared between 19 had to be shared between 9 so it’s alright saying you have the continuity that the civilians give but they wouldn't take on those responsibilities and it has got like that and it has continued to go like that where you end up wearing a lot of different hats and there is only 8 hours in the day and something has to give so it’s that erm unless that's is what I think is the biggest change we have decreased in numbers but  we have increased in actual work load so erm.

## C

yeh and erm I take it you lived in your own home when you were at Waddington.

## Karen

yeh I have been very lucky I've only ever actually lived away from home once when I was at Halton.  Everywhere else I've commuted, yeh extremely lucky.

## C

So, you are established if you like in the local community which must be nice you know you are not starting from scratch are you.

## Karen

No, because I have been here 30 years I'm part of the community so my friends are civilian so yeh I that wasn't such a big leap for me. I think the biggest thing that I was worried about was and it wasn't the rank thing ..

## C

Sorry it wasn't the?

## Karen

It wasn't the rank it wasn't the fact that I was a Warrant Officer it wasn't the rank it was the fact that being needed by people to not being needed.  That is what was worrying me because I thought I'll go from you know, I was there mother, you know their mother their auntie their best friend and to have nothing that was a big a big change you know.  <><><><><>< (calls off screen to someone to make a coffee) 42:45

## C

the worry that you loosing that need that people

## Karen

yeh I am that type of person I want to help but I need to feel needed as well and I think that's why going into this what I do now where I facilitate erm and help people realise what they know what they can do I think and yes I was working yesterday and at the end of the day I we went through and summarised it all and I said right have you found today useful erm have you got what you needed to out of it do you know where to go? Brilliant, yes thank you very much erm <><><    and it was that you know knowing that you have actually made a difference to somebody

## C

yes

## Karen

that's that's I I admit I need that I need to be able to make a difference to somebody, at some point you know.

## C

ye yeh that's all all good.  So, when you actually left could you just describe how that felt?  That actual few months as you came towards the end and

## Karen

Well it is funny because before I left I'd said I was going to have a dozen leaving dos cause I am renowned in the trade for having parties and I did have several leaving dos but it really hit home you know when I got taken off the station.  And I have a penchant for Firemen (laughter) and erm they they got a and they were and the <><><> cutter was just behind MT and erm and they presented me with some champagne and flowers and stuff there was <><>< and I had some bits going on and when we walked round there was the fireman you know the big fire engine there so erm they took me for a ride round the camp and we were doing our stuff and then they drove me off the station and as we came you know Waddington where the medical centre is well there were people standing there and it was a Friday afternoon, half two in the afternoon, and there wasn't it was all med centre and I was chocked up that they had actually stood out and when I came round the corner all the rest of MT and all my guys had done a guard of honour for me and all of supply and that was me I just cracked. Cause it was just you know very emotional and that is when it hit home and I just thought wow I'm finished.  Do you know what I mean? So and then I went back because I have got a contractors pass and erm so I went back onto camp to camp to collect it and the guard stopped me and I said "oh I've got my driving license but I don't have an ID card on me" and er "oh alright" erm "the confusion is last week I was a Warrant Officer and and I just need to pick up my pass" this bloke at the picket went "oh that's ok Ma'am" and he went "what do I call you?" and I said "Karen sweet cause that's my name" and he went "aright then ma'am see you later".  you know and I just thought how cute is that and that is that thing about you earn respect people will treat you not necessarily cause there is a name there you know but because of who you are and I have always prided myself in getting work done and not having to say "do you know who I am?"  I've done it I think twice both times to my Squadron Leader (laughter) when he was getting pressure and erm "you have to do this" and erm and I'd say "Sir, this is not bird shit on my shoulder, this is a Warrant Officer, this is my Flight, this is my Department.  This is what is happening.  I'll get you know what I will go home now and I'll go home and you can sit in this office and you can manage all that then."  But that was only a couple of times I never had to do it you know any other time because you shouldn't need to you know but yeh that I think that and then I had a er Top Table, erm that that was emotional.  Erm and I had some fantastic and it was just like well,   bless you  (cup of tea arrives) 47:23 47:46 and its funny because I had gone to the Hive at Cranwell and erm to meet a friend and one of the Wing Commanders was there and saying how well you look and blah blah blah and then he came back and asked about the VeRRs thing and he explained it all and I said I'm interested in it and my friend turned around and said oh that's brilliant that's just what you need cause you are finding it difficult  to leave the Air Force and I said I can assure you sweetheart I haven't found it difficult.  And I haven't and I think people expected me to dig my claws in and scream "no I am not leaving".  But I'm I'd been working on it and I think this is why I needed a lot of leaving dos because I needed to work into that and needed to see people that I had worked with and say goodbye do you know what I mean and it er I mean I drive past Waddington now and I just laugh, yeh it's not my problem so it’s just great.  So, I do not miss that at all you know and in fact this VeRRs thing I would do it in civvies.  Cause er cause you have to have your uniform on and I was thinking and it is not about that it’s not even about wearing the WO rank it doesn't bother me I would go in civvies every day and do the same work erm it’s nice to be paid the same amount minus your know your x-factor that's I am quite happy getting paid as a warrant officer that's fine I couldn’t argue with that.  But it is not to to me it’s not the rank that gives you the credibility it’s the job, you know doing a good job and if I can do a good job then that's it so.

## C

yep, why why do you think your friend said that though?  why do you think you friend said you are finding it difficult?  When you didn't feel you were.

## Karen

Erm I think because that was her perception.  And we were both workaholics and she would be working in PSF until 10 o'clock at night and I would be e-mailing her when I was still in work saying why are you still in work you silly thing, same reason you are!  But that was more pride in wanting to get the work done you know getting the work done and there wasn't enough hours I mean your husband has probably told you as you have gathered from this conversation I do like to talk. (laughter) I would spend my day talking to people because that to me is part of the management job.

## C

yes

## Karen

erm coaching them without them realising they were being coached and making sure they were alright and I always swore I would never be that Warrant Officer where the door was shut, my door was always open because if someone ever had a problem it might be huge to them but very very small to me and it could be something that could be solved maybe in 5 minutes.  So if I could do that or get them on <><>< then actually I would have a better workforce and if I had a better workforce that's less stress all the way round you know so I used to do that and then I used to end up staying at night time to read my 100 and odd e-mails that I had in the day and you know erm and do the admin part of the job if you like.

## C

yeh, so what would you say has the biggest change for you personally in leaving?51:07

## Karen

for me my health and the stress in fact actually somebody said to me the other day erm that I look 10 years younger than I did 6 months ago you know when they say me last.  Erm and people have said to me I look better now than I did before and I'm like well yeh because all the stress because even though I was the Warrant Officer my biggest fear was failing my guys and the pressure that they were under I used to try and eliminate it all the time but I eliminated it by putting the pressure on me if you like.  But I didn't I didn't want to erm I I was accused all the time of making excuses for my guys and I would say that's because they are maxed out.  They work too hard and what do you want me to do? Break them?  And sometimes the comments back would be "if they break, they break"

## C

MM

## Karen

and how would that work because then someone goes off with stress, they're off sick, there you know depression is horrible.  But then the people left behind now have even more work to do.  How does that work?

## C

MM

## Karen

So, you know what I mean but the people that are saying that, the only reason they said it and I truly believe it it’s not because they are heartless people, but because they are under so much pressure themselves they just needed to get that job done.

## C

yeh

## Karen

So, it that "just do it" you know "make it happen" a saying I hate "make it happen".  Erm

you know and it used to frustrate me that I would go and say this cannot be done because it’s not legal.  "Find a way to make it happen" What part of it's not legal we can't do it do you not understand? "Make it happen" right do you know what I mean, it’s that that sort of stuff.  But erm yeh it erm I don't have that any more.

## C

Did you realise it was making you ill?

## Karen

yeh yeh I was erm I suffered I had a breakdown back in about 97 but that was due to d d personal circumstances, if you know what I mean, my brother-in-law died erm my father died my husband left me my father-in-law my mother-in-law was hit by a car and seriously hurt.  My husband at the same time my ex-husband had a brain tumour all these things happened over a 5-year period.  And then I broke

## C

MMM

## Karen

because I had not actually grieved or done anything and then it just all imploded.  Erm but them what 2 and a half years ago the same thing happened but that was due to work stress and a lot to do with the investigations and stuff and I ended up I was back on medication erm but they I said to them do not tell me to go home because if you tell me to go home that is going to increase my stress levels because I will be sat there knowing that all that work

## C

worrying

## Karen

and that work will have to be done by my sergeants and my flight sergeant who are already stretched so all you are doing is actually making me more stressed so that is not the answer but what I need is a bit more leeway and <><><< and medication helped.

## C

yep

## Karen

So

## C

It’s supposed to isn't it I suppose

## Karen

yeh definitely yeh.

## C

So, did you see the warning signs that second time do you think?

## Karen

yeh yeh that is why I went, yeh that's why I went cause I could see it happening Well I wasn't sleeping, I wasn't eating, wish could of lost weight <><><>< what's wrong with this it’s not fair.  (laughter) erm it wasn't the fact I wasn't tired I was I would just wake up at 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning and be wide awake and then and I was just working on auto pilot and it was silly and that is when mistakes can happen and as the warrant officer that could have been crucial do you know what I mean.   you know what I mean, it could have but

## C

yeh

## Karen

yeh it wasn't a nice time and I thought you know what if I carry on like this, it it

will kill me which you know

## C

yeh well its er its er a known path for warrant officer.  as you said it’s interesting that they wouldn't discuss any figures but they must have figures.  And erm we all we have these impressions in our minds don't we of warrant officers who leave and then ..... I don't even want to say it.

## Karen

within a year well yeh yeh but they do because you go from full whack to nothing and I I was clever and at the beginning of this year because I knew I had like 6 months to do I stated to do less and less and what I did was I didn't have all my leave at the end from last year I was taking a day off a week.  erm which helped with my stress but also got people used to the fact that 'she's going'

## C

yeh

## Karen

and then at the beginning of this year I started taking 2 days off.  But it sort of backfired on me because I would take 2 days off which was great but then I'd have 5 days work to catch up in 3 so it was a bit you know but my flight sergeant erm she was newly promoted but I kept saying to her right I want you to do this and I want you to do I will be there to support you and I will mentor you through it but I'm not you are the continuity I am not going to be here so I need you to do that so I started to off load and it worked and because I I did that I think that helped me and because I was working I've been working for the company that I work for now  since about last September erm and I would go with them and watch them train but then also I did some training for them so I I was getting I was leading myself in so it wasn't a case of RAF, RAF, RAF, stop, Civvi.

## C

Which is what I did.

## Karen

Did you?

## C

yeh

## Karen

yeh did you notice a big change, you know full on to stop?

## C

Oh God yeh because I was I went from I used to say to Steve, he'd come home and I think it was worse cause we were the same branch, he'd come home and saying I'm doing this and I'm doing that and I'd be like well why don't you do this and why don't you do that.  And he would be like will you just shut up, because you know I am not asking you to solve my problem I am just telling you how my day has gone.  and I would be going but all I have got to talk about is that I have cleaned the toilet.  yeh that's what I have done today. and er and so it was I did about a year I mean I was exhausted because we had moved so many times and when I left we had a 4 year old and a 2 year old and er I was on my knees, I had a year out basically where I just needed to recharge my batteries and the family dynamics changed instantly because we weren't trying to squeeze everything into a weekend and that was amazing we had our lives back basically because I left but erm it was hard for me because you have that position of responsibility people, you are resected people want your opinion they value what you have got to say and then all of a sudden I had nothing so yeh.

## Karen

yeh yeh when I go back into work now erm and they I'm talking to them and part of me is thinking ok right how do I answer this do I answer this as the ex-warrant officer or do I answer because I'm thinking or are they just sounding off so because it’s not my place to get involved anymore so I have to play if carefully to see

## C

What they want

## Karen

sometimes, they just want a bit of reassurance and someone who understands where they are coming from just to say you know what that's blah blah blah which then if you like I suppose my training  as a coach and mentor sort of  comes in and I can utilise that erm and what I like now is I can afford that time without thinking at the back of my head I've got those 2 SJARs I need to complete and the boss wants that thing done now it does make me smile and the Squadron Leader would say you have got til the end of the day to have this into me and I would go yeh yeh, and he would say its 5 to 5 now.  And I'd say Sir, the end of the day for me is 10 o'clock tonight so you know what it will be in your in box for tomorrow morning you know because you know it would be.  You know if I'd said something would be done it might just not be done when they want it to be done. Erm so it er I I think as well a lot of people who do come out have a 6 months sabbatical and don't do anything and I haven't done a great deal don't get me wrong and I've I've maybe 4 days a week, er 4 days a month.  erm but that is enough so I do a bit of <><>< at home so that's keeping me sort of active but I don't know how I had any time when I was working (laughter)because the house was clean, the washing and ironing was done everything was sorted you know, and ye I find myself now I've got so much work to do thinking when when where does the hours go?

## C

how did I fit work into this? yes.

## Karen

yes, yes how did you, my mate, she is 13 years older than me but I remember when she retired and she said I've got no time to do that "but you are off all day" "yes but I have got no time" and I'd say how can you have no time but it is true because before I know it

especially now in the winter when it gets dark at half past 3 or 4you don't want to be you know but I used to go training every night anyway but I go training through the day as well now 3 days a week three mornings a week I should say so by the time I've got up done a little bit, gone training, come back had a shower its lunch time anyway. So, the day is almost half you know erm but I smile to myself and think I I don't know how I manged to live before when I was holding down a full-time job but its I'm enjoying the non-pressure.

## C

yeh

## Karen

you know the the erm what was great as well was although my last day was the 30th of July my last day in uniform was the the 26th May.  And what was lovely was you know when you go on leave and you have a fab leave but then come near the end your thinking Aggh I've got to go back to work on Monday, I didn't, I didn't have that there was none of this I have to go back it was like 'yeehhh'.erm and it was so nice and and I keep having guilty pangs thinking I shouldn't be doing that and I'm thinking no you have worked hard for this give yourself a year, 18 mon you know in a years’ time I might be banging at the door saying right I need to go and work with somebody I need to go back and start working  5days a week, you know but as I said before my pension is there is not a need for me to do it I have a good way I can manage so actually you know it is quite nice to do something that I want to do not that I have to.  and that is a really nice feeling, and get paid for it, win win.

## C

exactly, its great erm.  So, do you think it has lived up to what you thought in terms of leaving?

## Karen

Erm its not been as worrying as I thought it might be I was a little bit worried my first my first pension erm was only about £1300 and I though ummm I've completely messed that up. Cause I thought it was going to be about 16 so and as it was I had forgot hadn't done a full month I'd only done 24 days so the next one was like alright because that extra £300 quid it’s a big chunk isn't it? you know

## C

yeh

## Karen

The only thing, but I am getting used to it now my my my fear over the last few months has been erm where is my next penny coming from, erm because you know I was so used to clearing just shy of £3,000 a month. You know what ever I wanted I could have erm and I lived nicely and I still live nicely but now I sort of sit and think do I need 3 joints of meat there is only me, no I've already got 3 joints in the freezer, stop it.  Stop buying you know erm but that was a little bit scary but I didn't know what was coming in but that was I think it was all 36 years I'd always known there was a wage coming in every month.  I am really quite good with money my father taught me books and everything erm unfortunately my ex-husband wasn't and when I went away on detachment and came back he had got us 13 grand in debt which was

## C

impressive

## Karen

yeh 20 years ago that was a lot of money.  It’s a lot of money now but I mean it was humungous so we got out of it but even though I was worried I still knew that every month there would be that pay check.

## C

yeh

## Karen

whereas that sort of thing and I had a fair amount of money in the bank.  I haven't now because of the extension and it’s all accounted for and when I look at how much it is going to cost me to its going to cost about 100 grand

## C

Really?

## Karen

The extension itself is about 45 for the bricks and mortar, but then it’s the flooring and I need new furniture and the en-suite and the plumbing I had a new boiler and windows and doors, it it all adds up.  But I've that money is set aside tis all there its already I just don't touch it.  It just means where I have been used to having a minimum of 20 thousand in the bank always I haven't go that now my bills sort of thing I know all my bills even if I don't work at all for a month my bills are paid for, my pension has paid for that.  And I still have £600 left but a hundred and 50 quid a week for food and clothes actually for me that is a lot of money you know

## C

yeh

## Karen

erm so that has started to ease off but that was the only that was the only that was the scary thing at first.

## C

yeh

## Karen

yeh but now I would still like to win the lottery don't get me wrong but you know but it so it means that all the work that I do now erm is pocket money and I am just keeping up my <><>< account and I won’t touch it and it will be just be there erm and I know I've got it there so if something drastic does happen I can go into tit.

## C

yeh mmm. Ok Well that is about everything?

## Karen

Oh, has it been useful

## C

Oh, yeh yeh definitely it’s been brilliant.  There has been a couple of standout things.  So, despite you being in a masculine, male dominated trade is that you you know rarely have you felt that was an issue and that was fantastic because there is this perception outside that the military is hugely overbearingly masculine and male and actually that wasn't my experience of it either and I tried to tell this to my supervisors and of course the Air Force is different to the Army.

## Karen

yes, yes definitely

## C

And erm pretty much everything that is written in academia is Army it is very Army dominated so you get this really masculine male perception of everything and I think the Air Force is more neutral than that

## Karen

yeh yeh

## C

And my supervisors will say to me but neutrality it’s not neutral Caroline it’s still male it’s still masculine hiding behind neutrality and sometimes it is, sometimes it is but a lot of times it isn't so

## Karen

you also you also come across those type of people

## C

of course

## Karen

and it’s funny you say that because the only time I did have any issues about being a female is when I dealt with the Army and I remember going to erm Army Barracks to do erm bowman training I think it was, my sergeant me a Warrant Officer and erm yes was a Warrant Officer and I took the Flight Sergeant with me.  This Army sergeant refused to look at me point blank and just dealt with my sergeant and it was like crack on then you know and afterwards he looked at me and I said “so in the Army then do you respect your Warrant Officers" "yeh" "What do you think this is?" and that was that again you know it was just because of that and then I walked out. Because I just thought and you are right the Army does have an issue I believe you know with that the Air Force, generally speaking as a rule there is a bit of banter that goes on both ways erm but you are accepted more I think as a female than you are and  a lot of people actually when I think back were inspired by the fact that I wasn't when I got promoted to warrant officer erm I was the only I was the third female warrant officer in the trade and I was the only female warrant officer at that time.  And there weren't a lot of female warrant officers and they would look and go you know how did you do it?

## C

yeh

## Karen

And then my mate got promoted which was great and then another female friend got promoted then another and another so on I I was given I was presented with a witches

broom when I was a flight sergeant as the most senior female in the trade (laughter) er and I kept it and then what I did at my Top Table I got it mounted on a piece of wood and then I had brass plaques made up 2 previous warrants officers made up, you know min and but it doesn't mat the rank is the thing I mean the next senior female could be a corporal.

## C

yes

## Karen

if everybody goes you know its that's being the most senior female within the trade and Mary my friend she's now got that in her office. Erm witches broom and transport you know.  So I have created now a legacy if you like something a tradition that can go on and what I did as well when I was at Waddington for my OC when he left I got a steering wheel made up and a plaque erm basically saying you know, chaps love him<><>< and he handed it over to the new OC MT so it sits in the OC MTs office so then they next new OC so again hopefully, it will probably die but it would be nice you know just to get passed on and passed on and just sit there erm and I think you know they are nice memories as well to have aren't they you know if the Air Force accepts it but we still in the Air Force if you think about it we still make a bit of a fuss about women either getting promoted or <><>< I can't remember her name who was it the first female she was an Air Rank and they made such a fuss about the fact she was an Air Rank and I remember thinking and what? Erm and then there was a female I think she was a police woman who got killed in Afghan and there was a big big splurge about it and I was thinking well hang on a minute, what about all the male so I think as human beings we like to put women in boxes as well

## C

yeh

## Karen

and do it so we tend we can as human being do that and say well it’s the fairer sex.  <><><><><><><

## C

You have got me thinking now that witches broom, so what did that witches broom represent then to you as a woman?

## Karen

transport.

## C

transport a mode of transport.

## Karen

yeh yeh yeh cause you are the wicked witch of the west.  sort of thing so I mean it was done in in in jest but it was quite it was a proper witches like a real real wicker, beautiful.

## C

yeh

## Karen

erm I'll send you a picture, but it was just I was presented it when I was on 2 MT was I most senior then? I'm not sure? Erm because unfortunately a friend of mine she died of cancer so then it obviously got given to me so it was a lot nicer when I presented it to somebody who was living you know what I mean that was a nice.  It was bitter sweet when I got it you know I was proud to receive it but also the only reason I received it was because my friend had died you know.  Erm but it was quite nice.  I don't even know how it happened or who started it off.  Erm but it’s nice to think that it will carry on and just yeh.

## C

But it is interesting isn't it because yes, it is a mode of transport and you were on 2MT but a witch is pretty much a negative female stereotype

## Karen

yeh yeh yeh

## C

But she is also a pretty powerful stereotype

## Karen

yeh yeh and its erm it is because I mean I'd like to know the theory the thought behind who ever created it in the first place.

## C

yeh

## Karen

and where it came from.  I like to think of it as you know the wooden broom stick and transport you know because I used to always turn around and say it’s alright I've got my own transport you know erm and make a laugh about it.  but yeh there is a there is a I mean you do get nice witches but you your perception of a witch on a broom stick is black hat green face and warts on her face and a black cat at the back so yeh its its out of everything it could have been a bike couldn't it but then that could have been even worse wouldn't it if it was a female on a bike.  (laughter) but yeh yeh that would definitely been a no no wouldn't it.  you will have to take that out of your recording.

## C

oh no.  That is staying in.  No, it’s interesting but you never took it as that anyway it didn’t mean anything negative to you it is a very positive

## Karen

yeh and its funny because you know all the stuff going on at the moment about the sexual harassment.  well I sort of look at it and think wow erm over my 36-year career I I'm very very tactile you know I always hug and everything but I am also aware of peoples when I am invading their space so I I can read people.  but I sort of sat there thinking wow I wonder if somebody could bring something up you know and it is it is the old line about the banter erm where do you draw the but there is also you have that emotional intelligence to read people to sort of and also if you have gone too far to apologise but also if you feel someone has gone too far to have the moral courage to turn round them and say I think you have over stepped the mark there.  Because if people don't know then they are going to carry on whatever it is they are doing not realising that it’s upsetting somebody.

