# Claire – Interview 1 2016

(officer, 16 years, partner, yes, +3)

## C

Why did you joint the RAF?

## Claire

Cause green’s not my colour and I don’t like the sea was my answer at OASC. I wanted adventure. I spent years … I left school at sixteen, went to work with horses, was a riding instructor, ended up doing my degree and just did not want to be shovelling shit at forty basically and it felt really exciting. My dad was in the Air Force and to me it was Ohh let’s go so I ended up going to South End careers office and it just went from there. I had no great plan other than I fancied doing that and it kind of happened.

## C

and it was that idea of adventure?

## Claire

Yeh I went into the careers office with a picture of a crewman on the back of a chinook and in fact think it was puma at the time. And went “I want to do that, that’s me”. And she said “Oh, a crewman”, and I said “yes”. And they went “Ok what are you doing?” And I said “well I’ve done this, I’ve done the other no A ‘Levels but I have A Level equivalents but I am currently doing a degree.” Oh she said “a degree.” And that is when she said “do you want to take your commission” and I said “what is that?” That is when I found out …. And I went to be a loggie because UKAMAMS advertising and I thought I want a piece of that.

## C

What was it about that?

## Claire

Adventure, going round the world on the back of a Herc, anywhere, it just seemed really cool. It was a really dark picture, the lights were on in the back ground and the team were loading the Herc and it was just in the middle of nowhere, what was it 99 so it could even have been …

## C

Bosnia?

## Claire

yeh, Banja Luka, Sarajevo. Somewhere like that, but it was just really exciting, and I was like Oh yeh, that’s what I want to do then. Hence when I joined up H took the piss out of me because as soon as I went through Training I was I want the specialist Course’ I am not interested in anything else I just want to be a mover.

## C

On the back of a Herc, and was it, was it as exciting?

## Claire

Do you know I had the opportunity and I turned it down to go the Wing instead, funnily enough. So I did my course, went to London, went to, went OOA. That was exciting cause that was lots of specialist stuff. That was operations stuff and I went to Wiltshire as an Officer Commanding had the opportunity to go and to the Wing but there was also the other job there as a Flight Commander, and I was just a bit, oh that’s different again I have worked with those guys really for the last couple of years on bits and pieces so I will have that instead. So I kissed the Wing off and went into the field instead.

## C

So when did you start thinking about leaving the RAF?

## Claire

The moment I returned from maternity leave. So I went on Maternity leave in Jan 13 went back to work in Nov 13, it was very much my, in fact no it wasn’t it was before then. My I’m not getting promoted and I threw my teddies out of the pram. 2010/2012 in Wiltshire, I got the worst feedback for promotion possible from the year before I was picked up and went ‘fuck it’ I am not interested. So I had organised myself a tour at Lincolnshire and decided to put myself out to pasture, go and do an easy Tour, live at home be with my partner, have a family, stop putting it off and go from there and there. And then after my amazing renowned Facebook winge whilst pissed Z phoned me up the next day and said “Claire do you want to come for a chat” and I went “yes I do Z”, I said “I’m so sorry” and he said don’t worry” I was shit faced and he said. “You actually redeemed yourself because a lot of other people were getting very anti but you were very balanced even though you were pissed comment”. So he bless him, it’s his… He said “I’ll give you a job at Air Cmd, SO2 job. They have just downgraded it to an SO3 but if you are lucky the paperwork won’t go through before June and your first report, so it will look like an SO2 report on your OJAR”. And I went “Yes”, and so I went into their and within two months got pregnant cause I thought well I am not putting things off any longer. I’ve decided I want to have family and I thought I am not going to wait for the right moment. Cause the right moment will never come along if you are in the military really. So did. And I remember telling my boss I will give it my all until, this was in the January 12, I will give it my all until the June and that report. Thereafter, you can stick your secondary duties up your hoop, I’ll do my job but that is it. And he went, “fine, what can I say?” And then I was just literally going to see my timeout, go back from maternity leave and do a job for a few months until my option point of April 15. At that point, April 15? Yeh, but then in the Dec just before I went 12/Jan 13, that was when I promoted. And they said you are going to come off this year’s board. You will go on maternity leave but you will come back in a Squadron Leader post. So I accepted it with a view that I’ll do three years for the pension thank you very much and then I will come out. So very much, it was then, 2012. Really.

