

Museum talk

[Start of recorded material]

Paddy Garner

Well thanks for coming. I want to make clear the first thing we're not here to glorify war and say what a fantastic thing it is and then watch you go off and do it. We're definitely not saying that. From our point of view for the most thing anyone that has been in the military will tell you it's all about your mates and that's as far as it goes, everything you do it's not for queen and country, you probably heard it on TV they're starting to catch up with it now, you're doing it for the bloke stood next to you or the bloke that's come along behind you, it's all about your mates. You make your decisions on a day to day basis that might affect their lives, you might just have a slack ten minutes and not bother to do a job and it will cost your mate a life and you live with the tremendous amount of grief afterwards. You can end up living with a tremendous amount of grief just by watching somebody and not being able to do something. I was a combat medic and you can't always get there on time, you do your very best and you get there and the fella's already dead or whatever but you

still live with the grief afterwards. Coping with it in the military is great because you've got your mates around you, it's a good coping strategy. If somebody goes no matter what the circumstances there's usually a bit of a drink afterwards it's the British way, it's what we seem to do. And you make a... what's the song *Lean On Me* we made that last for four hours, we couldn't find the end of the song really, we was drunk, but that's the sort of send off that we're looking for. If I go that's how I want to go, with me mates.

You come into Civvy Street you haven't got that same imperative there. With the military it's life or death because it's the blunt end of the what we call the [unintelligible 0:01:33] if they... if politicians can't get their way they send in the gunboat or whatever, it's life or death. There isn't that same imperative in Civvy Street but you can't turn that switch off. So you want to see a squaddie putting up a shelf he lines up so much kit, there's screws, there's different types of screws, there's things... if anything goes wrong into the next house he'll have some mortar and some bricks laid by, it would be [unintelligible 0:01:59] job and if you speak to the poor wife sitting on the side got to put

up with this and this is how a squaddie will do jobs or not do it at all.

Same with forms, if you've got paperwork in the military you phone up, you make one phone call and it's sorted. In Civvy Street if you phone on a Friday say after 12 they'll promise you something but you won't get any action, you've got to phone them again. I've worked in civvy jobs and I've heard people answer the phone. [unintelligible 0:02:25] works in child protection, answer the phone, yeah okay we'll do that now, go home and if it's really important they'll phone back on Monday. This is a family in crisis with kids. It's a big letdown from a military mind to come out and see how much effort people don't... people do put in effort but when people don't put in effort to do the job properly and let other people down to us it seems magnified. It might only be one person in a 100 but he has a squaddie mind and he'll probably think well it's everybody.

If you go to an organisation and you meet one person and that one person you meet really gets up your nose there's a bit of a thing there for blaming everybody for the same sort of mentality. That's what we find, we don't trust civvy street, we don't trust the systems. It's a bit of a shame

because a lot of us find difficulties in... this is how we live. A lot of us find difficulties in trusting things, so we go to an organisation for help and we get messed about with the paperwork and squaddies don't go back, that's squaddie pride.

We're working at the moment to try and push... [unintelligible 0:03:30] benefits for soldiers that anyone that's served more than one day for the British Forces, commonwealth, anyone helping out in whatever war they're entitled to benefits from all the military charities. I've been round [unintelligible 0:03:42] I've seen chaps there different shoes on, holes in the knees on his trousers, his shirt's wrong, he's trying to keep himself together and I say look mate we've got some stuff for you it's not going to affect any pension we can get... save it for those that need it. And you know this poor [unintelligible 0:03:56] got nothing. Save it for them that need it that's the battle we're up against. There's a lot of squaddies sitting at home they won't go out the house, they're frightened to go out the house. You know what it's like, if you know that there's some kids outside making a bit of a noise you know it's kids making a noise. If you've got your curtains shut and you hear that same noise your head fills in the gap, it's your sense of survival, that's

what's kept us going as a species. You fill in the gap, you go to the negative, that might be a threat to my premises and they withdraw further into the house. So you see squaddies haven't come out the house in a year or so. We're trying to get them out to get them involved, get them engaged. Because you've got blokes 25-30 housebound nothing physically wrong with them apart from the fact they've just fell off the edge of the system. It's not true of everyone, not everyone that comes through the military will suffer PTSD. There was a combat stress advert I don't know if it reached TV it was a bit... it was a little bit too gruesome probably. The guys that do 22 years towards the end they tend to be a bit nearer civilian life, you're not... well [unintelligible 0:05:01] left the army like last month, he was military right up till the end whereas [unintelligible 0:05:07] was sergeant major but his last couple of years he was like a [unintelligible 0:05:11] officer, so he was working [unintelligible 0:05:12] system he didn't find a problem. So it's not everybody gets it.

