Obituaries

Surgeon Rear Admiral Frank St. Clair Golden, OBE, MB, BCh, BAO, Dip Av Med, PhD

5 June 1936 - 5 January 2014

Francis St Clair Golden was born in Cork City on the 5th June 1936. He studied medicine at University College Cork, graduating in 1960 despite an interest in rugby (‘Colours’ 1958-61). After a year in the North Charitable Hospital, Frank went to London and spent 18 months in GP training. Following some friendly advice from his bank manager, he took a short service commission in the RN, joining as a Surgeon Lieutenant in 1963 and serving as MO on HMS JAGUAR before extending his short service commission to a permanent one. An outstanding career followed during which he served as: Consultant Adviser to the Medical Director General in Applied Physiology; Director of Naval Medical Research; Fleet Medical Officer and Medical Officer in Command of the RN Hospital Haslar. Frank retired from the RN in 1993 and joined the University of Surrey and then Portsmouth as Consultant Adviser in Human Physiology.

Almost uniquely, Frank managed to combine his naval duties with a successful scientific career. Whilst serving at RNAS Culdrose, he was involved in many air-sea rescues. It was the helplessness of not knowing how to prevent circum-rescue deaths that ignited his interest in physiology. In a subsequent appointment to the RN Air Medical School in Hampshire, he discovered, beneath the floorboards, a refrigerated pool that had been used after WWII to test aircrew immersion suits. So began a scientific career that spanned five decades providing new insights into the body’s physiological responses to immersion and cold exposure. In the early years of his studies he was frequently a participant in his own experiments. These led to improved techniques for the rescue and treatment of the victims of cold water immersion. His study of cold injury in the marines during the Falklands conflict was another of his considerable contributions to the understanding of thermal physiology.

Frank was awarded a Diploma in Aviation Medicine from London University in 1969. For over 35 years he hosted and inspired generations of students from the Universities of London, Sheffield and Leeds. Frank received a Ph.D. (Physiology) from Leeds in 1979 and published the last of over 70 scientific papers in January 2014. He never retired.

Frank’s voluntary activities were many, including being on the Executive Committee & Board of Management of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution and chairing their Medical and Survival Committee for 13 years. His distinguished career brought worthy recognition: the Gilbert Blane Gold Medal from the Royal Colleges of Surgeons and Physicians of London; the Pinkerton Medal from the British Anaesthetic Association; the Gold Medal from the Royal Life Saving Association (Ireland). He was also a Brother of the Order of St John and made Queen’s Honorary Physician. Frank was awarded an OBE in 1981.

But it is Frank Golden the man that most will remember: his honesty and humility, incisive mind and glorious sense of humour; a great raconteur, a man whose company and counsel one sought and which were never disappointing, a loyal and dependable colleague and friend. Frank Golden was a giant of a man in every sense; he will be missed by all who knew him. Many who never knew him will survive because of his outstanding work.

Frank leaves his wife Jenny, three children and five grandchildren.

Mike Tipton
Portsmouth 2014.
Surgeon Commander Thomas G Shields, RN, BSc(Hons), MB ChB, PhD, FRCP (Glas), MFOM

Tom was born on 3rd January 1941 on the small island of Greater Cumbrae, near the Firth of Clyde - where he also grew up - and retained his Scots accent with pride.

After graduating with BSc (Honours) in engineering, he studied medicine in Glasgow, graduating MB ChB in 1968. He married Dalys and they had a son and two daughters. For much of his 18 years’ service he was based at the Institute of Naval Medicine, specialising in underwater physiology and medicine, and was qualified as a Ship’s Diving Officer. He also undertook duties at the Royal Naval Scientific Service Physiological Laboratory in Alverstoke and the RN Deep Trials Unit. His collaborative studies there ranged from the use of special gas mixtures for 75m diving (with an early communication to this journal), through the study of safe decompression procedures to the use of oxy-nitrogen saturation in the treatment of severe decompression sickness. He subsequently gained his PhD in 1976. He also provided cover for some of the diving trials of HMS RECLAIM in Loch Fyne and later served in the saturation-diving vessel, SEAFORTH CLANSMAN. After retirement from the Navy in 1982, having reached the rank of Surgeon Commander, he undertook academic research and teaching at the Robert Gordon Institute of Technology (RGIT) in Aberdeen.