## C

And what did making that decision feel like?

## Claire

Nice, it was I am ready, do you know I’ve … what, not having got promoted. Being very late to promote you just think I am coming up for 38 I don’t want to move round every two years as such anymore. I have loved it, but I was using language to my partner “When we are 50 we can do this that and the other …” and you get this smacking realisation that life is going to pass us by we will be like ships in the night and who is to say we are still here at 50. You know. Enjoy life in the moment and in the now. And we can’t do that cause we are never together. So making that decision was lovely and it was Woah, I have no idea what I was going to do but that was like well something will turn up.

## C

You said the right moment will never come along cause it never does in the military, can you just expand on that?

## Claire

Yes, it was in the years where they went from promoting40, 20-40 odd, 20 – 40 to promoting 3 – 5 and there was a huge back log of perfectly capable Flight Leiutenants’ going dammit every report mattered. So I wanted promotion more than I did a baby at that time and I was not particularly broody but I didn’t want to be considering it at 40, and I was thinking I am 34 I will be mid 30’s soon, do I need to decide and it was well when do I do it? I am going, it was 2009, I was going into my 2ic tour …. Well that is 2 years of hell, in as much as … well it wasn’t hell, I loved it. I dined out on that tour but it was 2 years of, you have my life that is it. And if I was going to, I thought, when do you do it? I didn’t want to pitch up and be 2ic and go on maternity leave, I mean that doesn’t happen that would make me feel really bad, because I’d be like I’m off again and letting the Squadron down etc. So it really was when I had the bad feedback from the second promotion board, first promotion board up there, I think I missed out by two places, the next one didn’t even feature and it was like right fuck it, I’ll go and do some first tourist type job and then get pregnant so the right time is in and around the OJARs and your profile and if you have a gap at the wrong time that influences your standing on the promotion board etc. in amongst your peers if you don’t get the right OJAR. So they were all my perceptions at the time. Not necessarily fact but it was my perceptions at the time.

## C

So, when you made that decision to go for that Officer Commanding MT job, what did it feel like? How did that make you feel?

## Claire

Disappointed and a little bit gutted because anyone with 2 A levels can be a Flight Leiutenant in my mind and when you have to compete against your peers to become a Squadron Leader that is where you start to prove yourself if I am really honest. It was, gutted, that I know I am good enough, and that sounds arrogant but I knew I was capable because I was running rings around SO2s out in theatre and all sorts and people would come to be and you would do more and more and more, so you get a very good reputation and people start to rely on you but there is nothing more in it for you and you think well I am top of my grade in terms of pay and the next thing is promotion but you know what it is probably not going to be available to you because you are in the wrong place at the wrong time. With not necessarily the right profile because I didn’t really play the profile game until it was too late. I will explain that one if you want. So I was a bit oh! So I was kind of going in effect sod you, I am going to, this is all about me now. I have given the AF my all in as much as I will go where ever you want me to whenever you want me to happy to I’ve enjoyed it to. So it’s not that I feel that they owed me anything, I have had a whale of a time doing it but this is about me now, this is not about the AF this is about me. But my pride was hurt quite a lot, but it felt quite nice to go well do you know what if you are not going to appreciate me AF, in the way that I want to be appreciated I am going to put myself into a position where I can interview for a job cause my view was I could do quite a few of those Squadron Leader jobs at that time with my eyes closed but I can never just go for an interview to be selected for it because I don’t have the right rank whereas if I was taken from the street and I had the right CV, I saw it as the world is my oyster. Albeit, the world within Lincolnshire, so a bit of a double edged sword really!

## C

And that is because you wanted to be at home, you wanted to be with your partner?

## Claire

Yeh.

## C

So when it finally came to leaving, how did that make you feel, you had made that decision…?

## Claire

I was at DE&S so I wasn’t necessarily in the AF and it was really quite bizarre, yes I am here I am surrounded by civil servants, it is a very different way of working, different organisation than I had been used to and it was very easy. I was, effectively called myself a civvi in waiting and took the piss out of the system so I was entitled to resettlement courses which I did, when I came back I went to the gym at every lunch and I did everything possible and rather than in the past I did my job, I gave my jobs my all I gave this job just enough to be ok. To make sure that if I wanted to come back as a civil servant in that organisation I would do, I was good enough to. But I certainly concentrated on me, it felt really nice. There was no, I’m not going to do that. We are going to put that meeting on next week because tomorrow doesn’t suit me. I think for the first time ever I became assertive, appropriately assertive in as much as no this is about what I would like now I want to achieve this and I would like to achieve it in this way and you’re trying to put other stuff on me and I don’t agree with that and I don’t want that and entering into those conversations that I wouldn’t normally. I would just say Yes Sir and try to achieve the world and take it on because it was all about the OJAR while this was, this is about me now.

