

CONFESSIONS OF A MILITARY PSYCHOLOGIST

Kate Haysman became a military psychologist almost by accident by way of Zoology and a thesis on 'The Antagonistic Behaviour of Cows'. She only accepted a job with the Ministry of Defence as her father had promised to pay for a holiday if she got a job before her finals. The MOD has employed military psychologists since the Second World War and when Kate joined in 1970 there were 120 of them involved in selection, training, job allocation and resettlement. Today there are only about 20 military psychologists working directly for the MOD, though similar work is done within other defence establishments. Kate gave the Faringdon Peace Group a fascinating account of her work at their April meeting.

As an occupational psychologist (rather than clinical, educational or sports), Kate was concerned with people's experience at work – environment, training, counselling and the interaction between human and machine.

She was involved with RAF selection tests for pilots, trying to identify those who would not succeed. Attitude and motivation proved to be more important than personality or aptitude but it was very difficult to predict. Nowadays fast jets are highly computerised and pilots require different capabilities – less physical strength but more quick thinking and multi-tasking, making the job more suitable for women. Kate found she had much more respect and cooperation after she herself had been up in a fast jet and managed to walk away afterwards!

In the late 70s Kate was part of a study to predict when RAF Officers would leave the forces – after 16 or 30 years. This resulted in the 'Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey' (AFCAS), which now goes out to all service men and women once a year as well as spouses and partners and reservists. The information from this survey, gathered over many years, acts as an early warning system for future problems and helps shape policies in the armed forces. There are so many surveys nowadays – many are designed, distributed and analysed by websites but lack the human thought necessary to interpret the results correctly.

Kate's interest was in human communication, particularly non verbal – facial expressions and body language - but these play no part in our modern communication via machines, so misunderstandings are likely. Emoticons had to be introduced to give an idea of the tone of the comment.

All are welcome to the next Faringdon Peace Group meeting about people from Oxfordshire going to fight in the Spanish Civil War. Weds. May 4th, 7.30pm in the Friends Meeting House, Lechlade Road.