## C

yeh

## Karen

and we have got to be careful that we don't create a nation of people that look for things just so they can get money because it’s an easy way out.  And also create because when I went back in last week one of my civvi drivers I was having a cup of tea and he lent behind me to put a tea bag in a bin and he went "oh I'd better be careful there" I went "why?" and he said "well I might of got too close to you and you might be suing me" and I thought well that all joking aside it could get to the point where people are so afraid to say anything to someone

## C

yeh

## Karen

in case and I think the military is renowned for their banter and their black humour and that is probably the only thing that keeps you sane is having that black humour and having the same chain of thoughts so you can look at someone don't say anything and burst out laughing because you know what they are thinking whether that be right or wrong you know. and I think we need to be a little bit careful that we are not we don't get to that point.  There is a line that people can blatantly cross but also, I think if it goes too far in the military it will ruin everything <><>< cause we need that banter, like when I just said that thing about the bike you and I neither one of us had to say anything but you knew exactly where I was coming from

## C

yeh

## Karen

It’s an old school thing you know.  Erm and its that and it’s just a little, a little bit scary but that is another why I actually like diversity and inclusion I'm quite sad I'd go and deliver that anywhere because it is such an important thing to be aware of it.  But to use it sensibly.

## C

yeh brilliant I think that just about covers everything, I am going to press stop on my recorder so I don't have to erm ...1:17:45

# Kim Interview – 1 31 Oct 2017

(officer, 19 years, married, yes, -11)

## C

Why did you join the military?

## Kim

I just always wanted to I think I know I did I just always wanted to really sadly I just did I think I was more in love with the idea of the Air Force than what I did in it. You know as an Air Cadet I just liked the idea, no military family. Dad left Italy so he didn’t have to do his national service. That is how unmilitary the family are. He left Italy so he didn’t have to do it. He wasn’t like arrested or anything but mum did say, this was really bad, mum did say that every time they went back you know for a holiday in those first how many years they had to go to the police station and Dad had to surrender his passport for the 2 weeks they were there. Anyway, random but no military.

## C

So, what was it that appealed?

## Kim

I don’t know I just don’t know. I was a geek I was an air cadet and I think I had watched the Battle of Britain and I remember standing this was about when I was 13 standing outside RE, I went to a good catholic school, and saying to somebody I am going to join the Air Force when I am older. I remember that conversation and that is all I was fixated on, I went to the Air Cadets I was a proper geek, went to university, discovered boys had about a year and a half of not having much to do with the Air Force apart from my boyfriend who was on the UAS and I though I quite missed that fitting in you had with cadets and that’s that banter that social life and I thought how hard can this be, went to the careers office got myself a bursary for the last 2 and a bit years of a 4 year degree and there has never been anything else. With hindsight would I have done anything else yes and I probably came to that conclusion half a dozen years in and here I am 19 years in but its served its purpose. There you go.

## C

What do you mean it’s served its purpose?

## Kim

In terms of its given me a job I’ve enjoyed it, its paid the bills, its bought house, its not made me I am really risk averse in terms of jobs you know I am terrified about real life and think oh my god I am going to get sacked its given me the ability to have a job but not really have to worry about work does that make sense cause you kind of just turn up automatically if you think about it you are still in like this giant office sim but if you whereas sometimes you know you sit there and you think you know its not actually real this shit is just not real, you know. You really did. Does that make sense? Its strange I’ve not really had to have to work hard for my money at all and I frustrate myself sometimes and I think what if I’d put some effort in? Where would I be what would I be doing but I did not and I look at some lovely friends who are post staff college, have been promoted are you know knocking on Group Captain whatever because they worked the hours. I’d be the first person to leave and go to the bar I’m not the one to, its served its purpose its paid me a nice wage I’ve got where I am but there we go there we go.

## C

So, it really was just something you got into your head and you thought …

## Kim

Yes, I loved the idea of it I loved the idea of being in the Air Force of being part of it. And I think I enjoyed it more when we were little baby DAMOs and we were actually doing stuff you know 3 years into DE&S tour thinking this is shit. But I am here because they are always dangling that carrot but, there you go.

## C

Dangling the carrot being?

## Kim

As in the next job as in and as well so maybe the last 3 or 4 years I have been 12th, 10th 11th on the board so actually they have got as far as 9th 10th and whatever I’ve been one away and this year they have got as far as 9 and I am 11 and its like that carrot is still there but this time I am determined I am not hanging around for it I am going but yeh that’s it, you can get posted to here or you can do this job or that job and you think oh I’ll stay in then, I don’t know time is just the stuff that I joined for that banter that sport the bar life that doesn’t happen anymore and it doesn’t happen for 2 reasons, one is you have out grown it because you are a 40 year old mother and actually it would be really weird if you were still in the bar or happy hours and all that but also the novelty the novelty you wouldn’t be doing that at 40 anyway or you would be the really sad old man or lady in the bar that is trying to befriend the little ones, the little ones! The junior officers so it’s the right stage in your life there you go.

## C

Ok when did you start to think about leaving? 5.27

## Kim

Oh my gosh Lets go go all the way back, I thought about leaving when I finished in Cyprus which would have been 2008 no 6, 8 2008 I really thought about leaving I had been ,I was one away and I was one away on the board and this is where I was thinking about that dangly carrot of mid-wifery there is something about you know I thought I am going to do it. I am just going to do it, I am so far away from my pension I am just going to do it, I missed the board by one I am going to do and I got that in my head and then I had to do an Out of Area and I was on the flight sitting at Brize when the desk phoned and said when you get off the plane you are going to do the SAMO not the DAMO job, that is how I because somebody, I forgot his name broke his leg so he wasn’t coming out. So, I was next on the board, and I was oh ok and they sent like an AMW chap to back fill. So, I didn’t really think about it again but I really remember in Cyprus a couple of months before I left thinking that’s it I’ve had an amazing time nothing will be as good as 2 and a half years in Cyprus. Actually, because I was going out of area and then I was going back to a really dull job in DE&S. But I did the out of area on promotion and I still went to DE&S to a really dull job but my life changed because on the det I met my husband. And he was at Lyneham so going to DE&S worked and then suddenly I did 2 and a bit years there and then where did I go from there? I went to PJHQ and suddenly you are swept into it again and you forget you were going to leave. This time round I was going to leave when I was at my 16 year point and that would have been, I’ve lost track of my years, but then I lost my daughter and I thought we want to have another child and I was leaving it was about her and I thought I don’t want to leave three is too much change going on so I took a 3 year extension to my 16 year point which I spent one year pregnant one year on maternity and this is me going back for the last year. So, for the last 3 years really, I have been leaving. Because I just took those 3 years just to pay the bills because it seemed silly to leave when I knew I was pregnant and a year’s maternity and I knew this last year would be what it was and its turned out even better than it was because I haven’t got a job. (laughter) So it’s really really been the last few years.

## C

And it comes down to?

## Kim

Well it comes down to when I was having when I had my daughter cause I wanted to I didn’t want to work full time I wanted to be a mummy and when she obviously died I didn’t see a reason for leaving cause I was leaving to spend time with my daughter and I didn’t have a daughter anymore but then we got pregnant within a year and that was the intent so as soon as I got pregnant I thought yeh I am still leaving so that it comes down to what’s right for the time in my life. Its served its purpose at the time its not right not anymore because its 5 days a week it isn’t 9 to 5 its 8 til the work finishes I have maybe I’m not the one to I take it for what its worth, I do still work I put the hours in and I can’t just walk away at 5 o’clock I just I would resent falling further and further behind I think so there you go, I just don’t want to do 5 days a week and I don’t want to go away and leave them, not my son I can’t leave him at home and go for 6 months away I don’t want to go It doesn’t work if you are both serving and my husband is away from home now my husband hasn’t go the rank or the progression or anything like that but he loves his job so why would I pull him away from that to stay at home with a child just because I earn 20 grand a year more? To stay in work that I don’t really enjoy so you know what lets just be poor and actually I want to be a mummy so there you go.

## C

That’s fair enough, you just said something that you don’t want to about falling behind?

## Kim

The more I think in terms of so what was I saying to you before you started recording that whilst I still my friends 3 or 4 ranks ahead and staff college whatever that is because I knowingly volunteered for that det or I haven’t volunteered for or I would be the first person to go to the bar put it that way I’ve worked late I’ve worked the hours but more in terms of I’d be I’d fall behind because I’d be torn so that whole I’ve got to leave at 5 o’clock because I have got to get my son I’m not torn between that and work because I clearly would want to get my son but I think I would find it more when I went back in I’d be on the back foot I would miss something I’d just be constantly playing catch-up. I don’t want to be in that position, does that make sense? 11.01

## C

So, there was no specific incident that prompted that decision it was family life opposed to ..

## Kim

Yeh I think it was I was at my 16-year point and I think I’d always in my head said 16 years, despite that faff when I thought I was going to leave. Yeh I thought 16 years, I never wanted to get like to 55 and never having done anything else. Not that there is anything wrong with that but I thought I’d be in a rut with that I wouldn’t be enjoying it no nothing and I think it is family life. I think going back to loosing my baby it has made me realise that how quickly it can be taken away from you so just enjoy every minute of it she says having put him in nursery this morning so she can have a cup of tea. (laughter) do you know what I mean.

## C

And obviously loosing your daughter in that way that really made you appreciate

## Kim

What I have got now without a doubt without a doubt it just makes me think, you have those horrible moments if he is not in the car so this is my god we are going to go massively down a rabbit hole but we lost her at 29 weeks she just came too early but a 29 weeks you are you are 10 weeks 8 weeks away from actually having a baby not that you have bought everything by any means but you are a little bit prepared and you drive along and think oh I will have a car seat in the back next month or whatever and then you don’t, and now this is something that sticks in my mind now when I look in the back seat and I see my son it is amazing and I love it but I look the other way and I think there should be two car seats there. And it’s a horrible thought and sometimes I get in the car because he is at nursery or with dad or whatever and I look round and I have that feeling in my tummy that I had when I looked round and I she wasn’t there, not that she ever was and fuck me that is a horrible feeling. So the whole point is if you can encapsulate it in that feeling of them not being in the car that sums up why I am not staying I can’t loose that again and that feeling of being in the car cause I don’t feel it anywhere else, I think maybe it’s because we’d had that car conversation that it stuck in my mind. Cause it’s a car. The first time I went out without my son I went out to pick up a chair, my mum and dad were down, he must have been about a month old I literally nipped into town for 15 minutes and good lord it was the most horrendous car journey ever because he was not there. There you go.

## C

It’s funny isn’t it how our mind.

## Kim

I think its because my husband and I had been in the car and we’d been looing at car seats and we’d been going we will have our baby next month it’ll be in the back seat in a car seat and it wasn’t and now that car seat I don’t know why it just sticks in my mind and I hate it I hate been in the car with a car seat and no child in the car. Anyway, its horrid isn’t it but your mind I don’t think about it any other way. You know I go to bed at night and turn the monitor off I do miss him terribly when he is in nursery of course I do I get on with my life. It is just the car it is the weirdest thing I even find myself now driving up to the nursery literally undoing my seatbelt before I get to the car park because I can’t wait to get him in the car, its odd isn’t it. I’ve clearly got issues.

## C

Well it was traumatic, cause I had a miscarriage and I was pregnant again before I would have given birth

## Kim

They advised us not to get pregnant again til after my due date so it was 6-8 weeks but the still advise that it is hard.

## C

I think it would have affected me differently on that due date had I not been pregnant.

## Kim

So I don’t let myself think about that due date but on the 10 Jan which is the day she was born it is just a terrible day because she yeh but I don’t want to go into the details but I had an ectopic before that but I can’t even remember the dates now because I you don’t let yourself why would you unless it’s something significant. Its all a bit of a mess these children but the point the reason is it has taken us a long time, an ectopic, a still birth and this to get where we are and its you know we were talking about feeding, its hard work but it is not as difficult as being an MA to an Admiral at least you know its food, its hungry its tired you don’t have to mind read so its relatively easier than work.

## C

And yet earlier you said you are not ready to leave. You don’t feel quite ready to leave.

## Kim

More in terms, and I said this is my e-mail to the desk the thought of not putting my uniform on again is almost too much to bear but the thought of going to work 8 to 6 and being away for 6 months is harder so that is kind of that’s it does that make sense. And the thought of putting my uniform on its not because I like <><><> to death at PJHQ its all the ceremonial stuff its all the stuff that I joined in the beginning for which I don’t really do any more anyway. Cause that was the time of your life when you were a flight commander or doing whatever in a bar.

## C

So, what would you say is your most vivid memory of your service life and can you give an example explain why that one stands out. 17.02

## Kim

There are so many, there are just so many the most vivid example, probably when I was a DAMO a little baby DAMO either at Brize or I am trying to think of a specific example because that’s when you have the most interface with other people, probably when you are the most, as you know cause you did the jobs, when you are the most outgoing and you had to to do stuff. Gosh, to pin point one point in my service life that stands out oh my goodness, one incident, I can’t think there are so many I literally have a thousand thoughts in my head

## C

talk to me about DAMOing then why it was so

## Kim

That was cool, it was I think just because you were busy, you are busy and you are interactive and you played to your strengths skill of organisation and things like that, but when I was ADC that was a fab job that was great em cause then you were doing ceremonial stuff all the time and that was and you were super proud of that job and then being an MA in town was, I don’t know what is the one thing that stands out I am trying to be really gosh I am trying to think of one time when you are standing in your uniform and it all became …… there have been some I’m not struggling to think of good things because there have been so many bad. Ask me for a bad point in my service life

## C

It doesn’t have to be good it could be a bad one give me

## Kim

That is the whole point I can’t really think of bad examples. I was sick in somebody’s lift once but that doesn’t really count.

## C

You were sick in somebody’s lift?

## Kim

That was a bad thing but not the crowning moment of my service career. Maybe it goes back to doing the family thing, quite recently when I was on maternity leave I went to the woman at war thing at the national arboretum you know the <><>< service and my husband was supposed to come and he didn’t so rather than not go I took a 6 month old baby with me on 200-300 more women across all three services and there is me with a child. I was the only one with a baby so there was some with their husband so they stood out a bit more but erm it was fine and there was loads of veterans there and nobody batted an eye-lid and I just whipped my boobs out to feed him in my No 1s, that was that was a struggle but you know that stands out as just being do you know what cause that is most recent that is probably the last time I put my uniform on. But erm I don’t know. I might think of something as we are talking.

## C

Is there anything whilst you were serving about the life you were leading and what you were doing?

## Kim

Erm no not concerned me I remember coming back from Cyprus because I remember doing 2 and a half years out there I was quite looking forward to calming down I don’t mean that in that I was like mental but more it was just busy it was a busy job but it was a busy social life, I was 20 something single living in a battalion mess I was just a very hedonistic lifestyle not in a drink and drugs you were in Inanapa, Pathos, Limassol every weekend and there was stuff going on and you just through money and your liver were having an amazing life and I remember going back before Cyprus I remember my little flat in town with my friends we were we’d go into town on a Saturday morning for coffee and I longed for that quiet and calmness that came with that life I think cause I’d had a brilliant time but you didn’t have one or two best friends you had like 40 people in the mess and it was a different life. It didn’t concern me but I did think that is the one time I remember thinking I am looking forward to coming back off that out of area and stopping, stopping. It’s not because anything concerned me it was just I remember that was a point I felt I would like a step change now.

## C

So, what now, approaching resettlement what is on your mind at the moment, is there anything playing on your mind at this point?

## Kim

No, I think I don’t have I don’t want to stay because there is no job being offered that I want to do. I wouldn’t want to stay as a squadron leader and that is not because I think I am any better but I have done everything that I want to do what I’d like is money, its just money isn’t it. Not that we need it god that sounds really arrogant you know we have a nice lifestyle, clearly, we can make some adjustments and not lose the roof over our heads, we can still eat because I’ve got my pension but I think other than that. Do I worry that in a few years’ time or make the decision and left I will suddenly go it’s alright put him in childcare 8-6 sort of thing and there are days where I work occasionally now and he does full days in childcare and I don’t think about him because I am working why why am I leaving? But actually that is one day maybe two days a week and it is not sustained long days and everything it is the odd day and I am buzzing at the end of it because I have done stuff but it is not the thing is have I made the right decision will I come to that conclusion in a few months I know when I have my level head on I have made the right decision. Yeh money. 24.42

*(interview paused to put the dog out)*

## C

Right so just picking up on that again, so financially there will be some adjustments.

## Kim

Yeh there will be some adjustments but there is a roof over our heads because I have got my lump sum and my pension and we haven’t got the biggest house with the biggest mortgage because we knew we were sensible. We bought this when I thought about leaving, when I was pregnant last time, I was pregnant with my daughter when we bought this so we know before we were getting into it and financially I think well it is a comfort safety net isn’t it. Because it means you can do what you want you don’t really have to think about it yeh and the other thing was have I made the right decision and I know I have and you have the odd day where you have a brilliant day and you work really hard but I miss my son, will I miss the life style probably not because I am not even a member of the mess you know. So <><>< there was no mess before that was Waddington but I didn’t really go in the mess at all because we lived at Cranwell on the patch so I didn’t I missed the mess but I didn’t join the mess at all and haven’t even thought of it.

## C

So, if you had a magic wand is there anything you would change about your military career?

## Kim

I think I would probably of done more fun jobs does that make sense I seem to have just seem to have done 2 or 3 type PJHQ tours and I’ve done alright but I wonder if I’d done slightly less busy pressured whatever job allowed me to be a bit more personality driven as opposed to those jobs where you are just mental and I wonder if I would have done better or I would be leaving or not leaving I would be promoted or whatever if I’d worked jobs were I wasn’t worked to capacity if I’d done any because the jobs I have done have been brilliant but I have been at capacity doing them all cause they were those kind of jobs. What would I have done differently well nothing because I wouldn’t have met my husband, had my son be where I am now. So I think if I was in a place now where I wasn’t happy I would want to change my path but because I’m happy with where I am with my lot not that I am not going anywhere else but in terms of where I am right now I am happy and if I had to change something in my past that would change this I wouldn’t do that. Does that make sense.

## C

It does, ok I am going to quiz you on something because at one point you are saying you haven’t had to work hard

## Kim

Well no I haven’t had to work hard its more well I have worked hard what I mean is, I’m trying to put these into words I’ve worked really hard at but at the same time I could have worked harder. I could have ben a bit more, I don’t know how to put it into words, there have been busy jobs that haven’t allowed you to do all the sport and, some of them have and some of them haven’t but more professional is probably a better way of putting it. If I’d been maybe a bit more professional but that’s not the right word for it either. Its hard to put into words erm I just what’s the question or I’m just going to ramble otherwise?

## C

Its ok it’s just that it’s a little bit contradictory in your saying that you don’t feel hard on occasion

## Kim

On occasion, so some jobs the JFLogsC for example I didn’t work very hard at all it was a none-job and I hated every single second well not every single second it was just uggh. It was playing at war and training and exercises, training and exercises for training and exercises sake and I just cause it was rubbish and when I went to J5 and id didn’t breath for 2 years because it was mental so I loved it and at Waddington I worked really hard for the Squadron but I didn’t play the game and all the other stuff that people did to get on the top 10 on the station because that is just my interest was with the Squadron I enjoyed it for what it was busy, but busy because I made it what it was. Does that make sense.

## C

It does but I am really going to I really want to explore this playing the game because

## Kim

I think more in terms of what I mean I think is doing now for example I’m being paid to not work but I do have a job on paper but I feel bad (5.35) but I’ve never done this before just being at home and not actually gone into work but I’m still actually getting paid. That is playing a massive game and I suppose you play the game over those three years, one year pregnant, one year on maternity and one year now, the one year pregnant was in town during the SDSR and was crazy but I still took London for what it was and had a good time. I think going back to the whole mindset thing of this is still just one big office sim but you know its not real I always <<>< between my real friends and my air force friends and I don’t mean that <><> sometimes it’s not real.

## C

It doesn’t feel real?

## Kim

It doesn’t but then the ones who think it is real are probably the ones who are doing a little bit better. I’ve not really thought about it before you should have sent me the questions in advance. I’m just rebelling I’m thinking about things I’ve never put any effort into thinking about before

## C

The whole point is to explore it and not give you time to think about it.

## Kim

I’m tying myself in knots. But you do play the game you think it’s not real it’s a giant office sim, there are times when I have just gone fuck fuck me this is hard work for no effort.

## C

To no avail

## Kim

Yeh, you know I have flogged myself in some jobs absolutely, coming back after the death of my daughter, going to London and doing 14 hour days and still being 8 and a half months pregnant being an MA to a 2 star during the SDSR and that fucked me off no end that I then went backwards on the promotion board and that really annoyed me so this is this is the crux actually, something that really annoys me about the Air Force something that really stands out so on the board so I was 12th on the board, 10 th on the board they took 9, promotion is not, but I wouldn’t stay for promotion because the jobs that came up were rubbish but em 10th on the board but then the last board I left with a good <><><><><><> but what I am trying to say is what the desk didn’t do which I now know they could have done, is put a caveat on there, so this as I said before it’s a good report, but actually there were exceptional circumstances. I could not have got a better report so please don’t think I am saying they didn’t mention this and this but that report was written, take that in the context of she had gone back to work after the death of her daughter, only took 4 months off and threw herself into the MA job, and it was the SDSR and this and it was that and she was 8 and a half months pregnant when she left. Take all that into consideration and you have gone backwards on the board. When the desk apparently can just say I want to flag up something here to put that report into context and had it been a shit report maybe he would have put it into context and said but because it was a good report he probably didn’t feel like it needed but it still made me go backwards which made me so cross cause I just want I just want the board to cause one of the other comments was that there wasn’t enough of an upwards trajectory between reports, well I wasn’t at work for 4 months of those.(9.09) but why didn’t the desk point that out, explain that. I’m not going to putting a service complaint or anything like that, no, because that just comes across as bitter. I’m fucked off about it but, I’ve forgotten where I was going with that one,

## C

The injustice I suppose the unfairness in terms of

## Kim

Yeh but not the injustice and unfairness in that I am going to bitter about it for the rest of my life, I haven’t thought about it for ages but more it just makes me think you know uhhh I worked really really hard and again had I come back off that 4 months maternity leave and taken the desks advice and taken a nice quiet job at Air Command or RAF whatever ease yourself back into work I mean I <><>< could have done really well, where as I didn’t I did a mental job, had no capacity and did commensurate, did alright you know because that is where I was but actually did I shoot myself in the foot by doing that? But then mentally for myself probably not because actually I loved it and it didn’t give me the chance to think. Not in the way that I was bottling stuff up more just that I would have been more cross if I had lost her and then ended up doing clothing IPT or something, oh my god my life would have been over in two respects. Does that make sense?

