

Dear Skylarks,

First period this morning we will do a bit of listening work around things to do with the army. Simon has recently joined Pilgrims on the IT front and used to be in the army.

The army is, in some ways, perhaps the Cinderella of the three fighting services. Traditionally the Navy called itself the Senior Service more nobility joined its officer corps than ever went to the army. From the beginning the Air Force required men of better training and higher intelligence than were needed on the ground.

Of course things have changed as the army itself has become very much more technologically advanced and so has needed to recruit a higher calibre man (or woman).

The British army has been professional only since 1960, when the last mass enlistment happened. Until 1960 all young males had to do what was called National Service. I was in the first batch of those who were not conscripted and we felt very odd: on the one hand we were delighted to escape square-bashing and boredom over an 18 month period, but on the other we were in some way ashamed of not being called on to do our duty. To add to this uneasy feeling of ours, University teachers were right pissed off to be dealing with raw, 18 year-old puppies, straight out of school, where before their sophomore classes had contained 18 year old girls and boys of 20 who had somehow cut their teeth in the ranks of the army. Some might even have seen active service in one of Britain's many colonial wars. The teachers were upset at having to deal with immature lads, rather than focussed young men.

How male a world is the UK army today? How do the women who join up fare? How sexist is the army? Can women usefully contribute to this world of sanctioned murder and brutality? Who joins the army today? Why do people join up? What are the long terms benefits of joining up? Is the army less class-ridden than it was? How big is the social gap between the officer's mess the sergeants' mess and the mess where the rank and file eat?

These and many more questions may get answered during Simon's talk.

Enjoy.! *

* this American form would have been quite incorrect say ten years ago in UK English. We would have felt obliged to use the reflexive form. This is no longer the case and you will frequently hear "Enjoy!" without an object.

Mario