## C

Can you give a specific example of that?

## Claire

Oh, gosh. “Helen we would like to move you into the Sentry Post because we don’t really understand what the sentry manager does, she is very good, but we don’t really understand her and she is quite a character quite a strong lady” and the two enginering officers, I think their balls shrunk every time they talked to her. She just, they didn’t really get what she was doing. And she is really good, very capable, but she just wasn’t able to articulate what she had to do and how she had to do it and the complexities of her role to these two engineering officers. And they said Claire, “we would like to put you into that role and we will move D sideways and we are going to pretend to D that it is a really good career development opportunity for her”.

## C

And they admitted that to you?

## Claire

Oh yeh.

## C

And then D and I both spoke together because we are quite good colleagues as such. I wouldn’t say friends but good colleagues together and we both told each other what we knew as well. So it was, she said under no way under hells earth am I moving. And I went that’s fine, but it could be very awkward I hope it’s not but I turned round to Neil and Said “No, I’ve got 6 months to do in the training manager role and there is a lot of loose ends if I stay in this role I will be able to tie up those loose ends for you ready to hand over to somebody. If you move me sideways into that job, that she is doing very well. You just haven’t understood her or listened to her well enough, you will lose that and you will lose traction on 2 or 3 of the projects that I have got on going” and it felt really good to say thank you but no.

## C

But that is good, being appropriately assertive. And you hadn’t done that before, you would say?

## Claire

Not really, no. Not at all, I kind of I wanted to please because I wanted to get that OJAR so I wanted to be the very best and if one chap wanted that I will achieve that if somebody else wanted that I’ll achieve that. All the time looking at that, get that OJR, get that OJAR because I really would like promotion now. So yeh it felt good. And when it came to drafting my own OJAR I said to Neil who I knew from IOT anyway. “Neil I want to draft my own OJAR anyway because I want it to be used as a CV when I leave so I am going to put it into CV type language so if you don’t mind just signing it that would be great”. It was “hmmm… yes Helen!”

## C

So how would you, if you had to describe your job as an RAF Officer how would you describe it, based on all your time?

## Claire

Challenging, rewarding and at times like nailing jelly to a wall and dealing with ambiguity. One of my phrases all the way through is there “we are paid to operate in the grey, the policy is there, the rules and directions are there, it is in black and white. But rules are there for the guidance of wise men and blind obedience of idiots. So we operate in the grey and that is what we do very well, certainly after 17/18 years in.

## C

Can you give an example of that cause that is a very interesting way of describing it, I’ve never heard that described that way.

## Claire

I guess it is taking risks, so do you know what in order to get that, in order to achieve something the right way of doing it would be to do A, action A, but action A is going to take too long and it is not going to give us a tangible benefit quickly enough so what we could do is go to B and do B instead, B is a risk, it’s not a gamble it is a risk but if we do that we will get what we need a little quicker but we might just need a little catch up work to make sure we do get back to A eventually. It’s knowing where you can cut corners to achieve an objective. And I guess, I did a load of risk management stuff and it literally is just accepting and managing risk constantly, not necessarily capturing it on a risk spread sheet and going through the tedious paperwork process that you have to do it is those right I am going to take a short cut here, it’s not right but it can be done because my experience tells me so, it can be achieved in the time frame given to me we just need to do a little bit of work in the back ground.

In fact that was most of my career so I am just trying to think of examples but I kind of, everything I did was, yes the JSP says to do it this way but I am going to tailor it for what’s in front of me and I am going to challenge the policy that is there because I think it is too restrictive, I don’t think it’s flexible enough or detailed enough on some occasions, I think, that might not be a specific example I will try and….. Operational stuff, you know, you know ought to do things in a certain way using certain things, you haven’t got the right equipment. Technically you should stop and go no it shouldn’t go but instead you will nearly break people’s backs in the process to get it done but you choose to do it that way to keep the operational imperative. That’s the more silly end because you are messing about with people’s health and wellbeing or but you can make that decision because you know your teams is on your side and you want the same thing and you look at them and actually there are alright. Whilst if they weren’t alright you wouldn’t necessarily take that risk.