## C

It does in a way you were still pushing and hoping for promotion through that job

## Kim

More and promotion yes but more that I could go back to I’ve always done jobs that are really really busy I’ve never been one to take the crap job because that makes it easier I’ve always taken the hard job but not probably worked as hard as I probably could have in it. Does that make sense?

## C

Yes.

## Kim

I think that is what I mean (big sigh)

## C

Am I exhausting you.

## Kim

I think I am going to have a drink after this.

## C

It rakes stuff up and I do appreciate that.

## Kim

Its not bothering me talking about stuff I’m conscious that I have just been on transmit.

## C

That’s the point. So, if you had to describe military life to anyone who has never experienced it how would you do that?

## Kim

I would say its brilliant because it is it is. It it something totally unique you, its unique its as fun and as exciting as you want it to be. Its yeh its still a god way of life its I I its not the career, the lifestyle it once was but then probably when we were baby junior officers there were 20-year-old 20 years down the line going back in my day. And new people joining up don’t know any different

## C

So, when you said a life style what do you mean?

## Kim

I think you you could be an RAF wife or a couple and go from station to station to station and your kids go to school with military kids and actually you can still make it that life style you can still go to happy hour on a Friday you can still go to the Halloween discos in the mess, we’ve never done any of that I guess because I’m married to my husband and we have had the 2 messes and therefore never gone to either. We’ve bought our own house and he’s been away and whatever. So the lifestyle actually if I look back to being a baby junior officer, looking at my older people where I am now you would have lived on the patch you would have had all the party supers, all that stuff all that life style tat appealed to me then, we don’t do any of that now that we are in a position to do so not because it doesn’t appeal but because I am at a different place in my life. But that sort of life style is not a bad one and its really quite a nice way of life. And actually had I left Afghanistan and not met my husband and met another officer and then we would have been co-located because of our jobs and we only had the officers patch and the officers mess and actually your life would take you down those officer wives coffee mornings where there is nothing wrong with marrying a sergeant but we have just never have gone to his mess never gone to my mess. Got our own house cause we don’t want to live on the patch and we’ve had children late and whatever its just not where I find myself but <><><><><><>

## C

You have already described it really, how you find yourself now, what is different?

## Kim

From wat I expected it to be?

## C

To sort of staying in the military, you have kind of half left already.

## Kim

Oh, yeh without a doubt.

## C

You are in your own home

## Kim

I’m living in my own home, I’ve just had a year’s maternity leave, before that I was 2 years in London where I didn’t wear uniform at all, I was commuting. Since I left Waddington in 2000 and January 15 I don’t feel like I’m in the Air Force, not because I felt abandoned by it but because I could have been doing anything.

## C

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

## Kim

It was exciting I think, I didn’t feel like I was pushed into it so after I did that 3 year piece I knew I needed to let the desk know by Christmas past so I was I went onto maternity leave I was coming back and I was going to go back to Wittering I was going to do an A4 Force Head Quarters job at Wittering which just put me in a billet well not a post a year in advance from <><><>< and actually I’d said Lincolnshire I’d just had the baby lets go for that and I was thinking about it and I was thinking about it and I thought its going to be a dull job and I’ve never taken a dull job option because that would be horrendous plus I was thinking more about the childcare and I just said to the desk the thought of not wearing my uniform is too much to bear but the thought of going back is horrendous I want to go. It wasn’t even a massive sense of relief it was exciting it was I’m going and but it has just been what it is and I have gone on my CTW and stuff and I’ve got swept up in all these transferable skills and these amazing jobs an this in the city and all these crazy things ad I’ve had to stop. The reason I am leaving is to stop all this craziness, I’m not trepadatious about it. It is what it is,

## C

So, what happens next do you think? What you have still got a while before you are actually out. What is it?

## Kim

September next year

## C

So, what happens in the next 10 months?

## Kim

So, in the next 10 months RAF 100 will rap up a bit and I will do a bit more with that one imagines work back from my leaving date I will probably go about July I reckon. We are trying for another baby and have been for a while because the idea of again this last year back and if I could have left come back off maternity leave pregnant to work as little as possible this last year I would have done but it has not worked out for us yet or at all if ever. So, we will se if I get pregnant in the next month or so and work back I’ll be out in like March. So that could happen its an option if not its hanging around in July time and then its going on your terminal leave its no different to what I am doing at the moment, maybe a little less work. That’s it have another baby that is where we are going which is fine, excited about CTW and doing my CV and everything like that. I’m not putting a huge amount into it but

## C

Cause you want to stay at home?

## Kim

A little bit, I do need to work but it is not the whole career and I think that is kind of where a little bit CTW or CTP falls down a bit because they take you out and put you into these transferable skills (1852) these amazing jobs but the other briefings they offer you are retirement there is none of this inbetweeny bits when I was sitting at my little desk with people on CTW there was a pilot who was off to do pilot stuff and another pilot who was off to fly for the airlines and there was a couple of Army type captains, cause I was at Cottesmore, who were talking about city jobs. And I just thought I’d quite like to write a book or I would quite like to maybe do project management two or three days a week for the Woodland Trust based in Grantham, maybe management of a National Trust property you know that type of thing which is a job it’s a career of course it is but it is not the whole so CTP is geared to a second career or it is geared to retirement piece for the older ones. So, the bit in between where you think I don’t want a job behind the counter in Laura Ashley I don’t just want a job but I don’t want that massive career like have you heard of two to three days.com that kind of thing.

## C

So, what are you doing your resettlement?

## Kim

I’m doing the 5-day charity management awareness course because actually I would like to work something like the national trust the woodland trust or save the children a charity doing something like project management I volunteer in a care home one day a week anyway I have done that for a while I did that on maternity leave they are a charitable trust. So, I like that charity sector I like that so I am doing that I am doing the school bursar course again quite interested I think it will offer flexible working. Its like managing a squadron but you are OC Logs and managing a squadron was an amazing job and I’d quite like to manage a squadron in real life as a bursar. So that is the 2 courses I have signed up for I probably if at all. But I went to the one day where you have your interview with your career consultant, I took my son with me, I did it the wrong way round with dates, and I took my son with me literally nursing a 6 month old and he was playing on the floor and the woman, the woman was brilliant but she’s suggests I go and do the advanced diploma in company management which is like the 6 week thing at Manchester University and smash together the ELCs and get that level 8 diploma and company director and I sat there are you looking at what I am telling you I am sitting here. But with your command experience you have got and PJHQ and when you put all your skill sets together this is what my little computer is telling you to do and I was like 6 weeks at Manchester uni doing the diploma great to get the company director thing but no! Just No and you can do your Prince2 and your AMP and your Lean 6 sigma and your black belt whatever, you are not listening to me. They are putting your skills in the Air Force and putting them into civilian accreditation yeh that is great but I don’t want civilian accreditation for my 18 years logistics experience, I want I’d like to I read to old people in a home. I want to do that how do I get paid to do that, that would be quite nice actually. That is not because I have got no ambition that is because I like doing that.

## C

So, what do you think is going ot be the biggest change?

## Kim

Financially I think. I think because I am not stepping out of uniform to do nothing. I am going to use maternity and this year it will just be the financial piece. It won’t be suddenly not having to get up and put my uniform on. Because I don’t get up and put my uniform on now. So, it will be financial.

## C

Very last question.

## Kim

Oh, it we are ever friends after this you must be thinking oh my god how dull is she. I’m boring myself.

## C

Is there anything else you would like to add?

## Kim

No, I hope I have not come across as bitter and twisted because I haven’t been promoted because I am not. I hope I have not come across bitter and twisted because I harped on about Mary and I think life owes me anything where I am right now I am quite happy. I love it and there are things I would change but hindsight is a you know a horrible thing and you can’t do anything about it. I am where I am, I love where I am, it made me who I am. (24.42)

# Matt Interview 1 – 27 June 2017

(officer, 16 years, married, no, -2)

## C

Good Morning

## Matt

Morning

## C

Have you got a drink?

## Matt

Yes

## C

I thought you did there I was going to say what!

Matt (laughter)

## C

Right, I am just going to go straight into it if you don’t mind. It should take about an hour erm but I suppose that depends on how much you talk. Which is fine, feel free to talk as much as you want.

## Matt

Well I guess the more I info you get without blathering on the better.

## C

It is indeed it is. Right. You obviously came over from the Colonies

## Matt

Yes

## C

so what, why did you join, why did you come over here to join the military?

## Matt

Well I didn’t. So em ok. I came over here to see the rest of my family and whilst I was working in London I got to know through one of the girls I was working with her husband who was a squadron leader in the RAF. And he started saying to me you should think about joining the RAF so I thought about joining the RAF em looked around various bases because he introduced me to people, started to think this could be interesting even though I had never thought of it before. In fact I was actually, one of the things I always said I would never do was join any military so I want to start from that one. Em but anyway it seemed to be ok it seemed like … it was an organisation that was looking for potential that was the key thing it wasn’t the fact that the Air Force or anything else it was that it was just looking for potential, er and I thought that sounds good to me because I had met lots of people who aren’t. em and then started to go through selection and at each stage I figured they would probably tell me to stop and em they didn’t and I ended up joining, it was that simple.

## C

So what do you mean when you said it was an organisation looking for potential?

## Matt

Right so most other companies that I had applied for in the past or was even applying to work for wasn’t /?? RAF were very much focused on what have you done and therefore why is your experience going to help you do this job that we want you to do. And in most cases I found I did not have the experience people wanted for the sort of work I was looking for. Em whereas the RAF in this case was not so much bothered about what you’d done before, it might be relevant it might not, but er as you know it was looking was what innate abilities or what skills you had that the RAF could tap into and develop and turn you into an RAF Officer.

## C

And that appealed?

## Matt

That appealed, yeh.

## C

Why? Why did that appeal? What was it?

## Matt

Because it potentially gave me opportunities which I felt weren’t being offered by other areas. So it was all about opportunities, erm I wasn’t thinking necessarily when I joined about what a military organisation was, I wasn’t necessarily thinking about these are the sorts of things I want to do once I am in it. Erm I I realised that working with people and and potentially leading people was something that seemed appealing and here was an organisation that was going to let me do it.

## C

Ok, that’s that’s fine that is an interesting perspective. Different.

(Laughter)

So when did you actually start thinking about leaving the military?

## Matt

Em, it’s been an on and off process over numerous years erm because whist I have enjoyed many aspects of being in the RAF and the military its always, its alw.. I’ve always felt slightly like a em a round peg in a square hole. Or whichever version of that you want. Erm despite the fact of doing good work in my opinion em and enjoying what the RAF had to offer it it never really felt like something where I thought hey I am going to be doing this for the rest of my working life because it never felt that way, erm so it had and always been in the back of my mind that there will come a point where I’d say I’ve had enough thank you very much and one of the key factors that I always said in light of experiences of my colleagues and friends in the military is that as and when I get to a point where I am going to seriously settle down with some lady and get married or or live with whichever way that em would probably be the time I would start thinking about not being in the military anymore. So that that happened erm I met said lady and it had almost become one of those automatic processes so ok now I need to start looking at what I might do afterwards erm I think the timing really became full on, there is a cat coming through

(laughter) he wants to make his points known

## C

Yeh

## Matt

He says he agrees. Em I think probably the time will two two things really made it an absolute er decision were erm when I did my last out of area in Afghanistan and whilst I enjoyed that time away immensely actually that was a a positive experience it really proved to me that that 6 months away from J erm was something that neither of us really wanted to do again. So therefore from the time I returned to England the time was ticking from the end of that deployment to whenever the next potential might be.

## C

Yeh

## Matt

And therefore, if I was going to leave, I would need to leave within 2-3 years of returning to England from Afghanistan in order to probably not go somewhere like that again for 6 months

## C

Yep

## Matt

so I think it was that that time in Afghanistan and particularly the return from Afghanistan was probably for me the key pivotal time for that decision to apply I mean ?????? to put things into action

## C

Mmmhm, and how did making that decision feel? What did that feel like?

## Matt

Well it wasn’t easy, em it certainly whilst I’ve said that it was an automatic decision it wasn’t ne where I just woke up one morning and said well there we go I’ll do it, there was lots of thought put into that decision ?? well not so , why was I making those decisions what was ???????? reasons erm and also then I suppose I started talking to people and using the resettlement services that we have on offer to just make sure that wasn’t a rash decision that it was made for good reason. Erm and once I had been through that process, I couldn’t say how long it took but it was a period of a few months I guess erm, then my decision was very clear and it was at that point that I put my notice in and said right I’m Off. (0806)

## C

And It was just, it was almost a ???

## Matt

??????

## C

a considered decision

## Matt

yeh It was a considered decision but once that decision had been made it was then very clear there there was no point quibbling over it or thinking about it anymore. It was ??? done and what might be useful for your research er is to throw in the fact that even despite being promoted to Squadron Leader after I had said I was leaving, so I said I was leaving some period of time some months after that I was told you are promoted to Squadron Leader congratulations therefore we as a service are assuming you will rescind your PVR erm the answer was well ‘No, I’m I am still going’ erm and so then so yes just to try and illustrate the strength of that decision had been made

Yep

And even the great em riches thrown upon me by promotion and (laughter) and er opportunities etc weren’t enough to make me to decide to stay.

## C

Because it wouldn’t have made a difference to the reason you had left.

## Matt

It wouldn’t have made a difference, correct. If my reason for leaving had been I need more money then clearly that promotion might have made a difference but it was it was based solely around my circumstances and therefore my life circumstances weren’t going to change whether they gave me squadron Leader, Wg Cdr or Gp Captain. That was almost irrelevant.

## C

I’m getting .. obviously its its was been a very clear decision ae very considered decision but there is no emotion entering this equation

## Matt

There is I am just not telling you about it

(laughter)

Erm from an emotional point of view erm the decision to leave was obviously not just factual it was also emotional I suppose the emotional bit was clearly what was going on in my personal life that helped me make that decision erm but from an emotional point of view the RAF life wasn’t giving me the erm things I am still in the process of working out what these things are (yeh) I’ve got some idea but wasn’t giving me the the internal rewards erm … so so the emotion was one of ‘I can do better than this. I can do more that this there are other things in the world that I want to do and experience that the military isn’t going to give me. Erm yeh yeh and also I felt that promotion nice as it was to get it had come too late and therefore I suppose from an emotional point of view erm the RAF hadn’t valued me, in my opinion, enough early on or earlier on to to make me feel like I wanted to stay it was too too little too late.

## C

Erm

## Matt

I don’t know if that starts to edge into emotions or …

## C

Barely

(Laughter)

## Matt

Again Erm. I really it’s it’s not feeling valued enough, (yeh) feeling erm too much of one very small cog in one very huge wheel. Erm feeling that … you are almost irrespective of what you do, almost irrespective of what you, do erm you’re still going to be very much as I say a small cog and you are going to have to do these particular things because that is what the organisation wants you to do erm and that wasn’t sort of the way I wanted to be.

(laughter) (*every word heavily considered and thought about before being spoken*)

But I suppose part of the reason why you are not getting gushing emotion on it is because there aren’t extreme emotions involved in this I am not its not a case of I really loved this I really hated that I was really disappointed by this I was overjoyed by that, really that doesn’t factor in here my RAF career has never been one of great joy and skipping around the place and loving just loving being in the military neither, neither has it been me going (laughter) this is dreadful I have to leave because if that was the case I would have left an awful long time ago. Erm so so I suppose my lack of emotion in what I am telling you is partly reflective of my time that I have been in that I haven’t felt this ground swell of … there are people that you and I have known and will have met where, you erm in fact you might know someone fairly close, where you cut them through and they are RAF/Military and that’s them and they are very passionate about that for lots of good reasons and I am very envious of them for having it. I have never had that with the RAF erm I suppose its been over the 16 years I have been in it has been a very transactional process, you know, I have walked into things erm sometimes against my sort of innate that’s what I think or feel but you know I’m in that organisation and that is what they do so I have walked into aspects of the culture erm or had to but I have never had that strong emotional attachment so therefore leaving is not particularly difficult either. Em there are some practicalities about leaving it, the losing pay and em potential growing pension and all those things and I am sure once I have left fully there will be some things where I go, gosh I really wish I or maybe not wish I’d stayed but I miss those things I am sure ???? but I am really not far enough away from it. Does that help?

## C

Yes, it does, it does, I am pausing occasionally because I am really trying not to put words in your mouth and that is really hard for me (laughter) but that is why and I am dragging things out of you here. But that has been really really useful.

Ok, well we will move on from this torturous topic. Erm so what its been a fairly level playing field in terms of your experiences but if you had to choose one, good or bad, your most vivid of your time in the service?

## Matt

Gee that is a toughy isn’t it cause there is so many things from going through your training to meeting other people, to adventurous training erm ththere so many memories erm. ….. I think perhaps because this is more recent its one of the reasons this is coming to mind erm but this last tour I did out in Afghanistan where I was working in the embassy in the defence section. I was one of a small team of a Defence Attaché when I arrived it was a Defence Attaché, a deputy Defence Attaché me as what was called the Air Attaché and a Flight Sergeant, so there was 4 of us which isn’t that many rapidly the deputy defence Attaché went which left me the DA, the Flight Sgt and me. And every couple of weeks one of these 3 people, sorry one of the other 2 people would not be in the country because that was the the rotation system. So, I I would frequently become the Defence Attaché in all but rank

(Yeh)

And so this isn’t one memory it’s a collection of memories of that time over there, but what I loved about that and again this is probably part of the decision making process was erm I was actually in the scheme of things fairly important erm and I was briefing people and dealing with people all of different aspects of life that I hadn’t traditionally been dealing with in my time in the RAF so it was a less insular world that I was in. I was dealing with one star 2 star level people and clearly I was still lower in rank than them but in the various meetings I was dealing with them on a level because I was representing embassy staff that they weren’t involved in directly so for once or for one period of time despite still being Flight Lieutenant Smith I was actually carrying some clout and people were listening to me, because well in a sense they had to

(laughter)

Because I had a certain perspective but that was great, you know and I think that as well helped me to think this is a unique scenario that I am in now and that was by dint of circumstance, by dint of how I conducted myself, by dint of the character of the Defence Attaché who was phenomenal, a great guy. Who put a lot of trust in me. So that is a very rambling way of saying that time is probably the thing I most remember and and perhaps even most treasure because I feel that I genuinely doing stuff at a level that yeh this is me this is what I can do and being involved in things in an interesting way and that memory I think it is amongst all others the one that I take away with me to then go out and go into the big wide world it gives me it, it gives gave me a level of confidence of where I was at that was above and beyond what I had done in terms of being Flight Leiutenant Smith previously.

## C

Yeh

## Matt

Em And it has also informed my decision to go out and do other stuff. (ok) And that is why that memory as a whole is probably quite key.

## C

Yeh, that is good. That’s good. Ok. Emm. You mentioned earlier that em you bought into the culture sometimes you because you had to,

## Matt

yes

## C

is there anything, is there anything that worried you when you were in the services or anything that concerned you about .. what you had to do, how you had to behave?

## Matt

No, I wouldn’t say there was anything that concerned me there was nothing that I em vehemently disagreed with or went against any of my beliefs, culture or morals etc. so no. No I mean things that jump out are that particularly once I had decided to leave so in my last job ??? emm we would have the usual things of em you have got the wrong shirt on to wear a jumper on or you need to wear a tie cause you have got this particular, or its cold but you can’t wear a jumper because you haven’t go the tie and it was things like this which I thought I’ve always had to buy into them because it is part of how we operate but they are bonkers. (laughter) And these are the sort of niff naff and trivia and silliness that I can quite happily get rid of. I can’t get rid of them whilst I am in the military but I can once I am out of it. em So it is these perhaps annoyances and frustrations of that ilk, nothing serious but it is those sort of things that that started to I always thought were stupid but but now have really got silly and again made me realise that em yeh now I am in my 40’s I think I can dress I can pretty much dress myself how I need to. Em ???????

(laughter)

## C

OK that is brilliant. Is there anything. Em (22m27s)

Is there anything that is concerning you now, in this stage that you are at? Today, you know ..

## Matt

Yeh. Only the fact of finding work. Erm I mean that is that is a fairly base one, I mean I need to earn income Erm but but that doesn’t worry me, I mean it concerns me but it doesn’t worry me because until I’ve got something I haven’t got it. But it doesn’t worry me, I’m not lying awake at night going Oh My God this is terrible (yeh) erm far from it I am enjoying the freedom of time and of being able to look at options and see what can be done for the future so no is the answer.

## C

That’s brilliant, erm if you had a magic wand and you could change anything about your military experience. What would it be?

(long pause)

## Matt

I don’t think I would because because it’s been what it has been you know I have had the normal ups and downs of life that that we all have in any job erm but I see that as how that’s life goes you know. Erm overwhelming I have enjoyed it, it has been a positive experience I’ve done things I would never have done had I not joined I have had responsibilities that I wouldn’t of had in the same way if I had not joined erm I’ve had abilities to train and develop, em study em and become someone different by being in the military than if I had never been joined the military of that I am absolutely sure. So, no I wouldn’t wave a wand at all to be honest.

## C

OK, I am going to delve into that that response a bit.

## Matt

Ok

## C

In what way do you think you would be you are different due to military service?

## Matt

??? ok, so I think I am probably a more confident more capable individual by being in the military by dint of the training from the very beginning and and the experiences you have throughout. Em I doubt but I will never know but I doubt that I would have developed in the same way had I gone into er purely a commercial life. I might have done, who knows? But I doubt it because I think the sort of work I may have ended up doing or the types of hobs I might have done may never have allowed me that capacity to do stuff. Em But as I say we can never know that.

## C

But that’s

## Matt

But that is my my supposition based on the fact that the military has made us do certain things and trained us in certain things, to do what it needs to do. Maybe other careers out there don’t. And so therefore its either by accident or default your own personal way of being that you would develop those skills. Erm yeh.

## C

OK, Cool. Em If you had to describe military life, life in the military in 2 or 3 words how would you, how would you describe it?

## Matt

Right ok, Military life. So erm exciting, although let’s you know caveat that with there are some dead dull things we have to do. But overwhelmingly I would say exciting. Erm, I would say exciting, broadening because of the sorts of stuff we get involved in. Exciting, broadening and contrary to what I said earlier I would say rewarding. I would say rewarding, now I don’t feel that Matt Smith S was valued enough by the RAF as a system in terms of capabilities and promotion or whatever, although maybe they were right and I was wrong, you know

(laughter)

We will ever know but I don’t think so. Erm but I have had a rewarding time by being in and there is, there is a subtle difference. I have gained a lot by being in but I don’t feel I was valued enough by it as a service.

## C

Yeh,yeh. How do you think that is going differ in civilian life, how do you think that civilian life, is going to differ from military life?

