

Lt Cdr Keith Wren

School: Keswick Grammar, Cumberland.

The Headmaster of Keswick School (Major JE Thompson RM) suffered a sense of humour failure when, in **1962**, I left school on my sixteenth birthday, and prior to taking GCEs; I then entered HMS GANGES as a Junior Seaman just three weeks later. (GANGES **1962-1963**)

1963 – 1965 HMS BERWICK (Captain RKN EMDEN DSC – Captain D 21st Escort Squadron). Singapore based 1963-64 during the Indonesian Confrontation; experienced detached duty in the Malaysian jungle with 2nd Scots Guards.

1965 – 1966 HMS BARNARD, Boom Defence Vessel, (Lt Cdr P McCarthy) Greenock based, working the west coast and islands between the Clyde and Loch Ewe. Frequently involved in the 'all-hands-in' evolution of coal-ship - not to mention bunker trimming at sea.

1966 -1967 HMS EXCELLENT for Gunnery FC2 courses and GCEs. Selected as potential Upper Yardman (UY) candidate for officer. In **1967**, as a Leading Seaman, acted as navigator in MFV 1056 carrying Royal Marines taking passage from Harwich to Carlingford Lough, Northern Ireland; remained in NI until the return passage several weeks later.

1967–1968 HMS CARYSFORT (Cdr RJ BATES) Gibraltar Guardship, Beira Patrol, Far East station. Pier-head jump from the middle of the South China Sea back to the UK for the AIB!

1968-69 September 68 entry to BRNC as SL UY (X); DTS in HMS TENBY (Cdr Robin Hogg)

1969 NORPED - Joint Service exped' organised by the Royal Marines to the Jostedalsbreen icecap and the Hurrengane mountains of Norway. Although ostensibly there for a glaciological survey our particular team (1xRM; 1xRoyal Tank Reg't; 1x RAF & self) was released to indulge in some serious rock, snow and ice climbing for three weeks; most exhilarating.

1969- 1970 HMS GRENVILLE (Lt Cdr David Whitehead) - Mid's year and Board.

1971 HMS EXCELLENT for 11th of Gunners Course

1971- 1973 HMS HERMIONE (Cdr DJ McKenzie) – G2/Master Gunner
Home waters + Portsmouth refit - Refit Liaison Officer.

1973 – 1976 HMS MERMAID (Cdr Jim McPhee & Cdr Roger Heptinstall) - Gunnery Officer. First of Class trials and refit, followed by Singapore as Five Powers Defence Agreement ship. Stationed off Vung Tau during fall of Vietnam and evacuation of Saigon.

1976 – 1978 Staff Gunnery Officer to CMCM/CFP Rosyth; sea-riding and work-ups with considerable emphasis on board-and-search for Operation Grenada, Northern Ireland. Time with the Royal Marines in Belfast, Londonderry and Carlingford during the troubles. Selected for transfer to a permanent commission on the Supplementary List

1978 – HMS DRYAD for PWO 27 Course.

1979 – 1980 RAN Exchange. HMAS VAMPIRE (Cdr Rod Taylor). PWO (A), later PWO (U). Subsequently also took on role of 1st Lieutenant. VAMPIRE loitered at the Ground Zero point in the notified impact area to witness the Chinese long range ICBM test firings in the western Pacific Ocean. The Chinese became a trifle emotional about our presence.

1980 – HMAS Melbourne PWO (A) – Conducting flying training/exercises in Australian waters and the Southern Ocean. (A4 Skyhawks & S2G Trackers)

1981 – 1982 Australian Department of Defence as Gunnery Trials and Assessment Officer, including the US-built Charles F Adams class DDGs, and also weapons systems acceptance analysis of the new Oliver Hazard Perry class FFGs. Conducted airborne trials of proposed new AA target systems (with the perks of having the sole use of a leased executive Learjet for a couple of weeks). Developed a desk-top software system for the analysis of Medium Range 5"/54 and 4.5" gun performance.

1981 Exchange service period extended at the request of RAN – which later caused me to miss the Falklands. Selected for promotion to Lt Cdr. on the Supplementary List, March 82.

1982 – 1985 HMS CAMBRIDGE Head of Training Execution and Range Safety Officer during live firings, with an average of thirteen classes under instruction each week. Responsible for vetting bidders' responses to MOD(N) Invitation To Tender (ITT) to industry for a new Range Control suite, and in the selection of the resultant system. Retired from Active List March 85

1985 – 1988 SULTAN OF OMAN's NAVY on Contract. (CSON - Rear Admiral Hugh Balfour) Staff Officer (Warfare). The Iran/Iraq war, particularly around Oman's Musandam Peninsular and the Straits of Hormuz, rather caught our attention. Authored much modified equivalent of Fighting Instructions/FOTIs and conducted associated validation trials and exercises. **1986** Loaned to HMS FEARLESS (3 Commando Brigade) as Liaison Officer for major joint UK & Oman exercise Saif Sareea.

1988 – 1991 FERRANTI - Operational Evaluation Group (ORG) - One of the two lead design engineers of an Artificial Intelligence (AI) software system for ARE Portsdown, plus another AI/KBS system concept demonstrator and associated test harness as part of the UNISYS Consortium bid for the proposed NATO Standard Frigate Programme. This latter role involved prolonged visits by the two of us to the lead contractor - McDonnell Douglas Aircraft Corporation, St. Louis, USA - for the purpose of instructing the MacDac software engineers, and demonstrating the system to the denizens of Capitol Hill and The Pentagon.

Baled-out of Ferranti early **1991** when the writing appeared to be on the wall for both the company's finances and the future of the NATO Frigate programme.

1991 -2003 - Civil Aviation Authority - National Air Traffic Services (NATS) West Drayton as a Senior Software Engineer; employed as Head of Group. Responsible for Programmes Management of NATS Software Systems for UK air traffic control; sat on the Configuration Control Board. Later the role expanded to embrace the LORAL/IBM National Airspace System for the New En-Route Centre (NERC) at Swanwick. Also involved in the requisite Due Diligence for the Partial Privatisation of NATS and the associated split from the CAA.

Left NATS in **2003** at the age of 57 years to redirect focus and effort into refitting a commercial ship which my wife Ann and myself had bought in France in 2001. The vessel, VIRUNGA, was lying in a yard in the Netherlands awaiting a complete rip-out, re-build and electrical, liquids and hydraulic systems upgrades, while the hold, plus an associated new-build superstructure, was to be fitted-out to provide much of the new accommodation space. A much larger replacement wheelhouse was also to be built.

She was a former Rhine general cargo vessel, originally 38meters (125 feet) l.o.a. but cut-and-shut at the after end of the hold to reduce her to 28.5 meters (93 feet) l.o.a. to fit the smaller French locks. Her empty displacement was to be 184 tons after fitting out and ballasting.

The refit took two years. When finally completed, and we had finished HATs, SATs and a long shake-down around Friesland, we took passage south to spend the next few years gallivanting around continental Europe.

After eighteen years of ownership under the Dutch flag we sold her in **2019** and came ashore to live in Devon.



VIRUNGA post conversion. Website and gallery at: <http://goo.gl/UBXEXo>



Keith Wren who, despite finally coming ashore in his seventies and settling inland, is clearly unable to kick his binocular addiction.