## C

So it is an on the ground assessment?

## Claire

Yes.

## C

So this leads me quite nicely on to the next question. If you think of your most challenging job, either out on operations or on JHSU, if you think of your most challenging job what kind of things would keep you awake at night when you were doing that tour?

## Claire

People, always people. I had a really large number of people with welfare related problems. I am a perfectionist and I want to make things right for people, I couldn’t always do that. So I’ve learnt the hard way over the years that people are responsible for their own behaviour and their own responses. And my biggest challenge in Wiltshire was learning that I can’t make the world right for everybody. I can’t make people see why I have made the decision I have and they don’t agree with it. I have experiences since then a whole world of NLP training etc. which has made me go well I am sorry you are upset by that decision but you are responsible for your own behaviour. But it was people, worrying about them whether they are ok, whether or not they were slitting their own wrists because we had quite a few suicide attempts. Whether or not they had enough money, whether their children were going to be taken into care. Whether or not they were Oh God just complete fuckwits who were fighting all the time or taking Cocaine. Bits and pieces. Really good lads but doing and just making stupid decisions. Just say I’d want you on my team every time because you are a bloody good lad at what you do but I can’t trust you cause you are a wild card outside of work and your social life and how do we help them find their moral compass again. So yeh, people.

## C

So you wouldn’t necessarily trust them on the job because of what is happening in their private lives?

## Claire

Yes, I’d trust them on the job all the time but I knew that if you choose to go and take cocaine etc. I have no choice. If I hear of anything like that I have to call the drugs team in because it is the right thing to do within the military. So the moral decisions I had to make, I knew somebody 3 or 4 of them were regularly going out and taking cocaine so I called the drugs team in on a Monday morning first thing because they had taken it on a Friday, if they had taken it on a Saturday night we would definitely have caught them, if they had taken it on a Friday night we had a high chance of catching it in their system. And the one that was caught was a private and he was a really nice guy had a really shit up bringing in life but he was basically a good lad and again, a bit of a wild card, but I would want him on my team. But his time on the team almost was really limited because of his lifestyle choices outside of work. He was in with a gang of lads in London, civi lads, who were leading him astray basically and that was his preference rather than toe the line and play the Army card. And I just thought that was a real shame he ended up being kicked out and my biggest fear was that he would fall into the wrong crown and he would lose all the opportunities but apparently he is doing really well for himself so…I needn’t of worried he’s doing alright.

## C

How did it make you feel though when you made that phone call?

## Claire

Disappointed, disappointed that people, I had to do the right thing and I was going to do the right thing regardless but disappointed that I can’t believe that you have put me in this position in a way. Oh come on that is it now, I can do no more.

## C

And you had tried to intervene, you had tried to help this chap?

## Claire

Yes we have the whole AGI63, various Army processes, well actually they are joint service processes. But he had been on report almost, in school language, it was come on you are doing alright you’re a good lad but you are a bit too much of a wide boy and we just need to watch out for certain character traits or behavioural traits that we are seeing. That is impacting on your job and your role.

## C

So people kept you awake at night while you were serving as you have approached leaving the Air Force what has kept you awake at night?

## Claire

How do I fund my life style without having to work? (Laughter) That is basically it. Yeh, I am quite comfortable in a very nice position but I Iike to spend money and I don’t know how I, how hard do I have to work? What do I want to do? A lot of it was based around, I have an opportunity now, I either continue in a similar role where it is safe. Or I choose to do something completely different if I want to and is now, 38, the right time to do that. So if I was to do anything else I would go further down my NLP training. Further down I, did a load of spiritual energy healing with an amazing guy and it was, my dad got me into it really it was one of these things, I’m like I am feeling something with this and it is something I could go into. But well I can do now, but there are a lot of things and I thought your not ready. And one of the things it has taught me is to listen to that inner voice it is something I will do and I know I will, but I know that now is not the right time, I don’t know when the right time is going to be but I will know, when I am there. So there has been a lot of backwardsing and forwardsing with that. Going do I just go for safety and not challenging and I know it will be back into logistics or do I just go for a part time job in Lincoln, behind a, you know as a receptionist somewhere because I absolutely want no stress and no challenge or do I do this completely different thing whatsoever. And I think doing the receptionist kind of thing was safety, completely safety, I don’t have to think I don’t have to do anything. But as I engaged with the resettlement process it was ahh I was no, no, no, no I can’t do that it is not for me no, no,no no, no.

