

Peter N Keeble, part of KEGS 1957 - 1964 sharing some of his memories and experiences.

1958 was probably the high point of my KEGS academic career! I was elevated to 1A after our first set of exams and in 1958 moved into 2T. In honesty I struggled to keep up, the more so on further promotion to 4R! By the time GCE O-Levels came around in the 5th Form (a year earlier than normal for those who took the "remove" track) I failed Latin and Chemistry, although I managed a pass in the latter with a resit. Latin, however, was written off as a lost cause! I struggled through the Maths 6th, and required a third year finally to achieve a single A-Level pass in Pure Mathematics in July 1964!

From the age of 13 I had been a member of the Air Training Corps and had long been keen to become a pilot. I flew "solo" in a glider at North Weald in December 1962 after an ATC gliding course in the depths of winter, and went on to obtain a Flying Scholarship which enabled me to complete a Private Pilot's License course on powered aircraft at Stapleford Tawney in the summer of 1963. I was awarded a provisional Cadetship at Royal Air Force College Cranwell but this was withdrawn after my academic "stumble" over the A-Levels! Consequently I was invited to join the RAF on a Direct Entry Commission instead and I signed on for Officer Training in December 1964 at RAF South Cerney in Gloucestershire.

My time with the ATC sped me through basic training and I was delighted when I was re-assessed and made a new offer to start a Cadetship at the RAF College in April 1965. I graduated in August 1967 as a Pilot Officer with pilot's wings. Further training took me to the Lockheed Hercules transports of No 24 at RAF Lyneham in Wiltshire in November 1968.

Flying at first as a copilot I was given a magnificent apprenticeship into the world of professional flying, with many opportunities to learn from "old hands" about the pleasures and the pitfalls of aviating! Memories of St Elmo's Fire running across the windscreens and jumping around the propellers at night in the middle of the Indian Ocean; flying to Thule Airbase in the north of Greenland where the air entering one's nostrils is so cold one can feel it freezing the moisture within; arriving in New Delhi after midnight where the temperature was **still** 43°C! My trips took me all over the world, from "milk runs" to Cyprus, Bahrain and Singapore, to "global trainers" to Hong Kong, New Zealand and Hawaii. Frequent visits to Canada, the USA and Central America, plus a few one-off tasks to South Africa, Zimbabwe, Libya and Australia, made this the job of a lifetime!

As a "babe-in-arms" I was afloat with my family, a history of sea-faring being passed on by my grandfather who had been a Thames Sailing Barge skipper like his father and uncles before him. In 1965 my father had been appointed the Director of the new National Sailing Centre in Cowes, Isle of Wight, after years of involvement with the CCPR in sail training. This had given me every opportunity to go boating in its many forms, from canoeing and power-boating to sailing. I had capitalized on this at Cranwell, becoming Vice Captain of Sailing and gaining my sporting "colours" while there.

Not content with just traveling with the RAF I applied for a place on a US/European Sailing Exchange scheme and in July 1970 flew to America for six weeks, living and sailing with people who have since become life long friends.

I returned home to marry Mary and start a life together which has led us around the world in the last 37 years. The first of our two sons was born in 1971 and the second in 1973. Between these two wonderful events I slipped quietly out of the baby routine and spent six months during 1972 learning the duties and responsibilities of aircraft captaincy. I returned to No 24 Squadron and found a whole new experience of flying from the Captain's seat! Still in the days of teleprinters and landline phones, sextants and sharp pencils, an RAF captain was at times "out of contact" and totally the master of his crew's destiny and the job became all the more exciting for it!

The Defence Cuts of 1975 forced the RAF to axe some 600 aircrew so I took the opportunity to resign and emigrate to New Zealand. In February 1976 we flew to Christchurch, NZ, and set up home in our new country, while I found my feet in the Royal New Zealand Air Force. Very soon I achieved a boyhood dream and learned to fly helicopters! By mid-1977 we had moved to Auckland where I took up my new job as a pilot with No 3 Squadron flying the ubiquitous Huey, best known for its massive presence in the Vietnam War. One of my instructors was a Vietnam veteran and, even as an experienced pilot in my own right, I learned a huge amount from him during my time in Auckland.

In 1978 I was appointed as the Commander of our Search and Rescue Detachment based back in Christchurch with responsibility for coverage of the whole of South Island, NZ. Within days of taking over I was involved in the rescue of a skier who had fallen some 3000ft down steep snow-covered slopes to end up astride a rock on the snowline! Below him was an almost vertical drop of about 4000ft so he was certainly glad when the helicopter arrived above him and we lowered our winchman to rescue him!

Sadly my father-in-law became very ill back in UK and we decided that for peace of mind we would have to return to England in 1979. To enable me to continue with helicopter flying I took a job with the Sultan of Oman's Air Force based in Salalah, Oman and doubled my rotary wing flight time in the next eighteen months! The desert presented many new experiences and was surprisingly varied, from sand dunes to deep wadis to mountain ranges soaring to 8000ft.

In 1981 I accepted an offer by the RAF to rejoin them as they built up strength once again under Mrs Thatcher's Government. I joined No 33 Squadron at RAF Odiham to fly Puma helicopters and was soon operating in such varied locations as Northern Norway in January, February and March each year, the jungles of Belize for six week detachments, and in Northern Ireland flying a specially equipped surveillance aircraft, also for six week stints.

After three years and a lot of time away from my family I requested a return to the relative stability of the Hercules fleet and arrived back at Lyneham in 1985. A short tour as a Captain with No 30 Squadron prepared me for my new role, from 1987, as a flight instructor and examiner with the Operational Conversion Unit, teaching others how to use the Hercules in its working environment. I was still teaching new captains

even as we flew in and out of the Middle East as part of the Gulf War campaign in 1991! By 1993 I sought a return to normal squadron life and rejoined No 24 Squadron as Senior Training Captain but it wasn't long before normality was again interrupted by becoming a "tanker captain", meaning I was now qualified to deliver and receive fuel during in-flight refueling manoeuvres. This led to a four month tour of duty in the Falkland Islands in 1994, and included air-drop resupply of South Georgia which was in itself a fascinating experience!

Over the years I had continued to sail and in later years had qualified as a RYA Yachtmaster Offshore. I spent more and more time running expeditions from the Joint Services Adventurous Sail Training Centre at Gosport, as well as with the RAF Lyneham Offshore Sailing Club. We sailed on the South Coast and in the Baltic in a selection of boats from 33ft to 55ft in length, with crews of mixed abilities and ages.

This all whetted my appetite for more involvement with boats and after some careful thought I resigned from the RAF in 1997, spent a year at the International Boatbuilding Training College in Lowestoft, and eventually found myself restoring my own 32ft replica Dutch sailing barge on a long-term project. The work is on-going but soon to be finished I hope! It would be nice to actually get back to what I love most which is being afloat and retracing some of the passages my forebears have made in the sailing barges of yesteryear!