I've forgotten what I was on about. One of these I'm having a shower so I'll warn you now.

All [laughs]

There's nobody here under 18... oh there is [unintelligible 0:05:29].

All [laughs]

One of the things about military life is the sort of thing you see going on here, you get to play with rifles, these things, earphones, you get to play with this sort of kit on a daily basis, normal job. If you're a plumber, you work in IT, that's your normal system. In the army the military it's big bits of kit as your daily environment it's what you get used to. When they strip that away, well not they strip that away you decide to leave when you go, there's no... you've got a job you feel like it's not that important I'll become a postman maybe or whatever the job is it's not that important, no one's going to die if they don't get these letters whereas in my last job it was all about this. All action all the time, they've got to keep that sharp and on an edge... they're like a coiled spring ready to go.

So every now and again with a solidier goes into town has a few beers, he's been training for months and months and months waiting to deploy and it takes something silly to set him off, he wants to fight half of Aldershot. So then he finds himself a

prisoner in the system. If you're going to beat people up that's where you're going to go and we're not making excuses for the chaps. But there's a certain level of preparedness that people have to stay at, you've got to be right in your head and your body because when this sort of stuff kicks off it happens that day although it takes the government quite a few times... [unintelligible 0:06:54] nothing at all, they didn't have oil that was it. You don't find many squaddies get very political while they're in the system they're... they tend to stay... this is Northern Ireland on the plate there that's the boys from Hereford that was. Squaddies are not political, you can't afford to be political, we just do as we're told. Once you come out you start to see why you do things, you know the First World War started because Archduke Ferdinand and his better half were shot, if that was the case why were the first British troop men 52 Battalion stabbed at Basra, it was showing up way back then, it was always about oil. But obviously they can't concern themselves when they're doing this kind of job that's got to be our total focus.

When [unintelligible 0:07:48] you've got to be a couple of degrees off and you can put a really big round through somebody's house you're not going to get many smiles for

that. Your eyes have got to be totally focused on the job, you cannot afford to have anything in the background hassling you, an unpaid poll tax bill, things like this. It can jump out your mind, you might only owe a tenner but if that tenner carries on and carries on, silly little things like that will affect people. The worse thing... you've seen probably some of the films one of the lads gets a day job, I've seen quite a few people get these and one or two have took what they thought was an easy way out. The military... they're really good, they do protect us from civilian street... civilian life in so far as the bills, unsolicited mail, we don't get any of that. Up until recently when you were hungry you just went and ate, now you've got to pay for each meal. You've got 17 year old or 18 year old lads that come here and they'll get the wage and they'll... I'm a man now I'm in the army so they'll obviously go out for a beer with the boys as you do but they don't know about budgeting. So now for the second two weeks of the month they've got no money left for food, you've got to buy it each time, it's not given to you for free you've got to buy it first.

Defensive cutbacks and such like, I don't want to get political here. If we need a military we need a military, if we don't we

don't, you should say knock it on the head. You're always going to need something for the lads to do. In other societies there are... there's a ritual where you go from boy to manhood. I think we've decided over here it's get somebody to pregnant, to drink ten pints, that I think that is our ritual for manhood. You'll probably tell me I'm wrong but other societies/places they'll go out and kill a lion, I'm not sure yet dad I've still got some Lego I haven't opened last Christmas. You've got to be a man here go and get the lion yeah but dad you know what it's a big step. Other people appreciate what they've got to go through to be a man, over here we don't. So when you get the young lads going in there sometimes and that's... beer is our cultural letdown I think, it's good that we've got it but there should be limits. A lot of the time some of the lads when they've left the military... they come back from operations like Iraq that one, come back from ops and we sit round a table and you have a debrief with a beer. And that... the sergeant major will come up and say right you've done that back to work. Civvy Street you all meet up, you sit round having a beer what we haven't got is sergeant majors telling us what to do, it's got to come from within. And you get used to being... I'll wait another ten minutes if they want to do the job they're going to go