## C

You say now is not the time, you don’t know when it will be but there are things that aren’t right that make it not the right time, can you put your finger on that?

## Claire

Yes, I don’t feel I have enough experience, enough practice, enough knowledge to be taken seriously because if you are going to help somebody. The whole people side the people in my career, managing people, helping them, supporting them, coaching them, like a life coach kind of thing I really, really enjoyed. But I don’t know as if, am I not ready? or don’t feel as I have enough qualifications? Or enough behind me to be taken seriously, when you start coaching people mentoring them certainly when you start using NLP type things there are some fairly major fundamental changes you can make within peoples thought processes and that is a big responsibility. And in my mind to do that I would want to spend a lot more time training and practicing really. So now I NLP the people at work…

## C

Do they know?

## Claire

No, it is not NLP that is a throw away phrase, it’s the I told my boss, “Neil you want me as the Air Seeker Logistics Manager because you know my back ground”. The head is nodding, you want me and the intonation in your voice and things like that will all help build that picture and he is going, “alright Claire, I can see” and I’m going “yep, I’ve got you!” (laughter) So it can really help you put the positive slant or the slant on something you want just by your language pattern.

## C

So what would you say has been your greatest challenge to your career progression?

## Claire

My ability. (laughter) Probably me, there was a game to be played and I didn’t want to play it. I thought I’d get what I wanted without playing that game. And I didn’t. I didn’t start playing the game until it was too late and then I was playing catch up. I knew I should have gone and done a PROJECT TEAM tour, instead I choose to go to the Wing cause I said “I’m never going to go and do a PROJECT TEAM tour” but, so I wanted fun, I wanted it all basically, I wanted fun and I wanted promotion. And I wanted this that and the other.

## C

So paying the game, so you wanted to have the fun and the have it all.

## Claire

Do you remember, I always giggle when I think back the lady at London and who said to you Caroline “You need to brush your hair and do bits and pieces” well funnily enough it was HP and TK who had those chats with me and they said “It doesn’t just come to you on a plate, you have to do the right things at the right time” and I’ve never been one to do what people tell me to do and I have always been one to buck the system really and I think I learned a little bit too late that I need to be playing the game so that by the time I started playing the game I was a couple of years behind my peers as such and then got stuck in a promotion system that just died for a few years so it was never going to really and you were like ok yep.

## C

So how does that come together, being an officer in the military which is obviously hierarchical and bureaucratic and rule driven and bucking the system, how did you manage to…?

## Claire

I have no idea because I bucked the system right from a real early age. So even at school I hated male teachers’ cause they tell me what to do. Some people were ok but others were not, so if you deal with me in a funny way or in a way that I perceived to be not right and who is to say what this is depending on the day. I would be Hmm Hmm I don’t like you. And just it took a long time to get over that, I still do it. I still meet and I think “you’re a fucking knob, I don’t like you” and its instant and I am a lot better now at trying not trying to judge people and going well they probably have had a bad day, they might not be aware of things etc. etc. But that has all come through a huge amount of self-awareness training, coaching, mentoring and NLP type stuff and going to IOT as a leadership instructor gave me that focus. You did a lot of leadership theory, a lot of behavioural theory a lot of work on its not behavioural the strength deployment inventory, MBTI, a lot of things like that and looking at what motivates you as a person, what motivates your behaviour. So 2 years’ worth of quite a lot of introspection. That helped enormously?

## C

MBTI?

## Claire

Miles Briggs Type Indicator. People say “I am a IGBT and they like to label themselves”, but A it’s not that the labels are completely but it’s an indicator of what types of things are likely to motivate you, where you are going to feel most comfortable because of your style and approach of life.

## C

So if you did that to yourself, where did you fit?