## Matt

I have no great erm expectations there the wider world, the ???? world is necessarily going to value me is probably the best ?? erm better or differently it might erm what I would say is they are considerably more options out there in order to find that reward and satisfaction because there are so many other different things in the rest of the world, which being in the RAF in particular or the military as a whole you are still going to be bound within a certain sphere of what you can and you can and cannot do you are allowed or not allowed to do. Because it only has a certain sphere of stuff in mind. So yeh there is no guarantee that by leaving that is going to improve but it has a chance of improving whereas staying in is still within the same bubble.

## C

Yeh, yeh, ok, ok. So how would you describe your situation at the moment in terms of your… how comfortable you are I suppose.

## Matt

I am I am very comfortable with where I am at at the moment. Erm In fact I was having a chat with someone literally over the weekend and erm it became very apparent to me actually that I am very comfortable with this scenario (laughter) … ?? erm almost almost too comfortable. Erm so yes other than securing some sort of employment which obviously we will discuss a little in some part of it, but other than getting that thing erm which is uncomfortable until that is done. I am very comfortable with where things are at I am very comfortable with the fact that I can now I have more freedom of manoeuvre and choice in my life now that I am in that process of leaving erm than I have previously had because for the last 16 years I’ve been very much under the thumb of the RAF. With some degree of freedom of manoeuvre but not a huge amount.

## C

Yes, ok SO that freedom of manoeuvre how does that make you feel, how’s tha

## Matt

Good. That is good that is a very very positive thig and that is definitely one of the things I wanted to achieve by leaving. Erm to step outside of what is a very protected bubble it’s a sort of, you are employed, you ??????? all the medical service??? You step outside of that and you take on some degree of risk by stepping out of it but you also open up a huge amount of freedom in terms of how you do things, where you live, whether you go here or there, if you don’t like a job ???????? and within one month or so your no longer in it erm those freedoms I like and the prospect of those freedoms.

## C

ok cool just going back to your decision to leave, did you did you feel the support you got from the military was good, what type of support did you get.

## Matt

Oh phenomenal, absolutely phenomenal I think the support I had from my particular bosses was outstanding. They gave me all the flex at the time that I needed to do what I needed to do. Erm the system for leaving the formal system with the careers transition partnership ?? brilliant. The Officers Association I have found to be absolutely fantastic and I have made quite a lot of use of them. erm so yeh I couldn’t fault that leaving process at all, its been top notch and I can say that in light of the fact that I have had other colleagues who perhaps haven’t had that support in the same way because of the personalities of the people above them erm so I recognise that I have been very fortunate in my circumstances.

## C

Good. Good. So what are you expecting to be the biggest change? About leaving the military?

## Matt

Erm, I mean other than the fact change the sort of thing I do day to day for employment yeh that’s quite possibly the biggest change em well I guess in tandem with that the other biggest change is the fact that I get to live at home and whilst I was very lucky while I was at HW I did live at home certainly …. Doing for the the last few years that hasn’t always been the case of curse nor will it be the case in the future. (yeh) erm Though I think possibly the biggest change will be able to have that domestic life where I will only take a job that allows me to be at home and if if it doesn’t I wont do it. So so being able to have that grounding of being at home wherever I choose that to be whether its where I am now which is in this house here or when I am married we decide at some later point to move again that will…..??? In order to have that family life and that feeling of stability in a sense. I think that is going to be one of the biggest changes in a very positive way.

## C

Yeh. ok so what erm what happens next them what is your ?

## Matt

So I am in the process of applying for various work I am going onto another Officers Association do tomorrow in London erm which is with Lloyds of London Insurance and various syndicates there so I am going to have a nose around there to see if that might be of interest to me or not. Em so it’s a case of just applying for all sorts of stuff, and its it started off at the beginning of this career transition that I wanted to be self-employed which I still do actually but I wanted to be self-employed I wanted to run erm leadership events and team development events whatever being around the knot of it now I have seen enough people to realise that whilst that is all fine and dandy the financial risk to me doing that at the moment doesn’t work erm there are too many unknowns in that scenario and so therefore at the moment I have gone full circle and I am now applying for work so that I know I have an income, Meanwhile if I still want to work on I can still branch out to self-employment I can. But I am not doing it from the point of view if I don’t go and earn money now I’m stuffed, which is what I would be

(???)????

Erm so yeh that is what I am doing, I am applying across a whole range of sectors it’s certainly not related to my background of logistics erm yeh the default position would be you’ve spent the last 16 years dealing with logisticy stuff, in the main, therefore clearly you are going to be applying for logistics work, no, because it doesn’t interest me. Erm, so hence I am applying for a whole load of other stuff and re-jigging my cv with great frustration every time I get told this is the thing you wanted. (laughter) so, so that’s where I am at at the moment.

## C

Ok, ok em where do you think, you don’ti ts early days I appreciate that erm but do you have any anticipation with regards what you think you will miss about the military?

## Matt

Erm yeh I think there is a very good chance I will miss the camaraderie that is, that is lets not say its always there but in the main it’s there and certainly for the most part with the people I have dealt with part of it you are definitely part of a team and that’s part of the culture and I have really enjoyed that so I suspect moving into a world where, of course there are teams and of course there are all sorts of different ethos and different companies and different parts of companies, but where I don’t think the word is structured to be as team orientated as the one I am leaving so to think that is possibly one thing that I will miss.

## C

Erm, do you intend to sort of keep in touch with the military in anyways, do you intent to..

## Matt

Well yes there will be lots of individuals that I will be staying in touch with. I have good friends over the years so I guess vicariously there will be that I shall remain a member of the RAF Club because that is good. Erm but I am not doing overt things such as becoming a reservist erm or joining any particular organisations that sort of very much, again I’ve known several people who have left where their default option has been, well of course I am going to be a reservist and they are going to do this and that because they still very much want to be a part of the military although they may not necessarily want all of the military. That is not the perspective I am coming from which is probably quite apparent from everything I have said from the beginning of this chat. Erm I have ??????? several links to the RAF I wouldn’t want to say they are dead to me you know but nor do I feel this need to cling onto it. I am quite happy to start a new life and actually I have got something that will demonstrate this very clearly to you, so, I am a member of one of the city guilds the worshipful company of Carmen that I think you might have aware of erm, I to date have been part of a ???military liaison between the RAF and Carmen because I am in both organisations, the last meeting we had which was only last week erm my main brief was that I am stepping away from that role in Carman as the link because firstly I am no longer in therefore it makes it harder to do it but also because of the fact that I want to make the psychological break that I am not still dipping my toe into the RAF waters I am leaving it because I am leaving it, I am leaving it for all the reasons we have discussed Erm, quite happy to step away. That is one prime example where I was already in a position to keep that foot in and I very consciously said I don’t want that foot in thanks very much I don’t need that so.

## C

Yeh

## Matt

I think that says a lot about how I perceive it

## C

I think it does, it does indeed. Ok well we are almost done.

## Matt

Wow.

## C

I know its fantastic. Erm There is just one last question. Which is really is there anything you would like to add about leaving the whole transition process, that we have not really covered?

## Matt

I think this will probably be a very individual thing so therefore what I am saying is very much Matt rather than yeh a person leaving the military. But what trying to find where my niche or niches might be out of the military has not proved easy. Erm. Nor did I ever expect it to which is why it’s not a shock and em because I think there is a lot of self-discovery that goes on as part of that unless there are things you have done in the military that clearly that transfers across erm or something ese that naturally… so for example lots of people have dealt with er in the military who are leaving during this transition process a number of people are doing thigs either directly or indirectly with project management. That has just astounded me erm because it is just a very well-trodden path because we may or may not have had qualifications in ???? erm we have all to one degree or another all managed projects in some form small or large and so you know there is a lot of people who have gone off in that direction, well that doesn’t interest me in the slightest so therefore a big potential area of what is a fairly natural way of going that in a sense I’ve closed off by recognising it doesn’t interest me at all.

## C

No

## Matt

Em so therefore I am in the process of having to try and find more Matt related areas of work and that is still ongoing. Em and I have found that challenging if not difficult em but I’m not I don’t see that as a problem I just see that as part of the process of doing this. Em so yeh yeh and of course I’m sure everyone that you interview about this will have their own take on that very point but I am not wanting to do stereotypical stuff because I am leaving the military therefore I must therefore want to go and do that. So the trick is trying to find out what the other stuff is.

## C

So you are you want a clean sheet really?

## Matt

Yeh, yeh absolutely but of course you create your own risk with that because you are making it harder for yourself by perhaps not going down more traditional routes.

## C

So staying away from logistics, staying away from project management staying away from defence.

## Matt

Yeh, so I think tap dancing is my next (laughter) ?????

## C

It’s erm well I will probably close the interview there actually and we can just have a chat but I will still record actually because sometimes things just come out.

## Matt

Of course.

But this is where I get to, because I have tried very hard not to put words into our mouth during the interview and now I can just

## Matt

Now You can put all sorts of words

## C

Yes, but to me its em it’s an opportunity, to me leaving the military was an opportunity to do something completely different and I have only half got there because I am still studying the military.

## Matt

Yeh yeh yeh

## C

But I am doing it in a completely different world to the one I occupied before. Em and unlike you, J has nothing to do with the military even though I left I was still in it, here I am in a quarter at RAF Wittering.

## Matt

Yes, absolutely.

## C

So I haven’t really been able to escape so I am quite envious of you being able to escape it (laughter)

## Matt

No I agree with you Caroline. Its em that is why everybody’s scenario very different and is exactly why what you are doing is very worth while and interesting because every scenario is different

## C

It is

## Matt

I am in the lucky position, I think that I am able to close the door on the military and thats as closed as I wish it to be or as open as I wish it to be.

## C

Yeh

## Matt

But there is nothing keeping me in that world what so ever.

## C

It’s actually part of what I am looking at and there is so many things in this research that are coming from left field,

## M

Yeh, I bet.

## C

And it is just in terms of, you talked about being valued

## Matt

yeh

## C

the promotion offer didn’t come early enough, aside from promotion because we know promotion is fickle there is 2 some years there is 20. Aside from promotion how else can the Air force show value and show reward towards individuals.

## Matt

Yeh, you are absolutely right because it is it has very few strings to pull apart from promotion. We had a chat about this funnily enough I haven’t left yet because I went to a top table up at high Wycombe. For AP.

## C

Oh, oh is he going?

## Matt

Oh he would be an interesting one for you? (laughter) em but let me go back to what I was going to say first. So we spoke about this very point a few of us because there are a number of people who were at that top table both Squadron Leaders and Flight Lieutenants who are feeling you know I am not getting anywhere here no matter how many blood sweat and tears I put into this (yeh) and we were saying one avenue the RAF or the military as a whole could potentially investigate is recognising that you are a very good as a whatever rank and for reasons or the reports you have had previously, the the jobs you are doing, the skills you have got, you might not go above that or maybe one rank or whatever and we already know that the way the system works is that you will very quickly know whether you are likely to become a Gp Capt or an Air Commodore or not because of how much time you have been in the jobs you have done the jobs you are doing etc. If like me or at nay rank level you have reached the top pay structure, 9 or whatever it is now (yeh) you know that unless you get promoted you are stuck in fact you are not just stuck you are going backwards because inflation is going upwards and your pay is not. (yeh) There could be virtue in saying you have reached the top level rank after a period of time you will still go up in pay so for example you have reached the top level Flight Leiutenant you have not been promoted in the last 5 years ???? so we are going to give you the incremental Flight Leiutenant pay ??? a bit like flying pay in the sense that you are still being loyal you are still being paid and valued because you are still staying in for in for one year two years three years etc but you both recognise the service and you, you are never going to become a Squadron Leader or a sgt or whatever it is (Yeh) I think that is one way they could do it. Because em again pay isn’t the only thing but it is one way they could do it. Have I felt valued by most of the people work for yes em both in the comments and feedback they have given me throughout my tours and the reports that have been written em so I guess yeh there is a good question you are asking because you have to distinguish what level of of value are we talking about, you know. From a one to one point of view so with my current bosses I have felt very valued and I will always take that with me. Em, I will tell you another thing as well so in terms of value how how often ???? a rhetorical question to me how often has the desk officer really given a toss about Matt Smith and what Matt smith is telling the desk officer? Very little. there have been individual desk officers that have done it more than others but they get greater respect as a result of it. But because the system requires us to do certain things and I don’t fault that I understand that it is one of the reasons I have left it’s because the way the system wants me to be versus me is different it’s too discordant now and the desk officers in general have not em yeh really valued me in terms of I am a human being this is the scenario I am in lets try and meet mid-way. Quite frequently that has not been the case if anything it has been totally the opposite. Erm that is where the service need I think em as often gets quoted is quite often out of kilter with “what about me here” and I think how you feel valued fits into that. We are talking about me here and how you feel valued fits into that.

## C

Would you say that that occurred even though when you were single ..

## Matt

Oh absolutely

## C

or as you are now engaged to J?

## M

Its just that now now I am engaged and soon to be married the stakes are higher and therefore for my my tolerance for that scenario is far less than it would have been when I was single although I think I think I think age has a lot to do with it as well. If I was single now I think I would still be getting old enough that I’d be thinking this is a bit silly now to be honest this is a bit like boarding school rules I I am way beyond that now time to live my life in a different way. As you and I both know every person you talk to will be different on this for some people that’s they absolutely happy with that regime but I haven’t met many people who have spoken favourably about the desk officer posting system. (hmm) Very few, so I think that is an area that across the board could probably be investigated if the RAF wanted to improve its retention. And I think they are there yeh there are all sorts of work and surveys that have gone on em but I do think the pressure that is put up on desk officers and the role that they have to fulfil I think time and space for them to be able to think about how am I valuing the individual is very limited. Em so I don’t think they have got the task there at all I don’t underrate that.

## C

Ok, one last thing then cause you kind of brought it up again, discordant you said discordant between

## Matt

With me

## C

Yes can you give me an example? Of that discord

## Matt

Erm I think it is hard to give a singular example but I think if I may sort of generalise, I know its not what you have asked for but but there is there is a need, I feel I need for control over my, my life. The way I live it, where I live it, how I go about it well that that is totally against the RAF and the military’s mindset that which is one individual as a culture the individual doesn’t matter and I need to clarify that because I think you know within command chains people do matter and do matter greatly but as a system where you are based on sending people off to war zones ultimately, the individual doesn’t and can’t matter so I think you have you have got opposing forces there, you have got a culture that says you are one of many you are part of a team and we need you to do what the service needs you to do whether that be move to Wittering er go to Afghanistan em suddenly realise you are half way across the world with one day’s notice, that is what we need you to do. So, it’s has got that at the top but then you have got people who like my management line that I have just left who massively care about the individual who very much look after the individual you have got those tensions going all the time. Unfortunately, I can’t rely on the fact that my previous management are going to be in every job in the future so therefore the one constant is the system and that system is what is disconcordant with me.

## C

Right

## Matt

Because I don’t have enough control over my life.

## C

No, that is perfect.

That is really useful because I have an issue with what the way it is a sort of theoretical separation you make between what is the big discourse of the organisation spouts out and the little discourse that is the interactions day to day that people have to live with so it is the policy and the reality for people. The policy says one thing the reality says another.

## Matt

Yeh.

## C

And up until til you just said that there I was thinking the policy is all about we value people we want people to stay in and we are doing this that and the other about it and then the reality is it doesn’t actually filter down to the bottom

## Matt

Yeh

## C

But actually, it flips as well so sometimes it is the organisation can’t value can’t give you the attention you deserve because it just needs you to do a job whereas your individual line manager can actually really actually give a shit about you. So, you have got this constant flipping going on and that’s erm

## Matt

You do and a colleague of mine a friend and colleague was also er left, his last boss was so not caring about the individual that that made both his process of leaving difficult because he wasn’t given the flex he needed to getting him sorted he also left very bitter because of that particular boss erm and all of the things that fall out of that. That is not the culture, that is not the RAF that is absolutely down to those individuals that we are talking about. So again, that reinforces why I know well I know that I am very fortunate with the people I have had around me in this last few years because that has allowed me to do what I needed to do.

## C

??? Fantasitc.

(moved onto talk about another potential participant)

## Matt

You know its funny, talking back through there when you said you were not hearing much emotion early on and I thought you know it is interesting you could easily think that I haven’t got one ???? if you didn’t know me, Matt hasn’t got much emotional buy in and dealing with this whereas clearly I have loads of it because you can’t do any of these things without it, it’s one of the drivers of it. In fact if you didn’t have emotion about it you probably wouldn’t leave in the first place probably.

## C

Yeh.

## Matt

Erm but it is interesting in the way that we do describe stuff. Yeh

### Notes

End of interview.

59 minutes.

Interview concludes with Matt asking where I am in my research.

# Michelle - Interview 1 - 15 Nov 2017

(officer, 20 years, single, no, -3)

Introduction - describes job roles and responsibilities.

## C

I don't know much about the erm medical world.01:43

## Michelle

Not many people do.

## C

No.  you are sort of separate aren't you in many ways.

## Michelle

Yes, and I think sometimes that is a bit of an issue as well.

## C

In in in what way?

## Michelle

Well when it comes to things like accessing things like resettlement or any main stream type promotion courses or even just going to things like ICSC or getting on JOCC cause you are fairly limited in spaces available to do your sort of development from a normal military perspective.

## C

So what rank did you leave as? If you don't mind me asking.

## Michelle

Squadron Leader.

## C

Squadron Leader, yep just jotting that down.  Well we can get into some of that when w chat but I have got about 10 questions or so to ask you but it is ........ 02:55

So, I will start with a nice easy one.  Why did you join the military?

## Michelle

Erm I come from a military family, my father was in the Air Force, my uncle was in the Air Force my step brother was in the Air Force.  I did look to do my initial nurse training in the Air Force erm but at that particular time they had stopped training their own people and I was advised generally do your training outside and then look to join later erm that was my original intention and then obviously life takes over you know you meet people have relationships whatever erm and so I it was about 10 years later I then looked again at joining the Air Force and kind of made the leap to do it.

## C

And it was erm what drove you at that point then to join.

## Michelle

Erm I was working in London where I did my training as a senior sister in an intensive care unit I was quite you know the job hadn't exactly got glory but it was a little samey samey there weren't that many challenges  Quite a lot of my colleagues were doing erm retrieval for either NGOs they had worked with or they did insurance retrievals so aeromedical type evacuation and I I knew that was one of the things I wanted to do but I wanted to do it in a more structured way. And having seen a couple of the adverts for the Air Force you know come and do you know nurse in the sky that kind of thing that is what appealed and I thought if I change jobs in London all I am doing is literally changing location I I and the people that I work with I am not actually challenging myself.  So that is when I made the initial application to go and do that.

## C

So, although you had that military background if you like you kind of knew what you were getting yourself into it was the challenge really and the appeal of the role itself.

## Michelle

yeh, to do something a bit different really.

## C

yeh

## Michelle

yeh.

## C

And did you manage to did you get to aeromed?

## Michelle

Oh, absolutely I spent I did the first ever C-CAST erm which was basically, I'll give you the abridged version of it, the critical care air support team I did the first training I did the first ever on call for C-CAST.  Erm I was one of the only people just before I left who had used every bit of old equipment that we had to actually move patients.  I spent 10 years on call I did numerous strategic and tactical erm er deployments in that role and also mentored a lot of to undertake that role that are currently doing it now.

## C

yeh wow.  So er I was a mover so

## Michelle

oh right

## C

I was a DAMO so erm I saw you guys quite a lot really, unfortunately.  So yeh quite a challenging environment to work in.

## Michelle

yeh

## C

yeh.

## Michelle

And I think one of the things for me is that erm for the 20 years I served whilst the initial sort of 3 years, the initial 3 years were not that kinetic after that we had lots of conflict that we have been involved in, obviously in Iraq and Afghanistan and I was very very busy but also I'm a dual qualified not only am I an intensive care nurse I am also <>>>><>< trained so I spent a lot of the last part of my career looking after erm all the injured serviceman coming back to Birmingham and there was a team of 5 of us who literally worked round the clock from 2009 - 2011.

## C

yeh, I can believe it definitely 06:21 I remember I remember you bring all the memories you know trying to get the patients and kit onto the Tri\* or a VC10 and yeh.  Yes ok, actually you must have gone through IOT at a similar time to me.  Summer 97 I started.

## Michelle

yeh no August October, yeh

## C

yes, so we were actually at Cranwell at the same time.

## Michelle

Oh, wow small world

## C

It is isn't it?  ...... So, when did you start thinking about leaving?

## Michelle

Erm I think er I had a couple of health issues mainly with my shoulder and stuff that that basically affected my erm ability to do press ups erm and stuff so that kind of <><><>< and I went to a med board and there was some possibility if you can't pass your fitness test you can't do this that potentially that three strikes and you are out kind of loomed.  Erm but I knew that my run out date kinda was like I'd already been put in for you know  full commission full commission definitely been offered, our branch being quite tight but we're at overborn with squadron leaders, there aren't that many Wing Commander slots to go to erm so it was kind of that you know do I look and do I accept the fact that I am going to leave and a bit more proactive and be positive about it or do I just I have I have I was offered an extension but there were caveats tied to it like I had to make clinical which meant that therefore I would automatically dis discount myself from promotion and I didn't to leave on a sour note or stay there for another 3 years just adding to a pension pot and erm not really enjoying the job.

## C

yeh and and why wouldn't you be enjoying the job?

## Michelle

I think I would have resented people that I would have considered potentially that didn't have the same skill sets or experience being promoted above me.

## C

yeh, I can appreciate that.  I think it happens in every branch, doesn't it?

## Michelle

yeh, oh very much so.

## C

So that that is kind of a general thing but was there anything specific one specific incident where you thought you know what it’s time to go.

## Michelle

erm, I think just a lot of I mean obviously I I'd lived and worked in Birmingham so I'd been away from I've never really been apart from when I was in Cyprus I've never really been based on a station or a unit I've always worked away in secondary health care away from big kind of military establishments.  So erm I've been involved I think a lot of it had to do with how they were restructuring things the mess at Birmingham is an all ranks mess.  You know there is one dining room there's one one bar for all ranks which I just don't think is going to work that kind of niggled me a little bit.  erm things like the cutting of your allowances, a lot of the x-factor perks that go into being in the military the fact that you do get you do work 24/7 if the military tells you to stag on you get on with it cause that's what you are paid to and also doing a lot more with less people which kind of like I think now's the time to jump ship.09:40

## C

yeh, its its really interesting just picking up on something you said there.  Effectively having only really embedded in a military camp when you were in Cyprus and yet you probably seen more operational, oh are you still there?