and do it. It doesn't happen. So sometimes the lads, really fit lads quite intelligent well trained professional, doing nothing with their life and some of it is because they haven't got that... the same management that they used to. I'm not a psychiatrist or psychologist but I've met so many lads now with the same kind of thing, you tell them what is about civilian... why are you a computer specialist and the guy used to build radars for the navy? Starts off with a box of parts and decide what went where himself. He's achieving nothing because he's... he hasn't got that imperative, that service life imperative. They can train ya to be a soldier but they don't train ya to be a civilian. When you do your basic training I bet that was quite scary when that happened.

All [laughs].

They trained... they've got to train you away from your sense of self preservation. This big bang next door now you've got to move away from it in case it happens again because bangs can be dangerous generally. In the military you've got to go sort it yourself because you are the police force, you are the fire brigade, you are the ambulance, you are everything. So if you hear a noise it's your training to go there to

do whereas as a civvy you wouldn't really want crowds of people flooding in because people are going to get hurt.

I'll hand you over to Vinod, Vinod's experience [unintelligible 0:11:47] if I want to join the army, obviously not now I'm too old, if I want to join the army I go up the careers office and I sign my name and providing I haven't killed anybody I'm in the army. [unintelligible 0:11:56].

Vinod Shrestha

Thank you Paddy. Good afternoon and [unintelligible 0:12:22] thank you for giving me an opportunity to come down here and speak, where I've been, what I've done and how I went through in the army. I only realise what I was... what I will be talking about here when I had an email from Sarah the other day, didn't know exactly know what to speak. And when I realised that it's about the war, trauma and stress of things. To be honest Ghurkhas don't go through trauma, they don't go through stress. I don't know, probably we are built up like that, we are trained like that but we have been in the British army for over 200 years now and there is hardly any Ghurkha soldier with trauma or stress. But having said that in my life, in my 22 years in the army I saw

my family going through trauma which I never thought of until I realised when I finished my six month of touring Afghanistan and when I arrived at my house and saw my wife so thin and losing almost 12 kilo of her weight really put me back. So what I'm trying to pass the message here is Ghurkha soldiers will not be having any trauma whatsoever but it could be affected to the families as well. Going back to the time when I joined the British Army back in 1990 it was a great privilege, a great day for me to join in the army. Obviously my father, forefather served British Army and I wanted to do the same and I wanted to do follow in their footsteps but I didn't join the army to go in war or to fight with someone, I joined the British Army simply to wear a very nice suit.

All [laughs].

Honestly, but that didn't last long. When I joined the army obviously when you get something you don't go after that, you change your ambition, you change your interest and hobbies. But joining the army was a life changing moment for me. Obviously joining British Army is not easy as the country [unintelligible 0:15:20] from here, you go to the [unintelligible 0:15:22] Centre and they sign a piece of paper and

they go to the selection and it's just a very easy process. But for the Ghurkhas it is very hard, there will be hardly less than 100 vacancies and there will be 7,000 people turning and the selection process is to carry 75 pound on your back, it's not in a bag it's in a basket, upon the basket and you have to climb up the hill which is about four miles like that. That is one part [unintelligible 0:15:55] I'm talking about and we go through the academic side of life, we go through the medical side of life, we go through rigorous fitness tests, even we have to fight with my fellow friend to knock him down to get me appoint and get into the army. However, that two weeks of training session was worth for me to get up to here where I am now today.