## Claire

Oh, I can’t remember. I genuinely, I think my partner is an IMPT I thought I would be extrovert but actually I am an introvert so although I display extrovert behaviours I am actually quite introspective. Sensitive, judging, so IS? I’ve got it written down somewhere but it is, I’ll dig it out for you. I am driven a lot by gut, gut feelings, instinct I just know it is right. So it has taken me a long while to realise that I work with engineers and pilots analytical people so just saying it’s the right thing to do will never cut the mustard. It is right because the policy says so, this evidence that evidence I could probably never make a very good scholar because my instinct says do that, my gut feeling said do something.`

## C

So if you had a magic wand that you could change anything what one thing would it be?

## Claire

That could I have my perspective of life that I have now and give that to my 23 year old self.

## C

Why?

## Claire

 Because I went through years of frustration, of trying to fight the system, being angry at the system. Not working out that just because my gut feelings are generally right, they are the right thing to do and it works out very well. But I have worked in an organisation is quite academic in many senses, you need results, you need background you need analysis, you need evidence in order to make your point to be taken seriously and I think I could have been taken a lot more seriously a lot earlier, which would have paid dividends I think.

## C

Could you think of an example where that would apply?

## Claire

Tod Rogers, Squadron Leader Tod Rogers he was my boss in Wiltshire. He called LP and I the Thompson Twins, but not the musicians the ones who weren’t very nice to him at all. I thought he was horrific but he was a very analytical intelligent man who liked research, who liked theories, who liked this and I just had a complete personality clash with him because I knew best, I knew what I was doing, I had the experience in the field but I couldn’t communicate with him well enough for him to have the faith in me to let me loose, whereas I really wanted to be let loose. When I was let loose I did really well but he was always there in the background. Whereas if I was able to suss him out, take the young arrogant over confident me to one side and have a word with myself and then put me back in with a little bit more, just suss out who he is and how you need to present the information to him, how he wants to be treated and treat him in that way, give him what he needs you will get what you want out of things a lot easier. And I don’t want to sound manipulative in that approach but it’s I think it is the ability to work out who you are dealing with and how they are going to want the information presented at what level to what extent etc. And if I could suss people out I think I would have had far less angst.

## C

So what would you say is your best memory of your time in the military?

## Claire

Artic Survival Training.

## C

Why was that and what does that entail?

## Claire

Do you know I was the only female. I was the only female and I was the only officer that wasn’t a pilot and I was surrounded by marines, people who in their very language to me…didn’t mean to be but they were quite belittling. But it was a cultural thing I think as opposed to a personal thing. And I did the survival and I out performed quite a few of the guys on the course, just out of sheer grit and I’m just going to do it. But it was the most beautiful scenery, white, crisp, clean so cold that when you went like that your nose hairs crunched. Physically very hard, mentally very hard and I remember sitting there outside this snow Quincy. That we built, so you shovelled snow into a big hut you trampled down onto it until you get this big igloo type shape and then you have to, all that snow that you have spent 4 hours digging up you then have to dig out to make the inside of the hole and you get so sweaty you cab. My thermal underwear, I took them off, they were frozen within seconds, they were that wet they then froze into a body shape.

But that night when I was on guard it was absolutely freezing. But I had my own solo aurora borealis and everyone else was asleep, there was very few other people around and it was beautiful and that was an opportunity I had in the military and I loved it. So that one specific one was just yeh that’s lovely. In terms of memories it’s the friendships isn’t it? It’s the how many people you’ve met along the years that you have this kinship with. There’s you, Gill, Sandy, there’s Nat, there is a whole host of other people that you will, friends for life really.

## C

Why friends for life?

## Claire

Cause I think you get on with people there is something about each of the people that mean something to you that you don’t have to see them day in day out, week in week out, you just know that there are certain kinds of people that you won’t see for a year, two years and you will just pick up where you left off. But I think that is because we have quite, I think we are used to having a transient mobile life. Civvi friends unless I get in, in surrey, unless I go down and see them, there is no way they would ever consider coming up to Lincolnshire to see me because it is a real big journey. As such you have to go and see them and that is fine cause I love Kate to bits but it is it would be a real mammoth adventure for them to move while we are used to travelling 2-3-4hrs at a weekend to see friends and family.

## C

Thank you Helen that has been great.

## Claire

It is quite timely actually because I have now started my new job and I am adjusting, adjusting to just being a C2?

## C

What does it feel like?