## Michelle

yeh still here

## C

oh, its fine the Skype thing went off for a second there.  yet you have probably seen more operational activity than a lot of people

## Michelle

yes

## C

from the aeromed from side

## Michelle

yep, most certainly I mean when I was the on call I did my original C-CAST training in 2000 and from 2000 to 2010 I was on call constantly at different states of readiness, and then if we needed if they needed you to do anything else you would literally just go well if you are free can you come and help us out as a third nurse on a  because you've got a 6 or a 12 patient <><>< or whatever is going but also working in Birmingham being the aeromed <><>< hospital we would see all the casualties coming through.

## C

MMM yeh I mean that is I have always had a great deal of respect one of my friends she is a doctor she has done some aeromed I know.11:01 .............11:16 can I ask you what is the most vivid memory of your service then and could you give me or can you give me an example that really stands out?

## Michelle

when you say vivid memory erm

## C

good or bad

## Michelle

Well no I am just trying to think cause there are .... you know there are quite a few a few sort of instances that I can think of erm.  There are there are some of the pos positive fun things that you know will always stay in my memory particularly from when I was in Cyprus, living, you know I would never of gone there to live or work with any stretch of the imagination and I spent two and a half years out there and then I went back to do various other bits and tours and deployments that enabled me to have other people having done that that job out there but you know sort of advising people you know you need to you have got to make a decision now docs, either the patient goes back on the aircraft tomorrow or you have got a two week window you can't just decide two days later that you want to send them back so using that kind of knowledge to ene enable things but probably the biggest thing for me and having looked going having thinking about what you said before I think this is a double edged sword was certainly from 2009 to 2011 at the height of Panthers Claw and that high kinetic activity when we didn't stop as a team at Birmingham both military and some of the civilian staff I mean I went in I went in at 8 I went into work at 8 o'clock in the morning not knowing when I would go home and I worked a 90 - 95 hour week.  I then went and did a staff tour with the Americans erm at Leatherneck for 4 months and that was a rest going off on command and staff course was a rest from doing that it was like doing a back to back to tour for erm nearly 2 years,<><> and someone would say oh yeh I've got to go away and deploy and it was like oh I wish I could go away cause I can't I couldn't get away from it.

## C

yeh

## Michelle

so I mean the amount of people we helped and the positive effect we had on people and the amount of guys that we saved and you now see them in things like the Invictus Games I mean erm erm and it and also on things like DIY SOS the Big Build this kind of things I see all of my patients on programmes like that and you know that kind of being exhausted and tired and generally you know when is this ever going to end but seeing the positive effects and the fact that these guys are still functioning and doing stuff you know 5 years on kind of puts it into perspective.

## C

yeh, its erm its almost an instant realisation of what you are doing isn't it?

## Michelle

yeh but it was exhausting and nobody from that time, from a nursing perspective, is still in service.

## C

Oh, that is interesting.

## Michelle

I think bar one, who has gone on basically left not long after I did and has never gone back to clinical.

## C

yeh just burnt out a bit I am not surprised.  So, what are you doing now then?

## Michelle

I had basically I actually left my unit in May even though I only left service in August erm I had the summer off rationalised my house I moved, I was living in a flat in Birmingham got all that sorted went and saw people erm generally kind of and then saw a job in a local hospice 20 minutes away from my house which was not quite full time so it is 4 days a week doing a health care governance role which is something I'd done before that was paying  reasonably well so that is what I am doing I am just in my fourth week now.

## C

oh, ok so you have sort of jumped back into the world of work fairly quickly then really.

## Michelle

I did, erm but I'm going to give it 12 months I am also going to give living in my house where I am 12 months because I have never lived here on a permanent bases this was based here geographical kind of drop in the ocean because it was an hour from Birmingham and hour and 10 from High Wycombe, 45 minutes from Brize and hour and 10 from Lyneham so all the places I needed to get to were commutable within just over an hour erm so it was more kind of that not that I knew anybody and I am trying to get to know people in the town so you know it is one of those things.

## C

yeh sort of dropped its erm a difficult decision sometimes to choose where to live.

## Michelle

yeh I mean I know quite a lot of my friends there is quite a big ex-RAF cohort in and around Cheltenham loads of people kind of live in that area, and there are sort of around High Wycombe and further out, Princes Risborough and other places but this was just a geographical drop in the ocean. erm as it were

## C

yeh erm can I is there ask you was there anything that you worried about when you were in the service that concerned you or?

## Michelle

erm in what sense?

## C

Well just made you pause for thought really. erm in terms of how the organisation operated or how people behaved or ...

## Michelle

ok, erm for me on a personal level I always thought there wasn't a great deal of parity or openness about what jobs were available certainly not in the same way the Army has a list and you know over 2 years what jobs are going to be available on that list unless you promote erm and I did actually mention this to me head of cadre on my leaving interview that needs to be explained to people at things like our initial induction course how to get hold of your manner how to actually engage with them I mean it is something that I've used my wisdom I have said to people who have joined, newly joined the Air Force I've said don't sit and wait for someone to post you, you have to engage I'm not saying be on the phone everyday but you know every 3 to 6 months if you are left in a job that doesn't suit where you are they are not going they are just going to assume if they have not heard from you that you are content and where to go and look for what potential jobs there are and it’s something I never did and I I regret that because I think I would be in a slightly different position if I'd of done that.

## C

MMM can you, I kind of understand what you are saying but just for the purposes of the tape effectively you are saying you needed to be, I don't want to put words in your mouth but would you say a bit more pushy.

## Michele

yeh but I don't think it’s erm I don't think you are given permission to do that or encouraged to do it.  Erm also the fact that sorting where those jobs are now I think it is slightly easier when we have had something like DII and I think again this is the difference between being based on a station or you know somewhere on a military establishment where DII is readily available and that is the only system you have got.  Where I have worked is erm were I used to work in Birmingham if you didn't have an H2 type role job you literally were limited to 3 DII terminals or you hot desks with someone who wasn't in at their desk  That meant everything so there's 18:54 as a head of department which I was previously I had to get in their early to make sure I kind of snagged the head of department desk to be able to write reports but also to access anything on DII, I mean when DII was first being rolled out erm I was actually in a relationship with somebody who was part, an engineer, who was part of the team and it <><<><><>< what about all the health care establishment and he went "oh no one had even thought about that" ugghh  That wasn't even in the plan so I think that kind of puts a little bit of perspective on that.  Erm so you know even when <><>< source that information <<><not even on the military intranet and not norm does actually impede your ability to do any of that so you actually have to leave your clinical work place where most people have got access to it at their desks.

## C

yeh, I can see that I am just trying to have the impact that would have had on me, we had similar situations when people were overseas in RAFLO tours and they couldn't access anything and the information isn't there you are in a black hole aren't you in many ways.

## Michelle

I mean it is typical when I was when I was doing one of those bespoke jobs remote from Birmingham I was still part of Birmingham but I was working in Chelmsford I had to go to the local recruitment office to get my DII access, that was the nearest place.  I had to make a 6 hour round trip.

## C

That is quite remarkable isn't it? And it’s its the networking the contact with people that you were missing.

## Michelle

Very much so

## C

As much as the information that comes out on the system.

## Michelle

And then you have to remind people, what do you mean that you don't have access to DII, you have to remind people and I think it’s quite telling as well we had a briefing from the Air Member for personnel who came round and did some workshops and I kind of put my hand up I said I have to make a 6 hour round journey to put in a claim and I have to make a claim for the journey that I have just done.  (laughter) and he went pardon. He just didn't get it that you just don't have access, ready access to DII on your desk or the fact that I had put in for a remote access DII lap top and you know that wasn't even acknowledged it could be a potential yet I know that full well that people at you know if you are on you know teams at Northwood and stuff going out they have got DII on their desks and the take DII home with them.

## C

yes, they do. Loads of people.

## Michelle

yes, but it wasn't deemed appropriate for someone like me in a the job I was working.

## C

That is terrible.

## Michelle

I know

## C

I am really really surprised. (interrupted by small child) 21:50 ................. 22:29

## Michelle

I mean yeh one of the reasons that erm one of the things that I did to combat that kind of isolation piece is all the way through my career I have done <><>< a two weeks holiday and I have been part of an RAF group and within that I've met movers, adminers people across the Air Force so I kind of broadened my network outside of health care.  Just to help with some of that.

## C

You did what sorry? I didn't a children's

## Michelle

No, I was part of a erm I was an acute nurse for part of a charity erm an RAF group that was part of a bigger charity, and within that I met adminers, movers other people and that kind of broadened my network in the Air Force and gave me other connections as well rather than just remaining in Health care.

## C

yeh, yes because it erm you get forgotten about as well

## Michelle

Well you are always we are never considered until we are wanted so that was the same case when you look at things like Voyager and all the rest of it, we are never considered at the planning phase, <><<><they have to go back and rescope it all.

## C

yep yep I remember it all.  All happening there was no aeromed.  I used to work with the aeromed at High Wycombe a little bit we were next to each other.  Ok so is there anything erm that particularly worries you now, now that you are on the outside so to speak?

## Michelle

Erm now that I have got my pension through and I kind of know what that is and have sorted myself out financially erm and I did do a prediction and various other bits and pieces, at the moment no.  Erm I I erm I miss the people that I worked with and I miss the banter but I am still in touch with those people. And I have been back for a couple of things already and there are plans to do stuff with other friends and bits and pieces.  Erm its not been an easy transition but erm I think it is just the people that I miss really there is nothing really burning disturbing me.  I know that I have got rid of all my kit properly, I know that I haven't held onto anything erm I I don't really know that there is anything else that does concern me.

## C

When you said erm it hasn't necessarily been easy what exactly do you mean?

## Michelle

I think it is just missing the people, it’s just the fact that it’s like when you go away on tour your life kind of stops for the 4, 6, 10 months you are away you are working you know that erm you know it is not your normal day to day job, do you know what I mean, it’s not like normal it’s not normal life because it is a tour and it’s a set amount of time and you get back you go back home and the world has, everybody at home has just carried on as normal you know it doesn't matter where you have been there or not they have just carried on as normal.  So I know that my colleagues at  work will carry on as normal without me and I I fully accept the fact that no one is indispensable from a job and I think you know I am the one who feels like they are treading water for a bit which is possibly one of the reasons why I was I needed to get a job why I needed to get back into the work place I needed to do something a bit different just to carry on and do something like that.

## C

yeh25:43

## Michelle

Plus, you have got that kind of <><>, whereas I like the idea of I do actually like the idea of not doing much I couldn't completely afford to do that which is why I have only gone for a part time job and that is what I wanted to have a bit more time for me. Erm but er you know other people just carrying on and you know the job will continue without me being there which I am quite pleased about but apparently couple of people have said you have been missed which has been nice.

## C

So, if you had a magic wand, what would you change about your military experience if you had to give one example?

## Michelle

 I think it goes back to the fact that I would have been a bit more pushy about doing slightly more different jobs and I think had I done that I think I would have erm promoted erm earlier and I would still be in a job in a different possibly in a command job somewhere.  I stayed in m comfort zone of being clinical for too long.

## C

yeh and didn't move up the promotion, why do you think you did that?

## Michelle

As I said before there was no kind of erm ...

## C

guidance

## Michelle

yes, whereas now there is a little bit more structure but it’s more than just the fact telling people this is what you need to do but and they they kind of changed the rules as well so one of the times was that you need a certain key jobs to get to certain places or when you have got 25 people trying to get 3 different jobs you know its competition high you just think ok fine and they say no you need to have a more rounded profile. And well yeh I've ticked <><>< and I have picked that box and they go there is no and the other thing is there is no staff command erm channel for medical erm and it doesn't help when you have doctors and we are very doctor heavy and they kind of sit in higher ranks across the board, they and I actually had actually had a doctor turn around to me and say "you would never get a Wing Commander nurse doing this job" and I said well why not I would quite happily stood be clinical as a Wing Commander.

## C

yeh that is just that is just sort of that difference between nurses and doctors do you think?

## Michelle

yeh

## C

So how would you describe military life to someone who has never experienced it?

## Michelle

laughs - that is very difficult.  Erm again for me I would have to say to somebody in the nursing profession because I couldn't say what it is like to be on a station aside from my one experience in Cyprus which was quite a long time ago and again Cyprus is quite unique in the fact that they only work and its different now but when I was there erm everyone did a long day on a Monday and then they all finished at 1 o'clock on Tuesday through to Friday and then quite a few people were bemused "what do you mean you are going to work this afternoon?" yeh unfortunately people just don't stop being sick at 1 o'clock its they still need looking after at night times and weekends and things.  But I would say to somebody I mean I I certainly in my one of my erm nieces well no my cousins eldest she has just joined the Fleet Air Arm, she did look to join the Air Force and I kind of did try to explain it but again she comes from a military family my uncle erm her grandfather was in the Air Force I kind of try to explain to people it’s not a case of your life is not your own, but there are different considerations you have to put ahead of what happens with the choices you make and a lot of it depends upon what branch you are in as to what those choices tend to be erm but for me I would 29:31 I would tell them for a career it’s a very positive thing erm it’s a very challenging thing, if you want to literally come into work and come home and erm just do your own thing then the military life is not for you.  But if you want to challenge yourself and you want to experience something different and you want to meet a great bunch of people then you know give it a go.

## C

ok brilliant and and so how would you describe your life now? (laughter) How different is it from being in the military?

## Michelle

Erm ...... I think it is probably a bit too soon other than the fact that erm I am living in my own house and have done for more than 2 weeks at a time which is a novelty which I never did before erm you know I still get up early I still I'm into work early, work through you know get all the things done that I need to get done so the biggest thing is I'm out well I didn't do it that often I actually quite refused to bring work home with me to get things done I don't think for me that that's a different <><><>< the tick in my head is that  you know erm I am not going to bring work home to get things done and I am not going to stay late unless unless I really need to do so which was not the pace in my job but then when I was working in Birmingham cause I was working late and at the time erm I wasn't involved with anybody so I'd go to work at 7 and if I still needed to be there at half 7 at night to get things done I would be but then on a Friday afternoon I'd be out of the door at 2 o'clock because I knew I'd put my hours in well there is not that necessity so I think that kind of mind set has slightly changed my work ethic certainly hasn't changed.  Erm the only difference being is obviously now that I erm I don't have that military gang of people around who you could always got someone you could ring up and say "Do you fancy going out or whatever?" erm I don't have that around me as such  erm most of my close friends  aren't close to me geographically any more they kind of spread out so it is making more of an effort to keep in touch with them but I am trying to make new friends locally.

## C

So, what are you doing to try and do that locally then?

## Michelle

(laughs) don't laugh.

## C

No, I'm not.

## Michelle

I've just joined the WI, well not joined I've gone to 2 WI meetings and they are people there younger than me to do stuff.  I've joined the local rock choir, erm I've looked rambling and various other things.  Erm and there is lots of stuff going on here throughout the summer so there is lots of carnivals and festivals and stuff just generally and then I have invited a couple of my other friends to come with me to go to certain events and just stuff like that so.  Just trying to mix in with the local community really and attending things like Remembrance Parades and all that kind of stuff locally here whereas before it was obviously celebrate or present at your unit.

## C

So how did that, because I erm I remember standing, for me it was standing at the school gates and realising that I knew absolutely knew nobody and realising that I have got to I have really got to push myself out there otherwise it’s going to be a very lonely couple of years.  So how did that feel for you then joining these groups was it an easy thing for you to do or ...

## Michelle

Not necessarily but I think for me as well erm having moved jobs in different hospitals being posted somewhere you always get the well where did you come from, what experience have you had, what qualifies you to wear that uniform? and all those kind of things I got quite used to saying yes I am a qualified intensive care nurse, yes I have got 17 years’ experience, yes I do know about burns and plastics you know you kind of tell them stuff then actually demonstrate your care so I think I am quite used to that introduction thing and then obviously moving around in the At Force when my father was in the Air Force moving around changing schools it’s something I've got used to, introducing myself and making new contacts but it is always taking that deep breath and going ok fine, give this a go, I mean I did I joined a local ballet class did one kind of taster and thought you know what that really isn't for me. And I rang e-mailed them up and said look it was quite nice thank you very much for <><><>< but it is not for me.  Erm but it was after that thing it was one of those two people go and do ballet it’s good for your posture and good for <><>< ok give it a go yeh no not for me definitely not.  34:03

## C

No erm just going back to when you made the decision to leave then, could you just describe to me how you felt when you made that decision?

## Michelle

Well e it wasn't so much a it was the end of my commission.

## C

Right

## Michelle

So, I had the option to extend and I chose not to. Erm and I didn't know exactly know what those conditions were cause I said no thank you. Erm it I think it was a mixed emotion I think.  One was initially erm when I thought potentially I might have <><>< potentially <><><> you know you haven't passed your fitness test you need to do this because of whatever, erm that was a bit of a concern and because your leaving on different terms would have made monetarily differently whereas actually leaving at the end of commission was slightly more positive and I think it probably 18 months out it kind of I had that click in my head yeh this is I am going to be positive I have got to look at different opportunities different challenges erm and make it my own and I kind of have kept going with that. I've and I think with other things that I have seen happening erm er its I think I am very glad that I've left on a high I think I have really had a very positive career all the time I have been and I keep reflecting on that and I look at ok so I could have gone to South Sudan, oh my God, no thanks. I managed to st steer clear of Sierra Leon which I am quite glad about with the Ebola but erm I've done some I've had a very impact elsewhere and I wanted to still erm leave while that was still a positive influence and not you know why have I stayed, why am I doing a dead end job that I don't really like and I could potentially be doing something different with my career, whereas now I've gone into a bran new role with in in the hospice I am kind of making it my own I am shaping it the way I would like to and I know I have got lots of skills and lots of erm useful tools that I can bring with me.

## C

ok so when you erm on that sort of 18 months leaving did you get a lot of support were you able to do the things you wanted to do?

## Michelle

No, is the short answer but that wasn't really the I think there's a combination of things more than anything else I had heard a lot of people talk about resettlement and how they had managed it some people literally from about 2 years before their 2-year resettlement time had planned it and knew exactly what they wanted to do they had almost got a job plan in their head and got a job offer sorted. And other people literally just accrued time stuck it on the end of their terminal leave then left and did stuff my intention had been to utilise the 2 years as much as possible erm unfortunately my 2 years happened then literally my dad was in hospital for most of last year acutely unwell er really not coping very well so it was like having three lots of compassionate leave down in Devon with him so much of last year was taken up with that.  I was fortunate to be able to go to my erm the 3-day career transition work shop the financial brief and a couple of other briefs and

made contact with the CTP people from there but I never got to utilise the the full extent that I had access to or any of the additional training courses that I would have liked to have gone on although I did get the charity management awareness course literally 10 days before my exit date and that was due to a cancellation but that  and I know that that course enabled or gave me greater skill sets to do the job I am doing now or at least get my foot in the door.

## C

yeh, that is again that is interesting because a lot of people think seem to have this these problems actually accessing the resources that are available and for whatever reasons sometimes it’s actually work restricting with yourself and myself as well it was actually personal circumstances that were tripping us tripping me up.

## Michelle

yep

## C

Erm but you think you think 18 months 2 years is plenty of time and it is not is it sometimes.

## Michelle

No and I think one of the things I did comment on when they rang when I was given an opportunity to give feedback I said you almost need 2 years before your resettlement starts to prepare you for it you need to start things now and looking to book so that time that we know opens you are not having your brief kind of what you are entitled to you have had that before that time so when that clock starts ticking at the 2 year point that is when you actually start booking stuff not learning how to book stuff for me again not being on a station I couldn't walk round to the resettlement officer they had to make an appointment to come and visit me that was convenient or me get time off to go over and see somebody else erm so it is not like quite like having it on your door step. So, it’s a lot harder and then also working at tri-service unit that was Army led they tried to push me down the Army route and go to Bram<><>, and I was like no I want to go Air Force I am light blue. you know erm and there was <><>< resistance to that.  Erm so it was not easy trying to get that done and also during my time when I when I was able to access courses they CTP people completely restructured how they organised courses what was available so literally from the, I think the Tuesday that I on the first day that I looked at what was available by the time I left on the Thursday all the courses that I'd kind of ohh that's interesting oh yeh I wouldn't mind doing that look look look reserve put on my list had all changed and gone.

## C

mmm yeh not not erm helpful

## Michelle

Not particularly user friendly, not very helpful.

## C

No no I can see that.  So what40:11 you know hindsight is great except but what did you think was going to be the biggest change and what do you think has been the biggest change for you personally?

## Michelle

I always said it would be missing he people, I didn't think I would particularly miss the work cause I knew I could do that, I mean it was the same, I did this almost the same jobs but I just wore a different uniform.  And also, erm having spoken to friends that I did my initial training with that I was still in touch with they all kind of said it kind of fitted with the way that you were and whether that is because I came come from a military family I don't know.  Erm so it’s it’s the people that I miss and I think part of that is also some of the familiarity with the processes erm I had a good corporate knowledge of where I worked whereas now I don't have the knowledge of the organisation and I'm kind of on the back foot but I am using the corporate knowledge that I had to inform what I am learning where I am.

## C

So how does that, how does that make you feel when you are you know used to being in an environment you really understood?

## Michelle

Erm not too bad cause too bad again it’s not because originally, I was going to take a step completely out of health care.  But I think that was just a step too far but I knew I didn't want to go back to the mainstream NHS, because that's just, it’s just ridiculous. Er I had always I'd had the privilege of working in it but not for it which was which I think that's one of the reasons why I was looking out to somewhere like hospice and charity work, for something different where I could still use the skills and knowledge I had but in a different way.  And that is what I am doing and I am quite glad about it but I am just thinking there are some commonalities of structure erm that I am familiar with and it’s kind of trying to direct people and make suggestions that would help develop what they are trying to do.

## C

And you think that your experience and knowledge is really working for you in this new environment?

## Michelle

yes, yes. I think it is at the moment, only time will tell.

## C

But it’s a nice place to work? You’re enjoying it, your I know it’s only 4 weeks in so it’s it’s?

## Michelle

yes yes, no it is a nice place to work erm I think erm they are quite a few people who have got quite high expectations of what the role actually involves erm and I am hoping that erm I can fulfil those erm but  another bit is trying to get other people on board and it’s the same thing with a lot of organisations that people have worked there for a very long time and the only place I can really compare it to is Headley Court.  Erm and it is very similar and that is the fact that you are looking at everything from the infrastructure of the buildings to the processes and how patients are managed to erm lots of other stuff like I never knew so much about swimming pools in my life until I went there.  You know water contamination you know pumps and processing and all the rest of it and it’s a similar kind of thing and I think Headley, that experience at Headley Court reassured me that this is not a totally alien environment this is not totally unusual  process erm you sometimes have to guide people or go and find the facts out and say you know we need to kind of do this to bring us line with other bits and pieces erm for that experience but it is also the fact that you will have people who have been there for a very long time who have a lot of corporate knowledge about a certain small niche area and as I keep saying but I've just started, I don't know the cor I can't get in your head it’s not written down, it doesn't tell anybody or inform something you know no disrespect if <><><><>< got knocked down by a bus tomorrow how are we going to know how that process works if it is not written down.

