

## What is your current job title?

Operations Training Manager.

### Before working with Star, you served in the Armed Forces. Can you tell us a bit about your role in the army?

I was a musician in the army, playing saxophone. It was a full time job and we would play most evenings and weekends, dependent upon demand. Functions and events were both military and civilian and included extensive travel. I was fortunate enough to visit a great deal of Europe; Germany, France, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Italy and places further afield, such as the USA. During my service years I also briefly served as a medical assistant in Northern Ireland and tours of operation during the first Gulf conflict in 1990/1991.

### When and why did you decide it was time for a career transition?

After 18 years of playing the saxophone and supporting the battalion in operational zones I decided it was time for a change. I had to get away from continuously being in life threatening situations and just needed a change of environment. I was proud of everything I had achieved in the Army but felt there must have been something else out there for me to put my mind to. I was looking for a new challenge that would bring a total change and long term career potential. Let's face it, refrigeration is all around us and something we take for granted. There will always be a need for refrigeration engineers.

### Playing saxophone is very different to what you are doing now with Star – how did this career move come about?

I was very lucky in that it was actually fate that brought me to Star. I knew Richard Sawbridge who at the time was a service engineer with our Bristol office; he subsequently progressed to become Star's Southern Operations Director. In early 1996, Richard told me about a potential opening for a trainee engineer position as Star looked to open a new office in the Oxford area. This coincided with the time that I was beginning to consider a change of career. I was interviewed for the job and was subsequently made an offer. I'll never

# Q & A



## DAVID BARTLETT RESETTLEMENT STORY

forget that I left the army on Thursday 28th February and entered into my new engineering job the very next day (yes a Friday)!

### Had you always shown an interest in refrigeration?

Not at all! Before joining Star, all I knew about fridges was that they were a box in your kitchen that kept your food and drinks cold! It didn't matter; Star has a great support ethic and training programme that taught me everything I needed to know about the industry and I continue to learn to this day. I had never thought of myself as a future refrigeration engineer, but you just never know where life will take you.

### What skills were you able to carry over from your role in the army to your career with Star?

I learned a lot about commitment and being dedicated to the task at hand in the army, and I was able to bring these essential traits with me to Star. I also learned that it's important to always make good of an opportunity and to have the attitude to want to make things happen, and these were especially useful for me when starting off at Star.

### What were the biggest changes you noticed when you moved from the army to Star?

With the army you were always in a very controlled environment that was tightly managed, due to the often dangerous situations you would be in or be near. When moving to Star, I had to get used to being more independent. As an engineer you are allocated works and expected to deliver. You are still part of a team but often find yourself out there alone with deadlines to work to. This means solving problems yourself and having self discipline to carry out tasks in the time provided.

### You started off as a trainee engineer at Star but you are now the Training Manager, so you have progressed quite a bit! How long did it take you to move onwards and upwards at Star?

It took me about 6 months to progress from "trainee engineer" to "refrigeration engineer." Star's staff are extremely knowledgeable about what they do. Star Refrigeration is highly renowned for innovation and for their pioneering technological developments across the world. With an award-winning engineering team, I was confident I was in good hands and was going to learn from the best.

I continued to develop my engineering skills over the course of a further 3 ½ years, and then in August 2000, an opportunity for Oxford Branch Manager came up. After some very careful consideration, I decided to put my name forward. I was subsequently notified that I had been successful, so took another huge step and managed the Oxford branch for 15 years.

In 2016, our previous Training Manager, Jeff Little, retired and the company was looking for a replacement. I was attracted to the role as I had taken an interest in the professional development of apprentices and engineers recruited into the Oxford team. During my employment as Branch Manager I became involved in carrying out F-Gas assessments at the Oxford branch; I became a qualified assessor for the City & Guilds qualification and found my experience with training and understanding of engineers helped.

So, I tried my luck once again – and it paid off! There are many different possibilities within a company that go unnoticed from outside. Many of my colleagues at Star who also served in the armed forces are now refrigeration engineers, commissioning engineers, service controllers and project managers.

### What advice would you give to anyone who is switching from a career in the army to one in a completely different industry such as refrigeration?

My advice would be to approach any new opportunities you are given with an open mind. Take me, for instance – 24 years ago I never would have believed I would be where I am today, but that is because I was open to the idea of starting fresh in an industry I was unfamiliar with. It's not difficult at all to educate yourself on the fundamentals of refrigeration, what with the endless resources on the Internet.



Star has an eLearning website with courses ranging from basic refrigeration to pressure/strength testing (probably one of the most dangerous tasks within the industry), and all our engineers and apprentices are enrolled on all the courses for free upon joining the company.

I would also advise to always show commitment and ambition, both to your training and to your role in general. The more committed you are to the initial training offered to you, the quicker you can progress. With the right attitude, you can achieve anything.

**What tips can you give to your job seeking ex-colleagues?**

These days when searching for employment a little good fortune can go a long way. It has often been said “It’s not what you know, but who you know.” If I hadn’t met the right person, I wouldn’t be where I am today. It is likely I would have come out of the army and gone into another uniformed profession; a prison officer or security guard. Employment fairs like those laid on by CTP are crucial.

They are a fantastic opportunity for both serving and ex-military personnel to have a chance to meet the right person who will kick start a new career and new life – you just need to come along with an open mind ■



David, bottom row, first from right.

Star Refrigeration are the leading industrial refrigeration contractors in the UK. We provide services including new equipment/installations, maintenance, service, spares, retrofits and consultancy.



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David Bartlett - Operations Training Manager

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