## Claire

It was very difficult it feels as if I am having my wings clipped, when I said jokingly I am accepting mediocracy I don’t think I truly accepted what I was saying. Whereas I am now facing that mediocracy, I can’t fart, sorry I can’t pass wind without passing it through my C1. Who is just so down beat everything is just (big sigh) “I just can’t do any more” (Big sigh) “I know it is not right is it”. She is just so negative that you just think oh dear. So I will give it 6 months but it’s been ohhwww, the job could be challenging, the job could be really good, but if I am not, I think I am used to being given quite a big amount of freedom to operate in to work with, to sort out and I and I have probably have come in, I have probably been quite arrogant with things I don’t want to hear. I have probably come in with an I’m better than you approach and this last week has been quite difficult I have realised that I can solve this it is quite easy but you don’t really want me to because you think it is all too difficult so you’d like me to be quite slowly, slowly, slowly so yeh I will give it 6 months and see how I feel.

## C

So it is a real culture shock for you there, even though...

## Claire

I am in the same programme team,

## C

exactly

## Claire

I genuinely thought everybody know me in the PROJECT TEAM, in the sentry and the sentinel anyway because I have worked quite closely with them for two years. Airseeker has always been a bit different, always treated themselves a bit different and I am now in there. I was like Ahh ok, there are a load of engineers who haven’t had a manager for a year and they have gone a bit feral, they really have gone feral, so there is an element of it, it could be a really good challenge but professionally it could also be career suicide if I am not allowed to effect changes. Cause I am associated with very bad practice right now, as long as I can change over the year/two years because it is not an overnight, it’s almost a culture change.

## C

So you think you need to change?

## Claire

OH God yeh I do, because if I continue with in the same vein as I have been in the last 2-3 weeks I won’t win friends and I won’t influence people. There has got to be another way to influence that culture change but me being just me as I am coming in I don’t think that will work.

## C

Can you expand on that can you tell me why, what is it that you are doing?

## Claire

I don’t know, whatever I am doing it is not right. I’ve got both back barrels in an e-mail. (Unintelligible) We have deployed to a location without proper procedures in place against our MOU with the Americans, so we need to sort this out. There is a whole load of people not wanting to take responsibility. And I have come in and pointed out quite a lot of failings in the system that need to be sorted out and I just get the impression that I have not handled it very well in that environment but I wouldn’t necessarily know how to handle it so yeh I have had quite a tough 2or 3 days at work going hmmm I think I am a bit better than a C2, which sounds really arrogant, but the job I could do, would be, is really challenging but I don’t know how to change the culture they have got to get to know me and I think it will take about 6 months to kind of win trust and I don’t think I will be able to make any headway in anything until I gain people’s trust.

## C

And you think that is what is missing at the minute, that they don’t trust you?

## Claire

I don’t know something is not right I just don’t know what it is. Whether it is my approach, whether I am too confident, whether I am “Well, it is quite simple what we need to do is do this!” or “that is not the right approach what you could do is consider this and I think that would help you” and that’s not working either so I am at a bit of a loss.

## C

So the direct approach, I am not trying to put words in your mouth but I am trying to understand..

## Claire

I could be being too direct be trying to run before I can walk in many people’s experience. My boss has already said to me “You are too keen Helen, you’re too keen, you’ll learn but you are far too keen”

## C

I do understand but I am trying to get it for the tape so it’s that difference the military environment and the civil service environment.

## Claire

Yes, Yes and it’s more of a shock than I thought it would be. I thought it would be a very easy transition but I am working with people who, who really aren’t rushing, they are fannying around over details that don’t really matter and then they are going down rabbit holes that really ought not to matter but suddenly they do and before you know it 3 weeks have been gone by and there is no slight hint of an answer whereas I want to get people in a room and shake them up and go for “God’s sake this is easy” and I think it’s that I think people are seeing me, civil servants are seeing me a Squadron Leader still. But I haven’t got the rank and they are waiting for me to calm down but I don’t think I can cause this is me. So whether or not I am suitable to be a C2 in the long run is, we will see.

## C

So what was it about the job that appealed in the first place?