## C

yeh

## Michelle

so, it is just trying to get that kind of erm I'm not here to bash you over the head with a big stick am trying to enable you to demonstrate to the wider world and everything else that what you’re actually doing is a very good job erm you just need to write it down so people can read it.

## C

yeh, I get it ok.  I think erm I think we are pretty much done actually believe it or not.

## Michelle

Ok

## C

It seems to have gone really quickly.

## Michelle

Despite all the hassles with technology.44:36

## C

yes, it makes things interesting technology.  Erm is there anything you would like to add about the whole transition that we have not discussed?

## Michelle

Erm, e e e it’s not the, I don't know I don't think so I think I have said most of the things that I think erm frustrated me with the process, I do think one of the biggest things and it has always been the same with health care particularly secondary health care is if you if you want if you are working within within a med centre you ate automatically on a station and you you are attached and you are part of that process erm but when you are remote from that and you are working away from a main unit I don't think medical is understood by the, not just by the Air Force, but by the broader military.  Erm overall its its one of those things they don't want to think about it but they don't wanted it but when they do want it or need it they wanted it wanted it there and ready and all professional but they don't want to consider it. Erm and we always are kind of an afterthought erm in the whole process but I think that again is reflected when you go to things like when I work when I did do <><><>< at command staff course I was the only nurse, there were 3 doctors and a an MSO I was the only nurse out of the 110 and I think out of a 110 people on the course less than 25 of us were women.  So, you know you are very much in isolation erm and so you you see why we v we very rarely have nurses on the Advanced Command and Staff Course.  We have had them but you know the doctors have got their noses put out of joint and have kind of taken that slot back over again.

## C

Really

## Michelle

But that is just general stuff but erm for the transition piece I think it is just I anticipated I was going to miss the people and I do miss the people but I am enjoying the freedom I have got to do other stuff.  I also think part of that is because I know I had a very good positive impact during my career.

## C

Just one other thing would you say your experience then of not being on stations was typical or were you atypical?

## Michelle

I think if you speak to the majority of people in health care erm you look at it unless you actually get posted to TMW which was obviously at Lyneham and then Brize and even then they don't actually work on site at Brize they work off site erm there is very much a demarcation so yeh I think it is typical for a majority of people not to actually be part of  a station or a unit.

## C

Did you ... I don't want e did you really still feel part of the Air Force though even though you weren't physically located on a base, did you feel different from the NHS nurses?

## Michelle

Oh yes, for a start off you wore military uniform erm you er when you are actually giving care to patients actually if you if you are a clinical shift then no there should be no difference apart from the fact we are wearing different uniform and potentially you had to explain to patients why you wore  different uniform when it actually comes down to it no there was no difference between people at all, the difference being is so like when we had when we were highly kinetic in Afghan my role was vastly different I was erm basically liaising with aeromed with the labs, calling surgeons, arranging theatre times trying to get the whole transition moved and that was 24/7 24/7 operation 365 days a year and literally went home when we had when we had the chance to go home and when the last patient was seen, you wouldn't get an NHS nurse doing that.

## C

No so you would co-ordinate the the movement passenger from theatre all the way back to Birmingham?

## Michelle

No so basically aeromed would manage that piece and all the TMW stuff but we would get the signal up and we would be sat we'd be sat in the hospital erm whilst we got the signal or whoever's had the on call phone so let’s say we've got 4 people coming in, bearing in mind we might have had 4 the day before and 6 the day before that and however many we still had to get co-ordinated to get when I say theatre not theatre of op operations it was actually an operating theatre where they had surgery done so you would  co-ordinate and liaise well these guys ><><<>< more than 8 pints of blood so they would have to have different antibodies so you would let the lab know that we have got people coming over, intensive care review made aware, <><>< aware you would make sure they had bloods done almost as soon as they were admitted, maybe sort out transfusions, you would make sure that look at their injuries and go ok I need an <>><><, a need a neurologist, I need an optomologist I might need a chest surgeon I might need an abdo surgeon you would contact all of those people to tell them we have got people coming in what time they were due to arrive what time they were due to go to theatre you would make sure they had all the kit make sure all the consumables were sorted you would than go and organise the fact that erm one of our staff you might send somebody home right you might need to stag on cause the flight is not coming in til 5 0'clock and they might not operate through the night so you <><><><><< get somebody to come back in again erm and then you would coordinate the rest of the activity as well as all the people you had currently in and trouble shoot any other dressings that needed to be done.

## C

yeh, wow.

## Michelle

and we did that, literally I did that for 2 years.

## C

yeh it must have been exhausting.

## Michelle

It was, as I said when I went to command command and staff course it was .. what do you mean this is a rest?  I I can't get stressed about writing about giving a presentation when I have been doing the job I've been doing.

## C

yeh yeh exactly.  You must be very proud though, you should be very proud.

## Michelle

There are days when I am, particularly when I see things like the Invictus games and kind of things like that and I think yes, erm knowing what there are a large proportion of those particularly the triples and some of the double amputees who wouldn't normally necessarily have made it.

## C

yeh

## Michelle

yeh.

## C

It’s awesome, awesome I must say by the end of it erm it was so swept up, you know it did seem to run really effectively, you know from an outsider’s point of view.  It all seemed

## Michelle

The other bit of work that I did was to use the pumps that we put on for people you know

the when their limbs, initially they would always have bandages on and it would always leak through and be a bit smell and horrible so in 2011 we started using the <><><><> pressure pumps so they would have drains with bits coming off attached to a pump at the end so  a lot of the work I did was to get that through TRA through aeromedical testing to make sure the pumps would still function and they wouldn't interrupt the aircraft so I did  a lot of that work but <><><>   then I went and trained people on the squadron.

## C

What were they called again sorry?

## Michelle

popical negative pressure pumps, p-o-p-i-c-a-l

## C

when I come to transcribe this, I might be eh I might be calling you back.  (laughter)

## Michelle

so yeh that is the treatments we have been using at the hospital and then one day there was a push to take it further forward into ops and I said well yeh that is fine but you know you are going to have to stop it on an aircraft the only thing we couldn't use it on was helicopters.

## C

Well this is it, being air movements people just tend to assume that if a bit of kit works on the ground it is going to work in the air

Michelle

(big sigh)

## C

laughter

## Michelle

seriously do not even go there.  I mean that has always been the issue because we would get all the TA come out medical TA come out and go can we just stick that on the back of an aircraft and I'd go well don't expect me to get on if you are going on with that.  What do you mean, well you don't know what it is going to interfere with, and they looked at me and went what are you talking about?  I said why can't you use your mobile phones during take-off and landing on an aircraft oh alright ok so it’s the same principle so get that piece of kit away.

## C

and the length of time it takes to get cleared.

## Michelle

yeh this didn't take that long, I think 9 months, 9 months

## C

yeh that is not bad (laughing)

## Michelle

I thought was pretty quick compared to some things.

## C

yeh I am going to I think I am going to call it a day there. 53:3053:59

the uniform you wore and the hours you worked and things like that, they kind of

separated you from the NHS nurses, I'm just a bit curious because it’s an identity subject I am studying, what else made you really feel part of the Air Force?  What was it about the working environment you had along your cohort ..

## Michelle

Erm we all made a push to erm so things like erm we would celebrate PNs thanksgiving day, we would make a bit remembrance is very much celebrated in the hospital its its putting your uniform on, putting on a show.  Erm we have er OC N's forum which was a gathering of all tri-service nurses but we were trying to explain to people the differences between what the different branches do, why they are different, but also trying to encourage people to one of the PN days erm, the thanks giving days I organised I looked at the history of the PNs, cause the PNs whilst separate from the main Air Force we are as old as and established at the same time so looking at a transition from the first aeromed taking place in 1923 from Baghdad, erm to Fluffy Bowers being on the Normandy Beaches erm the day after the D-Day the development of the aeromedical evacuation service from where we are C-CAST and other stuff and trying to sort o often to look at different hospital where we went from and all those type of things trying to get the young and I have always had an interest in military medical history anyway but trying to get the young people some identity of where they have come from so they can feel part of a bigger thing and then also encouraging people to go to our annual symposium where they can meet up with the whole people from their branch, exchange ideas on what other people are doing. Erm trying to encourage people also to try and have single service team days as well to do that same kind of thing.  Erm it’s difficult to maintain a military ethos and identity and a lot of it is determined by the willingness of your erm hierarchy to allow people to do it or encourage people to do it and we also had in the main corridor we have kind of have different boards which represent the 3 different services and the civil service was included within that as well.  So, it was trying to say to people we are all different for a reason but we are all here to serve the same kind of purpose.

## C

yeh.

## Michelle

I think it was slightly easier at Birmingham because we had the aeromed cell.  Erm so there was a kind of end point to what the guys were doing.

## C

yeh it is fascinating stuff.  I suppose I am very lucky in many ways to never have to go to Birmingham.  Erm would you mind very much in about 8 - 10 months I contacted you again?

## Michelle

Absolutely.    That would be fine.

## C

Thank you very much.

57:22

# Nicola - Interview 1 19 Oct 2017

(airwoman, 13 years, single, no, +7)

## C

I just want to double check a couple of things.  Are you 29 now?

## Nicola

No, 30.

## C

30, and are you married?

## Nicola

I'm single

## C

You're single.  And that is your own place you are in?

## Emma

yeh

## C

No kids?

## Nicola

No

## C

And what was your last job when you left the Air Force?

## Nicola

Erm recruiter at the \*\*\*\*\*\*\* office.

## C

Ok.  And you are currently working in what kind of role?

## Nicola

Erm so I sort of do internal recruitment, I am a recruitment advisor for a not for profit organisation.

## C

OK.  I just need to ask these questions so that if anyone ever asks me if you are real I can give the details otherwise I could be just making everything up.  Right I am just going to crack straight into it then if that is ok, yeh?

## Nicola

yeh

## C

So, you joined the military when you were 16? And why did you join cause that is that is quite young, isn't it?

## Nicola

yeh well I think it wasn't I did at well school but I didn't want I started earning money erm and then I just wanted to leave and earn money full time to be honest.  So I wanted to become a photographer, I googled photography training and erm then I took the selection test and I didn't have enough spatial awareness to become a photographer erm so I became a HR administrator also my uncle was in but it was wired because I never really thought about him being in until I actually until I actually started going through the process the recruitment process. Erm  I don't know at what point I changed my mind it was like, no I don't want to do that I want to carry on doing this job that I was doing but then my uncle wrote me this massive long message about how he was in Beijing in the embassy and it was amazing and it was really glamourous so yeh I was definitely eager to do it. yeh so.

## C

So, so what sorry what would you say really appealed to you then about joining the military as opposed to, to continuing doing photography in a different?

## Nicola

I think probably like erm the independe4cne of being away from home at that age definitely as a teenager I craved independence erm and probably like being able to travel and go to different countries that appealed to me.

## C

ok that is fine cool.  ok so when did you start thinking about leaving?

## Nicola

Erm so on and off I always kind of saw 30 as the time.  And cause my 12 cause I joined at 16 and my first years didn't count count erm in my service so my 12 years I was going to get 30 that was kind of like a half way point as well isn't it erm you need to get erm a resettlement grant at that point as well erm a lot of people you know would say oh you get in the pension trap if you stay longer erm and all that sort of thing.  I had always had 30 as like I would decide then if I would stay in for ever or not but a lot of the time I kind of felt like yeh I love it I am going to stay in forever and a lot of people were really surprised when I put my notice because I had it was a life style. So I think I always kind of had it in my mind that I could leave <><<><>,but also I would look at other things and I couldn't see what else what I wanted to do so that would be a reason for not leaving because I couldn't see anything else that I would want to do more than what I was doing do you know what I mean?

## C

yeh

## Nicola

erm yeh so yeh <><><>< while erm and I when I did put my notice in I hadn't decided what I was going to do.  So, I put my notice in and yeh then just decided through the resettlement process I guess.05:22

## C

ok, it was just something that you had in your mind you just thought after 12 years, being 30 its a good point to either move and start a new career in something else or stay in and commit full ..

## Nicola

well I kind of thought that 40 too, it seemed like it was too old to start a new career in my mind then erm and it seemed like as well I think, another thing was as well erm like moving around every couple of years its really exciting when you are young and going away and the possibility of going away <><><>< its really exciting when you are young and then you know even though I don't have like some responsibilities and reasons why it would be more difficult I just think you just get tired of running yourself around a bit and you just want to settle down and yeh I and so I did buy a house before but I got posted away from it and then I rented it out then I ended up selling it cause it is too difficult looking after it and now I have  like bought this house and I can live in it and I can travel to work from it everyday, you know and I am near my mum as well so there's lots of reasons I suppose its when you are older like your priorities <><>< actually change I think don't they.

## C

So did you have any nervousness about making that decision to leave?  Is there anything you were concerned about?

## Nicola

Yeh, at one point my hair was actually falling out onto my pillow (laughs)

## C

Really!

## Nicola

Yeh, I was freaking out, yeh like I went to find out what it was and it was like stress from leaving, yeh cause there was times when I thought oh my God, I've put my notice in and I don't actually know what I am doing and a lot of people were like well you can change your mind and I thought like No! like I shouldn't just change my mind because I don't know that is just a ridiculous reason, you know.  So it was a long, I'm glad I gave myself the 18 months <><>< cause it was, it was like an emotional rollercoaster erm but yeh made it, its not as bad as I thought.

## C

So its so what was it that you were scared about then, or nervous about?

## Nicola

I think it was the unknown, so like not knowing like what was going to happen.  That I wouldn't fit in with you know civilians like you know, like you know you get told from like basic training like you know you are no longer a civilian, like civi whatever and it gets drummed into you doesn't it, throughout your career you are different from them, <><><>, whatever, I suppose you need that don't you. You feel that your something different and you know feel that the reason you are doing something definitely you do need that while you are in but then you need to change to transition from that afterwards to kind of stay sane. Erm so yeh it was just it was just during that transition really of just like become thinking like what a civilian is, there's lots of differences and kind of come to terms with it and that it wasn't this big scary thing that maybe I wouldn't be able to do as well and like job wise you know you think cause I'd never had, any other job that I'd had before being in the RAF was like a manual job so I I just seemed like it would all be too different and even like when you are looking for work looking at the role profiles on websites is looking at the job descriptions it was I mean you can't its hard to relate it all and just being just kept thinking oh my God,  I can't do that.  And then it turns out that you know its actually a lot less than what I've have been doing before.  But its just worded differently so it was just really scary for those reasons thinking  that you couldn't be that person you didn't know what it was erm yeh just the unknown and like would I regret it as well cause its such a big decision cause I've been in for so long like but you don't know until you've done it but you have to make that leap and it is like a leap of faith it really is, yeh, yeh, soryy to have gone on.

## C

No, no gosh no its great.  But you said it wasn't I mean you are what literally only 2 or three months after leaving and you said erm it wasn't as bad as you thought so ..

## Nicola

No well I got a job and I literally started working before I had like finished erm so I was still being paid by the RAF and then I got this new job as well and its such a lovely a lovely organisation it is really nice to have a job where you know that the organisation is not for profit and are doing so much good erm and it is really easy to get enthusiastic about that kind of work.  So it has been really easy for me to become a recruiter for this sort of job because it is really easy to sell this kind of thing because it is all really nice. Erm and then its feel good as well for you and for everybody else that is working there you know it is a feel good sort of job erm and its you know walking distance, I cycle to work and yeh I've got my house so normally you would like I already see my family way more erm so all the things that are there already the only thing I have missed out on is erm so I I was like part of the surf team and they have surf champs the other week and seeing that on facebook you know I couldn't just like go down to Newquay for the week and like it wouldn't come out of my leave or anything like that, like I  thought I had a little bit of a pang then but I mean I was really sad that I would really miss it or I'd have some sort of mental breakdown but it just hasn't happened (laughs)

## C

Good.10:56

## Nicola

It might yet, its early days (laughter)

## C

Lets hope not.  So erm can you give me erm a sort of vivid memory of your time in the service?

## Nicola

Erm, mmm like like a positive memory or

## C

Well, yeh but it doesn't have to be positive, if you think back to those 13 years something that jumps out.

## Nicola

Erm mm <><><>< happy cause there is so many erm, er so one that one is slightly more significant than the others erm <><><><>< Benson erm because that was like my first camp so I think that is more special to you and I was I was spent longer there than I did anywhere else.  I was 5 years there, erm and and I have a lot of memories there and lots of friends I made there I still see quite regularly.  Erm even though we haven't been posted together since then I formed some really good friendships erm so probably like memories of of working there and erm a did a couple of detachments while I was there as well  to the Falklands and to Iraq which were both memorable detachments for different reasons.  So yeh so probably that time more than anything else.

## C

Ok, and there was anything while you were in the service that worried or concerned you?

## Nicola

Erm in what way? <><><

## C

Well is there anything that sticks out I mean you mentioned moving around started to get wear a bit thin was there anything else that you were expected to do which you just thought uhh I've had enough of that.

## Nicola

Erm I think there's at work being in a male dominated environment it can wear a bit thin that is its alright sometimes but I just think as you get a bit older or spend time away from that and have to go back to it it can be a bit of a don't know I just started to find it a bit I knew it that it wouldn't be acceptable in other places.  I was just like urghh this is annoying up yeh I think that sensing this job that I have now is a completely female dominated because it is erm well its mainly women that end up doing not for profit jobs to be honest so erm yeh it is a much nicer environment to work in its a lot better.

## C

So can you give me an example of what you mean when you said men..

## Nicola

so erm its like so like being in a male dominated environment its like the kind of jokes they have between themselves like lewd banter that kind of thing and even if it is nothing directed at you or you are even involved in a conversation it is still happening around you erm and that can just be a little bit uhh why does this have to happen?  (laughs) you know I think it is something that you put up with from early on and you get used to erm but it doesn't mean it ever stops having an impact and even even in my last 6 months yeh I still thought about that.  <><><>, in my last 6 months I remember thinking ohthank God I don't have to put with this anymore cause I knew it wouldn't be acceptable outside.

## C

yeh.  ok, erm is there anything that worries you now as you are in terms of your job, your security and the life style?

## Nicola

erm like the money is not as good, its not so much of a worry as ughh I will have to work my way back up again kind of thing erm I I have already sorted of thinking ohh what if I get board and also my age is actually become more of a, a different I see my age from a different perspective so like being in the RAF I was like 30 is being old and then 40 was like you know you could end your career at 40 you can retire you know, so 40 and you then you'd sit and you would like by the time you are 55 and that's <><><><>< and in my work place now there are people there who are 65 and they are as fit as a fiddle they are still going to carry on forever and your just like wow actually I am only 30 it suddenly dawned on me that I have another 35 years at least of working and I can do anything you know its not like, its like this weird thing of how my age hasn't become, my age has changed so that's not so much of a worry it is just something that I think about more or maybe it is a worry because I have been thinking well Do I want to do this forever could I do something even bigger even more you know like II even thought about going to university and things like that. I mean I have just started an OU course and I am thinking about stopping work and going to, I could travel to Cardiff Uni from here easy on the train so even yeh all sorts of considerations that I haven't thought of because I'd thought 30 was old and now I realise its not.  Because in the military it is old, you know, wow do you know what I mean?  Its really weird.

## C

I do I think that is amazing, you are right because if you haven't reached a certain rank by a certain age you are almost written off, aren't you?

## Nicola

yeh yeh

## C

that happens at all ranks all the way through the system and it is a bit erma bit odd yeh different to cause well I think they have extended the age now to 60, you can stay into 60.

## Nicola

yeh, in certain areas they have yeh.

## C

But erm for us who I left 3 or 4 years ago it was always 55 or after your 22 that was if you had't reached the correct rank you were out weren't you.  that is brilliant, its like a new lease of life isn't it?

## Nicola

It is its amazing.  Cause I am actually really young.  (laughter)

## C

Oh dear, so if you had a magic wand and you could change anything about that military experience is there anything you would change?

## Nicola

erm,  yeh I would have liked to have an overseas tour.  Erm <><><><>< I don't think I would have changed any of the tours I did have or any of the jobs I had they were all quite good for different reasons and I got something out of each of them.  yeh I wouldn't really change any of it yeh.

## C

With, with that in mind then what do you think is the most positive thing you have taken from being in the military?

## Nicola

I just feel really capable of like it makes you feel that you can do like anything in any situation because you get thrown into so different situation so you kind of just feel like nothing is really a problem and I have definitely noticed that since I've been in my job where I am now.  I can see solutions to problems while the others don't and I think that is because in the military you know you do just work things out you know I mean I remember like literally painting like a rack you know cause you build something from scratch you know you will just whatever you <><>< yeh its just the way it works but people expect a lot to be done for them or to not have to think about things too much it seems, as much like well in this outside, well I don't know about everywhere but in my experience so far I think from being in those environments it has made me a better person in that way.

## C

That is brilliant so how would you describe life in the Air Force to a stranger who didn't really understand anything about the military?

## Nicola

Er well I did that all the time in recruitment, (laughs) <><>< erm well yeh I would I would <><>< if I had a choice I would do it all over again, if I could.  So erm its <><>< yeh I think it is a good environment for a younger person to like grow and get experience and travel opportunities and you know just get to do lots of sports and things like that are fantastic.  Erm yeh that's what I would say about it.  Erm but the other thing this is something I mentioned earlier but it slowly dawned on me as well when I was younger although I did I was interested in current affairs, not as much since as I've grown older and erm I went to Iraq and everything but I never gave it enough thought.20:17 about everything and I think because I was so young I think like that but then when Syria was on the news a lot more and you started seeing all the children and that and then I started thinking about bombing and that and I didn't become a complete hippy but in my head I was kind of I was finding it a little bit more difficult to erm to be okay with being within an organisation that was doing something that I didn't really agree with anymore.  Erm and that kind of slowly happened over the last few years and then when I had put my notice in it it became okay for me to have, it was like in a way a felt disloyal  and I to have those thoughts so much and in the last 18 months I kind of got more and more like it.  Like and more opinionated about it and I felt like it was okay for me to, I wouldn't express those opinions in work but like you know with my family and with friends and things I felt like I could have those opinions whereas before I didn't feel like I could.  Erm so I think that as well yeh.

