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Service Story of Lt Keith Henley RN

I joined the Royal Navy at HMS *St Vincent* in March 1962, aged 15, as a Junior Electrical Mechanic 2nd Class. The Instructor officers, however, quickly ascertained that I was more academically able than my peers and wrote to my father to seek his assistance in convincing me to apply for the entrance examination for an artificer apprenticeship. The Schoolies guiding me pointed out that the entry examination was at least as comprehensive as GCE O' Level.



Junior Electrical Mechanic (JEM) Keith Henley at HMS *St. Vincent* (front gate) in 1962.

Source: Keith Henley - all rights reserved

Working in my spare time I was given six weeks and a pile of books plus occasional assistance from a colleague to attain the necessary level of competence. I passed the entrance examination with one of the highest marks and subsequently gained GCE O'Levels in Mathematics, Additional Mathematics, Physics and English Language at HMS *Fisgard*. I completed the first year of my apprenticeship at HMS *Fisgard* coming 2nd out of 124 entrants and moved on to HMS *Collingwood* where I obtained an Ordinary National Certificate (ONC) in Control Electrical Engineering. It was at this point that I rejected the opportunity of being selected as a General List Officer via the 'Upper Yardman' scheme and went on to join my first ship, HMS *Delight*.

The completion of my apprenticeship training then followed at HMS *Collingwood*. I was then drafted as a Control Electrical Artificer to HMS *Bacchante* and then HMS *Excellent*, where I first investigated the requirements for promotion to Instructor Officer, and in due course applied for day release to Southampton College of Higher Education to study for a Higher National Certificate (HNC) in Electrical and Electronic Engineering. On my first day I befriended an SD officer, Lieutenant Humphries, also from HMS *Excellent*, and he was a great help to me on advising how best to apply for my commission. After two years of study I obtained my HNC, achieving four distinctions averaging 96%. Due to these exceptional results, the Admiralty urged me to apply for an SD commission. However, I declined, but was later summoned to Admiralty Arch in London, interviewed and informed that I would be accepted into the Instructor Branch subject to successfully obtaining a Certificate in Education (Cert Ed) from Garnett College, Roehampton.



HMS *Collingwood* Apprentices Class Series 48, 1966.
Source: Keith Henley – all rights reserved

Whilst waiting for the year to start, I was drafted to HMS *Antrim* to maintain the Sea slug missile system and encouraged to carry out teaching activities onboard. This I happily did, concentrating on mathematics and was rewarded a couple of years later when one of my former students approached me at HMS *Daedalus* to thank me for helping him pass his Mathematics GCE O' level. He was then a trainee commissioned pilot.

I spent a year at Garnett College in 1976, passed the necessary exam and then spent six weeks at HMS *Excellent* undergoing management training as a Sub Lieutenant, which was the full extent of my officer induction training.



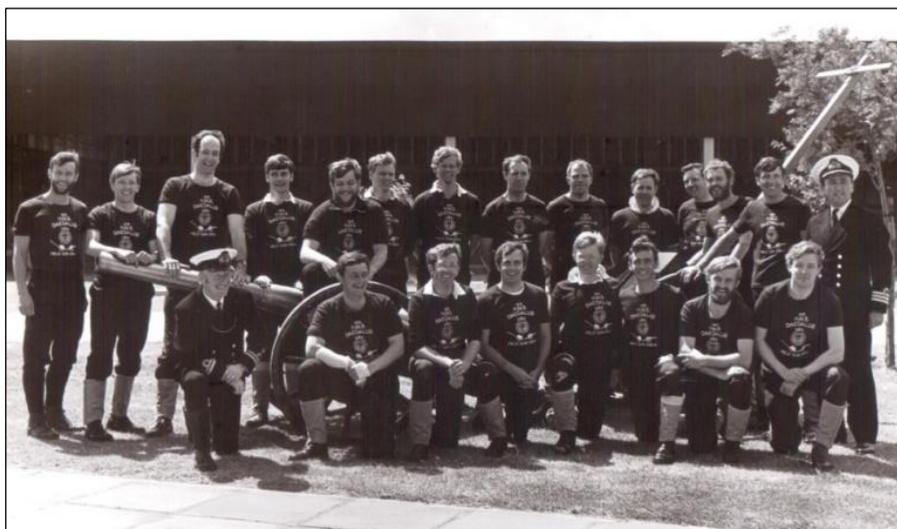
Sub Lieutenant Keith Henley Royal Navy in 1976.
Source: Keith Henley – all rights reserved