## Claire

Safety, 37 hrs a week flexi time. C2 for Lincolnshire is a good wage and its what I know. Being a l manger if I can be allowed to be one, awesome, brilliant there are some really interesting there are some really good challenges and I am quite upbeat about all the things that need doing that could be done. How and a lot of it is managing stakeholders expectations because airseeker is very different it is all Americans. A really, really interesting and challenging post and the military chap I work for Nwil was like “God, we need you in that post they need a kick up the arse, they need this we need you to look at this that and the other” and then you get in the post and go ohh yeh emm oh I am not really sure they want that because changing what they do means more work, at the moment they but something on a GPC for the aircraft and it’s gone, it is physically handed over but no other accounting action is taken. So there is no traceability, there is no accountability we just spent nearly £50K on cameras. They are not issued to anybody. They are just gone and I am going “NAO, it doesn’t matter if we are American PSI or not you have just spent 50K of tax payers money the least you can do it issue it to the aircraft how the Squadron then mange it after that is down to them but we at least need to be issuing it to an equipment account, which is an inventory, or the aircraft, end of. But they have no nobody pointing out to the right way to achieve what they want to achieve. For a long time.

## C

So how does all of this make you feel, when all of these things are happening at work which compared to what … how you would deal with it when you were serving?

## Claire

I’ve got to deal with it a different way I just don’t know what that way is yet. I spent all Thursday night in absolute tears going oh my Lord, the guy who was a Squadron Leader who sent me both back barrels in an e-mail and copied my one star in. I was asking who is going to sign for the inventory, for the cameras, my C1 had failed to let me know, Oh Claire there is there is bigger issues here and she tried to explain them to me and I was like that is not an issue the answer is this, so she said it’s with Tom they won’t make a decision and I was backed into a corner and ordered to issue something. And if I hadn’t issued something it would have missed an operational flight, so I had to do something that was fundamentally wrong so in order to play catch up I said “Can you tell me who is taking on the inventory and I will sort everything out for you etc.” But I got a very overly emotional response back which really shocked me I wasn’t expecting that and I don’t know if I would have got such an emotional response back had a signed in Squadron Leader Claire Smith. I went to see the guy the next day and said, “I’m sorry we may have got off on the wrong foot it wasn’t my intention but clearly there is something that I am missing within all of this” he then filled me in on the background and I said but we are still going to need an inventory holder I am sorry and I don’t think there is anything, I will go away I will have a look at it I will do some research but I think the right thing to do is this. If you choose not to then I just need something to that effect. But it really upset so I spent most of Fri/Thurs night in tears going what have I done, what have I done? Hence what I am saying now. I need to give it six months, I need to get used to them, they need to get used to me I need to feel part of the team but I am not convinced right now it’s not for me in the long term. I don’t think I can be that mediocre and just accept that nothing is ever going to change because there is no will or desire to change it.

## C

And that is the difference you are feeling between the military env and the culture military and the culture you are experiencing?

## Claire

Yes. There is a problem. Gosh that is a toughie we are going to have to work really hard but we can get round this we can do something with it. We will take our time it’s not always going to happen overnight versus have I got any terms of reference, well no, I’ve hit a bit of a brick wall. I’ve had to go to another department they have not got back to me. That means I can’t get on any further, we can’t do this and ….. a very defeatist attitude before you even start and you think well you are not going to get anywhere because the language you use is just all defeatist and that is a real shock.

## C

You weren’t expecting it?

## Claire

No. I hadn’t really noticed it in sentry or sentinel so whether it is just pertinent to airseeker, whether it is just personality thing, whether my boss and I just need to understand each other a little bit better, I don’t know. But something is not right.

## C

You are feeling that frustration because essentially you are not holding the same position of authority that you were previously as a Squadron Leader?

## Claire

I think so, I think there is a lot of that as well. I have to go through my boss for everything I mean I sent an e-mail out and she cut and pasted it into her own e-mail sent it to the programme manager then I am overhearing my boss had done some really good work and I’m like yeh, great that’s because I fed her that information. That is because I am good.

## C

So do you think she is threatened?

## Claire

I think she is genuinely a nice person, I have worked with her over the last couple of years and that is not what I am sure I don’t think she is threatened I think she just sees me as a bit young and a bit silly and a bit too keen.

## C

Young! No offence, Young!

## Claire

She is not 50 yet, she is only 40’s herself but that is the impression I get “you’ll learn, you’ll learn Claire”.

## C

Really appreciate it, it has been really good a lot of what you are saying is similar to, to other people but there are different bits as well.

## Claire

Yeh, it will be interesting to see where I am in a year.