## C

That, that is really interesting.  Because by making that decision to leave you almost gave yourself permission to to think that the Air Force, or the military, or the Government, whoever you know depending on what level you think of it erm wasn't necessarily doing the right thing. Yeh?

## Nicola

Mmm, well yeh it wasn't just that it was it was actually all to do with bombing which is like the main RAF thing as well. It was, cause you know how you get taught I don't if you get it at Cranwell but anyway, you know how you get caught the Geneva Convention and how you know unless and like I kind of always got that you know I had my head round that you know and unless someone is actually causing harm to you specifically you can't like fire at them.  To you know like civilians getting injured and like bombing and things and I just thought well we're not complying with that are we like it doesn't and seeing all the pictures of children and like that entire country just completely destroyed and like I don't know and I met some people as well who were Iraqis, and they talked about how when they left erm and then their entire home erm well they said their entire home land basically couldn't be recognised now and its the same for like Syrian's even if they did want to go home like there is nothing left, erm and I I and I you know I'm not saying that there's a a quick fix or any other fix that I know of but I just think that like that I can't agree with that any more and that was the main the main thing that the RAF did erm oh one other reason as well (laughs) there are a couple of reasons now.

## C

Its alright

## Nicola

when I was interviewing erm so as a recruiter you sometimes you can do like 10 interviews a week and a lot of the time I was interviewing really young people you know.  Sometimes they were like 15,16,17 erm and one of the questions that you had to ask was like one of the question you had to ask was at the end of the interview erm was erm as you are aware we are an armed organisation erm and erm you could be or you could be armed with a weapon erm and something about your life being at risk and you could be asked to take someone's life.  But basically it was like part of it erm and how do you feel about that?  And then you can see, you know, because you are watching someone's face, when you interview them and you can see like these 15, 16, 17 year olds having to seriously think about what how they would feel about taking someone's life and I was I just thought oh my God what am I doing, like, and I just really started feeling like ohh this is not very and so I I think I don't know if it was just because I'd put my notice in I was naturally disconnecting or if an actual part of me was making me erm I don't know so that I would be okay with leaving maybe it was something, part of it was making me like go against it or something but that started happening as well so then it made it easier to leave, yeh.

## C

That is absolutely fascinating. Really, really interesting.

## Nicola

yeh strange isn't it, yeh.

## C

I don't I mean yeh it it is but you are right you have got I mean nobody goes away til their 18, nobody would go overseas

## Nicola

yeh, but we do ask them that question at 15 sometimes because they are they are you know applying then to actually start when they are 16.

## C

And of course you have got to think in your head do these people really understand what I am asking them.

## Nicola

And there's a child, I'm asking a child if they are okay to be taking someone's life, I mean what the hell?

## C

yeh

## Nicola

its just like I I mean I was like a robot when I first started  and then it just slowly dawned on me there were .. I don't know I just couldn't then I just though what am I doing, yeh children are so taking someone's life wow I don't know (laughing)

## C

yeh, I had never thought of it like that at that age but I suppose it was the same question I was asked when I joined up I am sure you were too but I hadn't really, I was older I was 22 when I joined so it was different but yeh that really got to you and you didn't you didn't like, like it.

## Nicola

No no, what am I doing? yeh. yeh.

## C

So when you made that decision to leave can you just explain how you actually felt then because you had all this stuff going on ..

## Nicola

Oh it was so hard it was so hard I was really emotional it was ... I couldn't sleep for like ages afterwards it was so I mean I did feel like it was a little bit of a sense of relief I think but at the same time a sense of panic and I just felt massive anxiety and stuff and like I I have never not been able to sleep I can sleep anywhere I am really good at sleeping and I started having like erm yeh like feeling like anxious and not being able to sleep at night and stuff because my hair started falling out. Erm and I was like freaking out (laughs).

## C

So why do you think you reacted like that, because you had pretty much logically made that decision to leave because you are coming up to 30 but you still had this very emotional response.

## Nicola

Erm I think because I am a loyal person and you know I did really erm and I had such a great time and I was still there was still part of me that wanted to stay yeh I think there was definitely was still a part of me you know that wanted to stay, a part of me in one sense part of me that wasn't sure erm that I was dragging along to the end of the18 months you know I still right up until the end they sent me and e-mail saying you know you can change your mind your mind if you want to is there anything we can do for you to stay in you know I got e-mails from manning saying we can offer you a posting somewhere, what do you want? du dud du And I was like no I'm just gonna to leave and people at work you know even literally right up til my last few weeks my boss is saying to me you know if you want to change your mind (laughing) you so so erm it was there as well and there was a part of me I think it was just because of me did want to stay and that is why I was fighting with that part of me and just dragging it along with the rest of me.  Cause your not just one person, not just one person it sounds a bit funny but you are not just one part are you you are lots of parts so you know so it was just yeh, making the rest of it be ok yeh.

## C

yeh ok.  Erm when you actually made the decision to leave then were you supported, people were trying to persuade you not to go but did you find you resettlement useful and were you able to access it?

## Nicola

yeh, so I am the kind of person I really get on board with stuff erm cause like I love organising I love planning erm kind of like courses so this was like amazing for me. (laughs) so I really got into it all erm and I really got excited by it all and just I I threw myself into everything I made use of every single set up and opportunity there was and some of my friends were <><><><<><>, set my process together erm who didn't <><>< all of these things I heard <><><>, they moaned <>< you should have done this, you've hacked this, you should have done this so yeh I think I made use of everything and I found it really amazing really good really good courses all of erm all of the support I had from that was really, really good. I couldn't have asked for anything more yeh and still actually you know I still have e-mails from them checking that I am ok and ,.<><><><happy.

## C

And you said it was really during that resettlement process that you thought you'd go into HR that was when you found that you really wanted to be when you left?

## Nicola

yeh so erm I signed up for erm I did like a 5 week,29:20 <>< level 5 in HR <><><><yeh HR management erm which has go me this job (laughs) so that has really helped I also did coaching and mentoring I also did NLP, NLP <><>< erm and erm yeh I like it was more than really its weird because NLP the practioners course I was doing that because my friend a <><>  instructor said to me that erm the coaching and mentoring would be good to have erm if you are going into HR they like you to have that so I was doing it for that reason cause it would help me get a job but actually when I went through the NLP the course erm like it was in a way I felt like was I ever going to use this so a little bit cynical but at the same time it was a lot of like self-exploration in getting to know yourself so in a way it was like <><><>< not counselling but kind of a sort of reflective meditative sort of thing really well timed for me to get through the process to be honest, yeh it was weird yeh.30:33

## C

Ok so that's good so what were you expecting to be the biggest change before you left?

## Nicola

Erm I don't know I don't really know I think it was that I didn't know like it was just the unknown I think erm erm I don't know.  I think probably like the work place just being somewhere where I am not in the RAF.  I was looking forward to painting my nails and I do I've got like red nails, <><>< with my hair if I needed, so wearing my hair down make the most of it like not having to wear a uniform.  Erm yeh its really I think that's the biggest change that I thought it was just be a different work place that's not the RAF.

## C

And you enjoy being able to do that, you know? To have your nails done and have your hair the way you want it?  You see I've still got mine up.31:34

## Nicola

I know its funny, normally yeh er I've got used to it, I've had to get a better hair dryer cause I'm drying it more (laughter) <><>< in a bun usually not really done but no I do like hair in myself more I haven't quite dyed my hair pink like I said I would.

## C

I have a friend who said that too.

## Nicola

yeh

## C

Erm that has actually been brilliant, there wasn't that many questions just getting a feel of it but is there anything else you that comes to mind that you about that whole leaving option making that decision to leave and then actually leaving and the last couple of months that you think er that was interesting or...

## Nicola

.....I don't know I think we have covered like most things.  yeh it was just like an emotional roller coaster leaving erm but I guess I think its just because you know a part of you does want to stay but you know its not a big enough part of you.

## C

So are you quite excited about the future then and what happens next?

## Nicola

Yeh, yeh so I think in the in this job I am thinking I could work my up in this organisation, it’s a big organisation erm there is lots of opportunity and I really enjoy it. Or do something completely different because of what <><><> but I was thinking of, the reason I am doing, so I am doing an OU degree actually I have just started it, erm but it takes like 6 years because it is part time <><><>< and stuff erm and I just like to get on with things. So I am doing it now anyway erm but yeh, I was thinking about <><><> I don't know why I don't mind doing that so erm in January I am like going to start doing a micro-biology A ‘Level erm I did an English A 'Level in 2 weeks last year <><><><><><><><><><><><><><><<> I am going to start doing that in January erm and I am going to try and get it done before like the application phase in <>><><>< September of November like when you apply to like uni for a<><><> course then apply for Cardiff for physio therapy and that is what I am thinking right now I don't want to be in an office I want a hands on job and erm maybe I could travel with that and maybe I could be more into my sports with that you know cause yeh <<><><>> sporty <><>< other things sporty but I don't know just thinking there's something that feels like options I always like to have options so that I can you know I might just stay <><><><><><<><> like I said about oh my God thinking about 35 years <><><><><>< I've bought this house now this is my base regardless, but 35 years  do I want to stay here for 35 years without like being able to travel for work or anything again you know but it was my choice rather than being in the military yeh. So I'm thinking, I'm thinking I'm going to do this biology A' Level but I am already doing a degree so (laughs) <><><><><><><><><><

## C

What degree are you doing?

## Nicola

Erm English language and literature just because those are my best subjects so I thought I would find it easiest, and it is actually I am finding it is basically compare and contrast texts which is what I did for my A 'Level so I was like yeh I can do this.  So, unless I can work <><><><><><><> I don't know how I feel about that. <><><><><><>< *(continues to talk about uni degree)*

*Then we discuss my research parameters. 40:14*

# 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*

# Sarah Interview 1 – 9 Nov 2017

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

Time 43.11

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

Oh dear.

## Sarah

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

## C

You have got a military family?

## Sarah

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

## C

So, you are the black sheep. (laughs)

## Sarah

I know I know

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

EDP?

## Sarah

Er departure payment.

## C

Right

## Sarah

Cause I am on the naff new pension.

## C

Ah right.

## Sarah

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

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

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

## Sarah

yeh.

## C

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

## Sarah

problem, no

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

yeh

## Sarah

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

## C

yes, me too.

## Sarah

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

## C

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

### Sarah

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

## C

A little.

## Sarah

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

## C

MMM

## Sarah

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

## C

Or left

## Sarah

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

## C

And why do you think that is?

## Sarah

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

## C

Really.

## Sarah

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

## C

yeh

## Sarah

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

## C

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

Sarah

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

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

Really

Sarah

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

## C

yeh

## Sarah

erm so yeh that was it really.

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

yeh

## Sarah

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

## C

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

## Sarah

No, no.

## C

that is terrible

## Sarah

yeh (laughs)

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

fantastic.

## Sarah

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

## C

yep

## Sarah

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

## C

yeh

## Sarah

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

## C

yeh

## Sarah

Er Which was the the tough bit

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

yeh

## Sarah

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

## C

yep.

## Sarah

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

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

So, what are you going to go and study?

## Sarah

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

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

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

## Sarah

MMM, you basically start out with a lie.

## C

yeh

## Sarah

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

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

you will learn

## Sarah

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

## C

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

## Sarah

It’s crazy over here.

## C

Do you like it though?

## Sarah

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

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

that is true.

## Sarah

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

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

yeh

## Sarah

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

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

ok.

## Sarah

pesky mouse (baby noises)

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

like British Rail

## Sarah

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

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

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

## Sarah

yeh, there was never going to be

## C

A way you could be together

## Sarah

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

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

That's alright.

## Sarah

It’s a whole nother career isn't it.

## C

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

## Sarah

I will actually have another pension.

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

yeh

(baby crying)

## Sarah

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

## C

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

## Sarah

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

## C

yeh yeh.

(General chit chat)

## Sarah

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

40:52

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Concludes with general chit chat.

Contact Aug/Sept 2018.

# Susan Interview 1 – 2017 (Francine)

(airwoman, 18 years, married, yes, +4yrs 4 months)

17 Oct 2017

Introduction 2.43.

## C

Why did you join the military?

## Susan

OH erm. I wanted erm a career erm and also my grandpa had been in the RAF as well so that erm interested me I think initial actually I think what erm triggered it was erm when I was at school we had a career day erm we went and spent the day with the light infantry we were running around in a field doing all these tasks and I really enjoyed it erm. I think that’s what triggered it I think.

## C

It was just what? Just what was it about that?

## Susan

That was quite fun and I want a I didn’t want a job where I’d get bored. And I thought no two days would be the same in the military and I didn’t want to sit and work in an office erm even though I quite enjoy doing that now. Erm I just thought I’d get bored I couldn’t find anything that I thought would be interesting and that seemed exciting.

## C

Cool and erm for you my next question doesn’t really apply to you because its when did you start thinking about leaving the military? But for you because of your being made redundant it wasn’t a conscious choice to to leave but did you prepare yourself for that redundancy did you think this could happen and did you start thinking about in advance? Before the

## Susan

Erm Yeh I suppose I did when I knew redundancies had come up. I did speak to my husband and said what should I do? Erm and then we both decided that well there was no point in applying for redundancy because you only get 6 months before you leave whereas if you get forced into redundancy you get 12 months so it made sense just to wait and see what happened so I‘d sor kind of thought about leaving but erm hadn’t made my mind up at this it made it up for me I suppose.

## C

And so how that I just really want to get into I suppose how that made you feel when that redundancy notice came through. How did they actually let you know?

## Susan

Erm I got erm a letter erm which was delivered to my OC and then erm on the day when all the redundancies went out erm people got called into the office and I was called in and nobody else did so I knew I was being made redundant. I mean they were all different trades to me anyway so it was not a reflection on me against them, we weren’t in competition with each other.

## C

Because you were at the AVCO, yeh?

## Susan

Yeh cause I was a the AVCO. So, they were different trades. And then my erm OC sat me down and erm and asked as soon I came in as I got called into the office I said I know I’ve been made redundant cause he had a letter in his hand. I was expecting it.

## C

Yeh, yeh. But how how what what was did the emotion like I suppose ..

## Susan

I suppose it was a bit exciting if I recall back to the day I remember walking back into the office and my colleagues and saying “I’m leaving the Air Force” and I got so excited and then erm and I got stood down for the day and I went home and my mum was there and so was our au pair. And erm I said I’ve lost my job I ‘m so excited. So, I suppose initially it was the excitement, it was the unknown and the yeh I was excited I didn’t cry and I wasn’t upset I just like ohh something new and exciting. Which was a bit weird and I remember our au pair saying I’ve never seen anyone so excited that they have lost their job. (laughter)

## C

And why do you think you were, you say it was because it was something new it was did they did you ?

## Susan

I think cause they made the decision for me. When you make a decision you’re always like is it the right decision. I didn’t have a choice in the decision so I just had to deal with it.

## C

And you were just excited at what would come next what would

## Susan

Yeh yeh I was excited and it was because it wasn’t my decision. I knew that the decision might happen but there was no going back on it. It’s not like it was a decision you get a choice in.

## C

Well yeh, yeh.

## Susan

So, I was excited about something new cause I had toyed with the idea of leaving but I hadn’t felt that strongly about it to leave but then I was like right ok it’s a chance for something new.

## C

And you weren’t concerned about anything. There wasn’t any worries that you thought oh god how am I gonna earn a living or

## Susan

No. None of those worries cause my husband’s job was secure. Erm I just had to decide what courses to do I did have a bit of hassle from my Sgt who was a bit of a nightmare. Erm he was a bit of a sexist pig really the only one I have ever met in the Air Force. I’ve always worked in sections where I am the only female and I have never been treated any differently but he was just an arse erm (laugh) and he erm he put barriers up when I tried to book resettlement courses.

## C

Oh right.

## Susan

Well the office is under staffed and we need you and you can’t just book courses willy nilly and I was like I’m leaving the Air Force erm so after that initial excitement erm there was that real frustration and I remember we had a we had erm our neighbour was aactually, cause we lived in civvi street, and our neighbour was a padre in the Air Force, erm I knew his wife and I went over to speak to him cause I was so stressed out and I said is there any way you can get involved because I am getting push back every time I try to book my resettlement workshops or any courses. He keeps sighting we’re under staffed but as far as I am concerned I have been told to leave the Air Force and I need to sort my shit out basically.

## C

Yeh, yeh. And did he, did eh get involved?

## Susan

Erm no he just me advice about what to do erm

## C

Yeh

## Susan

And I just put my foot down cause I thought what are you going to do are you going to charge me? and if you are going to charge me it’s not going to it’s the end of my career anyway so .

## C

So you went ..

## Susan

I got frustrated because I wanted to plan my life and the Air Force wasn’t an issue it was one individual was stopping that from happening.

## C

MMHmm

## Susan

Or making me feel that I should put the job of the Air Force first instead of my resettlement. Which is so not the case, that is not how it should be.

## C

No that is a real valid point yeh he was still almost treating you were staying in and have a career and he could make you do what he wanted you to do as opposed to thinking about your long term….

## Susan

Yeh and he wrote me a really scathing final report as well. I’d actually moved AVCOs erm about 2 months after the redundancy come out. It was already in the pipeline to happen. You can do a transfer if its within your region and the new one was nearer to my house

## C

Yeh

## Susan

So, when a vacancy came up I applied to transfer over so that he already knew I was leaving his office. And when he wrote my final report erm he gave me a really scathing report saying that I wasn’t a team player because I had left work behind and I was like but I was leaving and it it was also the period when the Olympics was happening so I was hardly in the office I was down at London most of the time and erm yeh I was like I said do you know how much I have picked up when people have let things slip or they have made mistakes and I’ve not told you I’ve just picked up their work I’ve cleared their mistakes I’ve covered their arses (yeh) so if I wasn’t a team player I would have come to you and grassed everybody up

## C

Mmm

## Susan

So so So I was really frustrated at that.

## C

But that was pretty much the only negative

## Susan

Yeh yeh it was this one individual but the rest of my career was I really enjoyed it and I I felt quite bitter that erm I had had this great career and the last 12months had been ruined by one person.

## C

I think it is really interesting that erm that one individual can have such an influence, within the organisation, on you personally and and I think that happens quite a lot actually erm where that one person in your chain of command somehow can just really poison there the whole experience.

## Susan

Yeh the funny thing was I used to go home and moan to my husband about him and you know what it is like you moan to your spouse and they go yeh yeh you are just moaning and erm actually my husband’s co-worker had gone on deployment and this sgt erm was in his living accommodation with him and he turned round to my husband my husband had said she works with this person and he gave him the name and he goes ohh he is such a dick (laughter) and totally validated everything I had been saying for the past 4 months. Ahh yeh he said he is an idiot too and he gave me all these examples erm he had this guy had a bit of OCD about tidying up really badly to the point that erm in the tent or in the bathroom area I think people left things a bit messy and he I because he was in charge of erm I think he was put in charge of some the logistical side of it and he put a notice up in the Sgts bathroom to say if this bathroom is left a mess I shall be cutting off the hot water supply. And everyone was like well you can’t do that stop being an arse. So yeh he’d been so he wasn’t just like that me when I found out he’d been like that with other people that did made me feel a bit better but I just felt it had poisoned my last >>>>> in the Air Force which was a shame.

## C

Yeh yeh. So why did you erm join as a photographer what was it about photography ..?

## Susan

Erm Oh well I considered to, I wanted to do either air traffic or photography and I thought oh God if I make a mistake as an air traffic controller people might die whereas if I make a mistake as a photographer it is no big deal (laugh) erm yeh and I read the description I mean there wasn’t much on line at that point erm but yeh the job sounded interesting and exciting and you had a bit of autonomy and you do you did as a photographer anyway (12.18).

## C

And that was important to have that …

## Susan

Erm yeh. There is creativity in it as well because erm you know as an aircraft technician you have a rule book to follow as a photographer they can teach you but you don’t know what is going to happen in situations change you can use your imagination and I liked that.

## C

And you enjoyed that. So, if you could pick out one and it’s a hard question I know but oh How long did you serve?

## Susan

>>>>> years.

## C

Sorry I couldn’t hear that one.

## Susan

Thirteen.

## C

Thirteen. It’s a long period but if you could pick out one … example what would be the one memory that really sticks in your brain about being in the Air Force and if if you could explain to me why that one.

## Susan

Ohhh definitely. Being selected to do ceremonial duties at the Olympics that for me was the highlight of my career. And I did that and I went to do that about a week after I had been told I’d got made redundant so it was like it was like this was like my glory year for my last year although this this sgt had ruined it a bit this was the pinnacle of my career as far as I was concerned being able to do I was on the TV every night. Erm raised, we I worked at the velodrome.

## C

Oh wow.

## Susan

as part of the ceremonial team and erm myself and my partner cause your part you were in twos raising the flag and we got we just we just drew lots and we got selected for gold and we erm we did the first gold and it was Sir Chris Hoy and we raised the Union Jack for him. So, it was totally non mili well it was military cause we were in uniform but you know it wasn’t anything to do with war I just felt really proud, proud to be involved in the Olympics proud that I was in the Air Force and it was just it was really it was one of those things that people were jealous of I suppose I didn’t do it because people would be jealous but I think people were like how did you manage to get that job?

## C

Yeh so how

## Susan

I loved it it was really exciting and fun.

## C

You weren’t down there as a photographer? You were down there as one of the…ceremonial

## Susan

No. yeh >>>>>> We got. In the January before the Olympics erm there was erm something came out asking for volunteers (yeh) and you had to write a paragraph about why you about what you do in your free time and at the time I was a parish councillor and I used to do quite >>>>> a lot of stuff in my free time and we fig and we found out afterwards when we figured out who had got selected everyone had all done a lot of stuff in their free time and given back to their communities and that’s why we got selected.

## C

Yeh. That’s nice that’s g

## Susan

Yeh, erm. I think the sore point going back to this sgt. Was And erm I’d volunteered for it and at the time everyone was like what have you volunteered for the Olympics for you are stupid and I said well actually I think it sounds really exciting and of course oh how the tide turns a few months later G4S mess up on their contract and my sgt gets jiffed to do the security duties and he says this is really unfair you’re a cpl and your doing ceremonial and I’ve got to do 24hr security duties I am going to ring the ceremonial team up and get you and me swopped. That’s how horrible he was I said well I’ve already had my training and (yeh) he wanted to me to to em swop with him and do the security duties and he does the ceremonial even though I’ve yeh that would have pissed me off. But that never happened they told him to take a running jump.

## C

Yeh good yeh.

## Susan

He should have volunteered for it at the time so.

## C

Yeh. He sounds like he was a really interesting man to work with.

## Susan

Yeh he was so bitter and angry that he had got jiffed for security duties like it was personally my fault and if I had not volunteered to do ceremonial I would have been available to do security duties.