My first teaching post was at HMS *Daedalus*, teaching artificer apprentices and carrying out Divisional Officer (DO) duties. This was a most enjoyable task and I embraced the opportunity to take part in all the continuing historic sporting competitions between “tiffs” and other Royal Navy personnel. My immediate superior was Lieutenant Commander Peter Nightingale, who had also mentored me when I was an apprentice at HMS *Collingwood*. He always congratulated me, prior to lessons commencing, on my various sporting achievements and took time to advise me where necessary. On his departure from HMS *Daedalus* I was made temporary head of the Air Engineering School.



With seaman officers at the Royal Naval Divisional and Management Training School, HMS *Excellent*.
Source: Keith Henley – all rights reserved

Commander Michael O'Reilly was the Senior Instructor Officer (SIO) at HMS *Daedalus* as well as the Fleet Air Arm Rugby team selector. As an active Portsmouth United Services rugby player, I was soon inducted into the team as well as that of HMS *Daedalus*. Having competed in the Brickwoods' Field Gun competition as a rating it was with great enthusiasm that I encouraged others in our Instructor Officers' common room to participate. Participate we did and we subsequently won the officers trophy.



HMS *Daedalus* officers' Brickwoods' Field Gun winners. Source: Keith Henley – all rights reserved

During my time at HMS *Daedalus*, I studied for an Open University (OU) degree, aided by the credits gained through my HNC qualification. In 1979 I joined HMS *Neptune*, teaching in the Polaris School as a weapons instructor, principally training Tenth Submarine Squadron Commanding Officers and Weapons Systems Officers on the details of the missile warhead and projection system. Since the Polaris School housed a complete Polaris weapon system, my induction training was quite extensive, and included visits to the underground bunkers at Northwood, formal training at the Admiralty Atomic Weapons Establishment and completing a Principal Weapons Systems Officers course. Instructor Captain, later Commodore, Jack Howard, was the officer in charge. He had been a former Instructor Officer of mine too, when I was an apprentice.

The Polaris School was a highly secretive environment in which to work. This was quite strange at first, but one quickly became used to it. One day, the government's Senior Scientist came to the Polaris School to give us the news that the Daily Telegraph was going to publish an article detailing the workings of the warhead fitted to our missiles. The reason for doing this was that, if it wasn't done, the Russians would not believe that we had it! This was apparently essential knowledge to flag up the effectiveness of our deterrent!



Lt Keith Henley and family at the Polaris School, 1981. Source: Keith Henley – all rights reserved



Captain Naval Operations Command Systems (CNOCS) staff, 1982. Source: Keith Henley – all rights reserved

In 1981, I joined Captain Naval Operations Command Systems (CNOCS) at the Admiralty Surface Weapons Establishment (ASWE) on Portsdown Hill. My responsibility was to formalise the Computer Aided Command System (CACS) training for the new Type 23 Frigate. My colleagues were all senior officers from the seaman branch with little or no knowledge of computer technology or systems. Due to the operational aspects associated with CACS, I was put on a Weapons Staff course at HMS *Dryad*.

The Falklands war occurred during my time at CNOCS and I was placed on watches handling the signal traffic between the warships and the technical departments at ASWE. For various service-related issues it was during this time that I took the decision to resign my commission and leave the Navy, eventually going on to become the Director and General Manager of Mitsubishi Electric PC Division, formerly Apricot Computers. However, I enjoyed a long and eventful career as a Schoolie and have many fond memories of that time.