I joined 1990, started my life with the Queens Ghurkhas Signals a part of Royal Signals because I was good at education and my results were better, I was given a place into a radio operator and then I started my career through radio operator work on various telecommunications sector including [unintelligible 0:16:54] detachment and managing a [unintelligible 0:16:57] troop - when I'm talking about troop it's almost about 30 to 40 people. So I completed almost 22 years, within 22 years I had a privilege to serve the queen

further more abroad like in Bosnian conflict, Iraq conflict, Afghanistan and I'm very lucky that I'm here and standing with all body parts intact. And saw my [unintelligible 0:17:28] friend just beside me into pieces and I went through almost a week or two just being sad and then you see that trauma or what but it was sad, I didn't feel at all while I was there. Looking at the people, Afghani people they would want us to get out of their country but I didn't see the political reason behind. We were just following orders and putting our life into risk hoping that country will be better one day. But once again for every soldier we wait for that six month to complete. We wait our life to be secure, safe and that come. And as I spoke earlier that I want to realise how my family were suffering, how my wife was suffering. And then only I could feel the other families when their husband go to operation like Iraq and Afghanistan. And up until this Afghanistan conflict the Ghurkhas were I think... used to think that we are immortal, we couldn't die, the enemy couldn't touch us. Obviously Ghurkhas were in World War One, World War Two, not many loss of life, lots of VCs, Victory Cross not loss of life.

We went to Falkland War nobody died rather Argentinean run away hearing the

Ghurkhas are there to chop their head and make a soup of their head so they run away with that fear they won't be having head when they go back home.

So after Falkland there was bigger gap in conflict that our country was involved and the Bosnia took off, none of the Ghurkhas were even injured in that conflict. And Iraq none of the Ghurkhas... we went with the Americans at the front line [unintelligible 0:19:38] the defence but also none of the Ghurkhas lost their life. Having said that there was one Ghurkha, Queens Ghurkha engineer's [unintelligible 0:19:50] when he was clearing the barn and then he was caught into explosive. That incident was a moment when Ghurkhas came to know widely in the public because there was some cases in relation to how the Ghurkhas were treated because in that incident a Queens Ghurkha Engineer officer and [unintelligible 0:20:20] were... loss life. And then these two soldiers were treated differently and that was the moment when Ghurkhas really came into the public eye. And I will come back on this point later in my conversation.

And then Afghanistan... sorry... yeah Afghanistan has been a major operation for the Ghurkhas losing almost seven, eight so

far. And within my time when I was there back in 2008/2009 within the first month I lost two of my colleague [unintelligible 0:21:05] and [unintelligible 0:21:07] losing them beside me was really a shocking moment for me. Obviously hearing that over the radio for my wife was even more shocking because again I only felt that when I saw her after accomplishing my tour that... what... how... what kind of environment or hell she'd been through.

And then after Afghanistan I didn't see myself taking anymore part into the operation anymore because I was nearly at the end of my 22 years. I was very thankful to god either Hindu god or Christian god or Allah that he keep my life safe and secure. And then it was the last two years of my life where I slowly transited to a civilian. Obviously in a perspective of a soldier living in that environment for 22 years never integrating with the civilian, never knowing what kind of obstacles, never being able to claim any benefits, never being able to speak in a community like this is very hard, is very stressful and depressing in one sense.

For the last month or so I'm quite fortunate to come in contact with Veterans Contact Point, this Veteran Contact Point is really

important that simply integral part of the community. Obviously veterans and the civilians... sorry veterans I mean, military personnel and civilian are two people with different mindset, we are grown and groomed to take life and this you know what you do. But when we come to integrate with civilian we find ourselves very hard to integrate, either you don't understand what we are trying to say or what we are trying to do, either it is too much for me that I've been following order and this is the time you do something. So for last month or so it has been really challenging for me but I'm quite lucky to go through the Veteran Contact Point meeting same people like Paddy and the other... who are well before than me settled and understood what and how to tackle. And I'm having a bit of guidance like for the children in you do this and that and you expect this and that, it's not like in the army where you die for your buddy, where your buddy take of you if you lose your leg or lose something or you have a problem, this is a complete different board game.

Having said that I'm managed to secure job with the veterans related job once again, the job I'm doing is very worth for me. At this moment what I've found is within... within this country there are lots and many

veterans who have offended due to the fact they're not able to integrate and they're taking that physically and getting into offence and prison and custody. And having a background from there I'm now working with these veterans to bring them into understanding and develop their skills and get them into the employability or employment. I'm very lucky to do this job for them and as you can... as you have seen the photo clip there that is basically my whole lifespan from the foothill of Nepal all the way to British Army and enjoying my life to the full and very fortunate that I'm still intact.

[End of recorded material]