## C

Oh well he’s as you said tough for him basically. Ok

## Susan

That was the highlight just doing the Olympics it was just brilliant.

## C

I sounds like it it sounds like something you will er just remember for ever.

## Susan

Yeh

## C

Have you got it on TV have you got it recorded?

## Susan

We recorded some on the set top box but then the set top box broke so

## C

I’m sure it will be on line somewhere, a BBC video of it….>>>>

## Susan

Yeh it will be on there somewhere …>>>

## C

Cool. So if you had a magic wand and you could change anything about your military experience what do you think is there anything you would actually change?

## Susan

Erm

## C

Apart from this guy (laugh)

## Susan

What would I change? Erm I don’t think I would change anything. I did lots of varied jobs erm in different sections nothing was really repetitive. I don’t think I would change anything.

## C

So it was a really positive experience. All in all.

## Susan

Yeh I mean you have your ups and downs but nothing no slips happened overall. No I think I had a good career, I had a happy career and I enjoyed it. I always used to say to people when people used to moan about being in the Air Force I’d say well just hit the PvR button that’s what it is there for I don’t want to hear you moaning. You either do something, change something or hit the button and go and I never got to that point where I thought right I want to PvR. I was pleased I was happy so no I wouldn’t change anything.

## C

Good that is good to hear. So erm if I if you had to describe military life then to someone who didn’t know anything about it how would you go about describing it?

## Susan

Erm you need to be prepared for things to be unpredictable erm and you can’t always get your own way. In terms of leave or time off work or avoiding duties because you just have to do them erm yeh just prepared to be messed around a bit but you get compensated for that you get decent pay. Erm and even though you might get messed around you may have to work long hours it is really easy to get time off usually, you know, for sports or if you work a weekend you will get time off in lieu erm so you might have to work odd hours erm erm I’m trying to think of something positive now …

## C

Yeh

## Susan

And but Take all the opportunities I would say as well that are avail there are so many opportunities that are available. In terms of I learnt to ski with the Air Force I had never skied before. I did wind surfing mountain biking hiking all sorts of stuff so you have to take the rough with the smooth you know. There are the negative but you have got to grab hold of positives and volunteer for all the things that you can.

## C

Yeh that is good. Erm How do you think your life now differs from when you were in the military. So, what would you say is the biggest differences (19.14) between then and now

## Susan

Well the biggest one is that I work part time. Erm so I fit my job around my family instead of in the military where your family has to fit around your job erm so my family can be put first erm yeh I think that is the biggest one.

## C

And that’s that’s worth it. Even

## Susan

Erm I didn’t to be honest I it is but I didn’t find it a struggle juggling everything when I was in the military. We had live-in childcare which made life so much easier. Erm and so if anything happened or had to work late or had to work over night or for my husband we always had that extra that support network by having live in childcare. But it never felt like we struggle or had to juggle anything erm but it yeh I’m happy with it now but at the time I dealt with it ok as well it wasn’t an issue.

## C

Because of the live-in childcare.

## Susan

Yeh we had got that sorted and it was really good.

## C

Erm …. Sorry I am just running through the questions as some of them don’t don’t quite fit as you you made redundant as opposed to deciding to leave. So >>> outside of this this then, outside of this sgt, the rest of your resettlement did that go ok? Did you enjoy it and did you get benefit from it?

## Susan

Erm I got benefit I just I hated trying to figure out what I wanted to do and making decisions. In hindsight the courses I did I wish I’d not done. The original course I wanted to do I backed out of and I should have done it and that its I think it’s making all those decisions should I do it? you can’t predict the future you can’t predict what you are going to get a job in so erm I found resettlement beneficial at the time erm but in hindsight I the courses I am not using now so it was a bit of a waste of time. Did I answer that question or did I go off on a tangent?

## C

No you you you did. But I am just interested to know what what course didn’t you do? The one that you backed out of.

## Susan

Erm Yeh it was a CIPD erm in HR and it would have gone really nicely with doing the recruitment now erm but I didn’t think I’d get a job in recruitment I got told by my career advisor that I wouldn’t get a job in recruitment she said you’ve never been to university erm you wont get a job in recruitment. And I said but I am working in recruitment now and I’ve got a recruitment qualification from the Air Force. You get a certificate in recruitment practice.

## C

Oh ok.

## Susan

erm so I backed out of it and rethought my plan

## C

So you think that was bad advice >>>>>

## Susan

Erm yeh I hate the fact that I’d been pigeonholed. Instead of saying the skies the limit it was they tried to limit yeh, I understand doing recruitment now and working with veterans I understand you do have to manage people’s expectations erm but they would probably turn round and say it was reverse psychology we got we told you you wouldn’t do it and you’ve proved us wrong but I don’t think that is why they said it at the time. (22.40) so its yeh I can understand if people have wild dreams I could understand if I had turned up and said I want to be an astronaut yeh fine ok you know shoot me down but erm yeh I think that just it was frustrating and bad advice I suppose I got and I got told erm that my I’d never done a CV and I got as part of my resettlement and I found that very useful going on the workshop but the erm consultant kept saying that my CV was no good and I said but I’ve I keep getting called for job interviews so the purpose of a CV is to get you a job interview and if I am getting job interviews then it must be doing its job erm but she couldn’t quite grasp that I got quite frustrated.

## C

So just going back to that decision-making process when you were leaving and you were trying to figure out what was what you would do next if you like you had that desire to go into HR because you enjoyed in the AVCO and you thought this is something I could take forward.

## Susan

Yeh I’d really enjoyed the recruitment I’d done the training course I’d done it in practice in the office and really enjoyed it and I thought I’d like to do this in civilian life.

## C

But And when so when that was fu fuwed you had to rethink and try to figure out something else?

## Susan

Yeh tried to think up some other options really so I ended up doing erm the PETALS course which is preparing to teach in the lifelong learning sector and I did an NVQ assessors course cause I still I really like a job the where I can help people and those were similar as well with the assessing and the guiding and mentoring people (yeh) so I did those courses cause I thought they might work well together particularly if I wanted to work in a college environment.

## C

Yeh, and so how did you end up getting your job in HR?

## Susan

This job yeh (laugh) well I was head hunted I suppose it wasn’t advertised I got a random e-mail for erm well the back story is have you heard of recruit for spouses?

## C

No.

## Susan

It’s a it’s an organisation that was set up to help spouses find employment and I’d heard about them in the news and they didn’t have any recruitment jobs or anything like that and I thought well maybe they want some more recruiters so I rang them up on spec just before I left the military and I said I don’t suppose you are looking for any recruiters are you? And they said sorry not at this time erm and then about 6 months later they rang me up and said yeh we were looking for one and they interviewed me and one other person. The other person had loads of commercial experience so she got the job but the person who interviewed me had remembered me and she was friends with our MD where I work now and he’d said to her he was setting up a company and does she knew somebody and she said yeh I interviewed somebody she’s ex-military he gave she gave him my name and I got a random e-mail saying oh I’ve been recommended you by someone and yeh it was like the stars aligned.

## C

Brilliant and and you really enjoy it what you do now?

## Susan

Yeh I left here for 3 months eh 2 months erm because there was uncertainty with the company and erm I applied for a job back in the UK and got that but erm the job was horrendous so erm I came back because they didn’t want me to leave and its not like I didn’t enjoy the job so I said to my husband I don’t care if there is no job security at least I will be enjoying what I’m doing even if it is only for a few months.

## C

And what does the the job involve exactly?

## Susan

So, I work with veterans and clients. Clients erm usually have veteran’s programmes that they want to start or that they already have going erm and they want to employ military veterans from either any of the three services and I also work with veterans and service leavers erm to help them find jobs and also provide support and guidance in terms of their CV doing practice interviews erm just helping them along the way really. So often I will provide erm CV guidance and and erm send all comments back to them saying you need to add this this and this. Erm and they and they are really receptive.

## C

So so what’s what the best bit about this job then do you think?

## Susan

Erm definitely when somebody an inter gets called for an interview or gets called for a job. Er sorry gets offered a job erm those are good bits but what’s really great is often erm you speak to a person about amending their CV and some are really reticent but some are really receptive and often I will e-m get well quite a lot I will get e-mails from people you know saying I am so glad you made me work on my CV I’ve just notice since I have applied for jobs with the new layout I am getting calls for interviews and you think ‘yes’ and I like it because the candidates have that lightbulb moment and they are totally converted and they realise why you have asked them to do what you have asked them to do and I like that. It can of validates what you have asked them to do and I think well you know cause I don’t do all the work for them they do it so I get a lot of e-mails saying thank you which is nice it’s nice to be appreciated.

## C

Yeh yeh it is good. And its all industry sectors is it, all?

Susan

Yeh and there all private companies, well PLCs, it’s not erm public sector.

## C

Erm, let me see then so do you how would you say how would you describe how you feel about having left the air force now bearing in mind where you are at?

## Susan

Erm I feel Its really easy this one. I feel that the Air Force took what it needed from me and I took what I needed from the Air Force and it’s now the end of a beautiful friendship. And that is how I feel.

## C

Brilliant (laughing)

## Susan

I got I got plenty from the Air Force you know I got all the sports and all the opportunities and they got worked me like a dog but it was give and take.

## C

You felt it was balanced?

## Susan

Yeh I feel that its like a break up and you know a relationship break up isn’t it. I feel like I am totally over the break up we have parted our ways on amicable terms and that is it.

## C

I think that is perfect I think that is a really healthy way to to to approach it and to think about it that’ s really good cause it doesn’t always happen so so nicely. If that makes sense. Yrh? I think a lot of people erm feel that erh although they its its interesting because you didn’t get to choose but sometimes people do get to choose but they still feel forced. Does that make sense?

## Susan

Yeh like their hand was forced? Yeh I can see that but I think I always try to feel optimistic about stuff my husband and I have discussed this cause we are friends with another couple and they are both pessimistic and it really frustrates us they always see the worst and the negative and I always tell them to see the best in things and not all the time I would say I am more realists realist optimist but I think sometimes you’ve got to I think not enough people are thankful for what they have got erm and I I am always really thankful.

## C

So could you what is it the most that you think miss about the Air Force?

## Susan

Erm The camaraderie, the banter, the friends. Erm everything that just not tangible

## C

Yeh

## Susan

Erm, >><>> just the excitement sometimes you never know you get jobs and you do get sent away from family but sometimes they can be very exciting. Sometimes the unknown is quite exciting.

## C

Yeh

## Susan

Erm but yeh mainly camaraderie, the banter just having a laugh I’ve had in some civilian jobs there is just no sense of humour you’ll somebody will say something and you will see the filthy double meaning in it and you’ll start giggling and then everyone else in the office look sat you like you are an idiot and be like what are you laughing at? And when you explain it they are just like, look at you they look down at you. I miss the sense of humour.

## C

So would you say you are still consider yourself part of the military family? Do you still …

## Susan

Erm

## C

The wider military family?

## Susan

I suppose so because my husband is still serving but I still see it as a job, I see I see his job as a job. Erm he goes to work that’s his job and I have my job. And I don’t feel that erm I want to take any of my identity form it anymore because I have my own I feel I have my own identity or at least I like to think that erm and I don’t want to pull all of my identity from being … I don’t know if this sounds really wrong but a military spouse. I am a spouse and my husband works in the military but those two things are separate things. I didn’t join the military, well I did join the military but I am not in the military and and I don’t feel like I should I feel like it’s almost poaching off people who are in the military by using it as part of my identity now because I am not in the military. I’m I have I have my own job I have carved out my own career. I don’t know does that sound silly?

## C

No not at all. Not at all.

## Susan

I meet so many people whose identity is centred around their husband being in the military and … yeh what happens when your husband leaves the military have you got no identity anymore because you have piggy backed on somebody else’s?

## C

Mmm that is really interesting

## Susan

I don’t know.

## C

That’s really interesting. So you’d erm but would you consider yourself a veteran, would you ever call yourself a veteran if you were talking to people?

## Susan

I am quite reluctant to do that I don’t always tell people that I have been in the military. It’s not that I am ashamed. I just think well I didn’t do anything spectacular or remarkable. I didn’t save someone’s life erm I don’t know I just feel like I am not a glory hunter

## C

Mmm

## Susan

but I am not ashamed if somebody asks I’ll tell them. >>><>><if you are around people who are in the military but it’s not the only thing I have ever done in my life. I am more proud of being a mum really.

(33.14)

## C

So where do you see yourself in about another year, so what I am just trying to work out, you have been out now for 4 years.

## Susan

4 years, yeh

## C

Yeh, so which you know you have had lots of time to think you have had lots of time to move on. A year doesn’t seem that much difference but do you still see you still see yourself working in the same environment in 4-5 years’ time?

## Susan

I hope so yeh I mean to be honest although I am saying about my husband’s identity and him being in the military we’re still I’m still beholden to where we ‘re going to get posted to. So, I still have some of those restrictions imposed upon me, where we are going to get posted to, so I still have some of those restrictions imposed upon me where we are going to get posted to, what kind of house we’re going to be given because unless we are going to live near to where our actual home is erm we have to live in a quarter. So, I still have those restrictions erm I would still like to be doing the job I am doing erm but my husband wants to leave the military as well. So, I will be doing the supporting role where he supported me when I left so I can’t at the moment do too many career moves because I need to be settled and secure.

## C

Mmm

## Susan

So, we have a steady income ready for when he leaves erm to give him that safety net I suppose.

## C

Yeh

## Susan

So, at the moment its up in the air but that’s just really to do all to do not necessarily to do with the military making our decisions always it’s to do with the fact that my husband wants to leave. >>>>><<>

## C

Mmm

## Susan

So, we have to make decisions together.

## C

Yeh. So, what would you say was your biggest professional challenge in that erm transition from working within the military to working within a civilian organisation?

## Susan

Understanding erm commercial language and how the commercial industry works. When I look back at some of the first job interviews I went to I feel really cringey erm I think oh my God I must have made a right idiot of myself. Erm you just have to get in the commercial mindset if you want to work in the commercial sector erm so I think that’s a big it was a big shift for me

## C

Do you think

## Susan

Erm And I found quite a lot with my job even with my erm our erm managing director who is ex-Army erm and I will not stand up to him in a a rude way but I will often push back stuff erm and quite often it is me turning round to him and saying but there is no commercial benefit we are not getting any money out of this. And he’s like oh yeh I suppose you’re right. So sometimes you’ve got to you have to get into the commercial mindset which you don’t always get in the military it’s just like let’s do the job and it doesn’t matter how much it costs. (35.49)

## C

He he still has a bit of that?

## Susan

Sometimes yeh.

## C

Interesting. But your, do you think erm is that partly because he wants to help people as well do you think? and he’s trying to

## Susan

Yeh I think he gets really excited and he gets loads and loads of things plates that he is balancing erm and I have to turn round and say right we have to prioritise, we have to prioritise what is going to make money it is not that we’re not going to do these other tasks but we need to do the ones that bring an income in first and then when we have got capacity then we do the other tasks. So, its about getting him to work out what our main priorities are sometimes or reminding him anyway.

## C

What erm what do you think was your biggest personal challenge in that transition out of the military?

## Susan

Erm. Personal challenge was when I didn’t have a job. Erm there was a period when I didn’t have a job and I’m lucky I didn’t end up on anti-depressants. I remember I just I felt horrible I felt I had no identity I had no job and I was asking my husband for money and that we had never been in that situation as a couple. He was fine about it but we had always had separate bank accounts we had always had our own incomes I had never needed to ask him I had had my own money and I remember it was erm winter and I wanted some winter boots because mine had a hole in and I said to him my winter boots have got a hole in and I need some new boots erm please can I have some money. And he was like why are you asking just take it from the account but I felt almost it had made me feel like a child,

## C

MMM

## Susan

relying on him and asking him for money. Because I was used to if I wanted something I just went into a shop and bought it. So, I felt yeh not having a job it was not having my own financial independence. Because then you and for me I felt like it was a stressful time for our marriage and I felt that sometimes am I only there because I don’t have my own inde financial independence because when you are financially independent you are there because you want to be there not because you need to be there and so there were a few challenges but yeh not having a and I didn’t have a job my whole identity was around cleaning the house and looking after my son who was at school anyway and I just thought oh God, it was horrible. Even when I had a crap job it was better than having no job cause it gave you that sense of I got out of the house had a sense of identity and I was worried what other people would think cause I think cause I think of other people who have kids at school all day and have no job and who are not studying well what on earth do you do all day? And I was >>><< well people are going to think that of me, what the hell does she do all day she is not studying anything her son is at school all day I didn’t want to be a lady of leisure.

## C

Yeh its it wasn’t part of your make up.

## Susan

No, its not me I can’t just its nice I like going to a spa day and going out but not 7 days a week.

## C

No that’s that fine that’s brilliant. Its really fascinating because I think I had a a year when I left the Air Force where I er basically I was exhausted from trying to juggle the job and the kids and and constantly we moved well even now we’re 9 years married this year and this is our 7th house. And its just you spend half your life packing unpacking constantly you are just knackered so I took a year and I felt very similar I used to say I’m just a toilet cleaner now that is all I do all day. Clean the house yeh I didn’t like it and that financial thing. I’ve had a job since I was 14.

## Susan

MMM

## C

You know and then all of a sudden you have got, you haven’t got your own money it’s just no. I did not like it either.

## Susan

It was frustrating. I mean I had used my redundancy to pay off the mortgage my husband is like for crying out load you have halved our mortgage why are you feeling guilty about asking me for a pair of boots.

## C

Yes but it’s interesting cause that self worth and identity as you said I think when you have been financially independent its very hard to give up.

## Susan

Yeh I mean when I grew up my mum had always worked I my grandma worked full time with my grandpa they ran their own business and my mum was mainly brought up by her grandma because my mum my grandma and grandpa worked. So, I’ve always been around strong working females, role models, I’ve never been around females who stayed at home.

## C

MM yeh that is really good really useful stuff. Erm that is that is pretty much it we have covered everything I wanted to cover and I really thank you for that. Cause it is awesome to have somebody who is a bit further down the line than the people I have been interviewing and having a different perspective but is there anything else you would like to say about the topic of identity and how you transitioned out of the Air Force?

## Susan

I don’t know I think the whole process is almost like you know like with the grief circle when you you erm resist the idea and then you get to the acceptance stage and I think it is very much like that you’ve got to get to the acceptance stage erm and then I think you will be happy because if you are always fighting a situation that you can’t change erm you you never its it just doesn’t do anything for you mentally at all.

## C

What advice would you give to somebody then who was just about to leave?

## Susan

Don’t expect, erm don’t expect to feel normal or straight away give it time it could take 2 or 3 years before you get settled. Don’t expect to get settled straight away <><

## C

Why <<><>

## Susan

And expect a bit of a culture shock I suppose.

## C

Yeh I was about to the culture that’s that’s I was going to say why do you think it’s could take 2 or 3 years to to adjust?

## Susan

Because erm you might not find, the first job you take you might not enjoy I mean the first few jobs I had I didn’t enjoy and I walked out of erm the because the organisation cause you are always going to compare it to your career in the Air Force so for the first 2 or 3 years you are always going to be comparing well we did this in the Air Force or in this job we did this erm and you I think you are always comparing it and expecting it to be the same and it isn’t

## C

I Can I just delve into that a little bit more in what ways is it is it not the same.

## Susan

I think you expect your colleagues to have the same work ethics as you. And quite a lot are lazy at times. Erm I quite a few places that I have worked in erm everybody has got I felt like I was the odd one out because I was the only one that didn’t have an illness or a disability or a problem erm everybody wanted to have something to identify them as unique that is the way I saw it. and it was like, oh this one can’t do that and this one can’t eat that and this one and I was like and it just got really frustrating then everybody had a I’m not saying I have anything against people with disabilities or health conditions

## C

No its fascinating

## Susan

But it was like I felt like I was the odd one out because erm like I don’t know people were taking a lot of time off sick at work I remember being in a job and somebody was off for 5 days with a cold and I was like who the hell has 5 days off with a cold? (laughter) and then I am coming in with the sniffles and they are like oh aren’t you going home? And I was like no I’ve just got a cold its fine. Erm so I think its that, there is less of a team work mentality and loyalty and that is hard to get around I’ve got that now where I work because most of the people are ex-military we are very we have got each other’s back and we don’t stab each other in the back but in civvi street there is a lot of stabbing you in the back. And there is less working together. Even Where I work now one of the girls who has left when she first joined she said oh its really different I am used to being stabbed in the back and you are all helping each other out and I was like yeh that is how things get done when you help each other out erm so yeh sometimes the team work and loyalty is lacking.

## C

That is really good. That’s you know I am so pleased you know I went back to my supervisors and said do you think it’s a good idea to speak to people who are a bit further along the line. So, it has been really really good. I can’t thank you enough for taking the time.

44.39

General Conversation

46.10

## Susan

….. I was talking to it’s quite funny cause I was talking to my husband the other day about this the whole back stabbing thing but it was quite funny because when my co-worker was on maternity I took over all of her work and a big chunk of it was managing training courses and before she went on maternity she left massive hand over notes and when she came back we had a meeting and she was taking it over because I was leaving and I’ve come back now, and my boss said oh you’ve done a fantastic job covering for the past year and she said erm oh yeh its really great there are some fantastic handover notes and I said I wouldn’t have been able to do this fantastic job without you leaving the handover notes in the first place I have made them evolve and I have improved them but if you hadn’t left the handover notes I wouldn’t have been able to do such a good job it’s a team effort you started it and I finished it. But I said I can’t take all the glory because I would have fallen on my face if you hadn’t of left me all these notes to begin with I like that I like that we helping each other out. The other thing my husband and I used to always say about the military was it’s a game you have got to play the game if you resist or if you fight against the system sometimes it just makes you miserable quite a lot of the time. So, we got married quite quickly would we have got married in civvi street probably not we would have just lived together cause we could have done, we loved each other we didn’t have to get married it wasn’t for religious reasons but we were like well we’re fighting this we are never going to get a married quarter if we are not married we loved each other so we did it. We married we got married in we had only been together about a year and a half when we got married and we were just like well if it’s the only way that we can be together, the only way we can guarantee a posting, if this is the rules of the game we are just going to have to play along and so we found sometimes that if you resist too much erm then you end up just getting miserable and sometimes it’s just easier to play along. It sounds really horrible it sounds like erm … it sounds like we have given up all hope and we haven’t it’s just that some battles you have got to fight and some you have just got to give up and go you know what there are more important things in life to argue about.

49 mins

## C

Yeh. That is brilliant thank you very very much.

**Interview ends**

1. Name – military rank (airwoman/officer), length of service, marital status, parent, months before – or + after leaving the RAF). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)