# 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.