At that time Aberdeen was the international focal point for the North Sea’s busy oil industry and for some ten years his work at RGIT progressively analysed thousands of commercial dives on behalf of the Chief Diving Inspector of the UK Department of Energy. The aim was to identify realistic boundaries between safe diving and decompression illness, and these studies subsequently defined these boundaries of acceptable risk broadly for all operational depths of surface-orientated diving exposure. The impact and benefits of that work have been significant, worldwide.

As its President, he organised the 14th Scientific Meeting of the European Undersea Biomedical Society in 1988 as a packed 4-day scientific event in Aberdeen. Some who visited his house in Inverurie in those years would find that his excellent dinners were cooked over just a single gas ring - he was practicing for his subsequent years of single-handed sailing around the Mediterranean. From that activity and his associated over-wintering in Malta, he later retired to a small-holding in Greece, where he died in August 2013.

DHE, 14 Jan 14
Chief Nursing Officer Virginia Christabel Fisher RRC

Chief Nursing Officer Virginia Christabel Fisher RRC., Queen Alexandra’s Royal Naval Nursing Service, (QARNNS) died in hospital in Saltash, Cornwall on 19 December 2013. Known as Ginny, she joined the service as a Nursing Sister in 1967. Her first appointment was at Royal Naval Hospital (RNH) Haslar.

Ginny qualified as a State Registered Nurse (SRN) at University College Hospital and then undertook her State Certified Midwife (SCM) training. During her 24-year service in QARNNS she served at RNHs Haslar, Plymouth, Mauritius, Malta, Gibraltar, HMS SEAHAWK and on the Staff of SRA (SMS). She joined the permanent service in December 1974 and in 1976 was appointed as the Midwifery Superintendent at RNH Mtarfa, Malta before undertaking further nursing duties in Plymouth and Haslar.

Promoted to Chief Nursing Officer in November 1983 she was appointed Matron of RNH Gibraltar in May 1984 where she served for 22 months. In 1986 she became the Matron of RNH Plymouth prior to joining the staff of Surgeon Rear Admiral (Support Medical Services), SRA (SMS), in 1988, where she remained until becoming the Matron of RNH Haslar in 1989. She retired in 1992, having served a two year extension on the Active List.

In 1988 Ginny was honoured in the New Year Honours with the Associate of the Royal Red Cross (RRC 2nd class and in 1992 was honoured with the Royal Red Cross (RRC 1st class). Decorations awarded for exceptional services, devotion to duty and professional competence in British Military Nursing.

On retirement Ginny settled in Saltash where she enjoyed the country side, her cottage and garden and made many friends. For some years she helped with Meals on Wheels, and was occasionally on call for the Red Cross equipment store and also did some hospital driving.

Ginny was interned at Pentiddy Natural Burial ground at Pensilva in Cornwall, on 8 January 2014.
Surgeon Captain Ramsay Pearson, Royal Navy (1932–2013)

Surgeon Captain Ramsay Pearson, Royal Navy, died on 27 Nov 2013 as a result of an acute cardiac episode.

Surgeon Captain Pearson will be best remembered for his work with and support of the Naval diving community from the 1970s until his retirement in 1992. As Head of Undersea Medicine at the Institute of Naval Medicine from 1978 until 1984, he oversaw the development of the Royal Navy’s medical support of divers and diving incidents, with a particular interest in saturation diving. He was also committed to supporting the medical work of the Submarine Service, and in 1982 gained an MD from Durham University for his work on the occurrence and treatment of cerebral gas air embolism in submarine escape.

Ramsay Pearson was born in Washington, County Durham, in 1932. Christened Ramsdale Ramshaw, but always known as Ramsay, he was educated at the Royal Grammar School in Newcastle. He then went on to study medicine at Newcastle, qualifying in 1957, and joining the RN for his National Service in 1958.

As a Surgeon Lieutenant he had a number of sea appointments, including service during the First Cod War, and he also worked at the families’ clinic in Malta. He enjoyed Naval life greatly and was an enthusiastic cricketer. In 1962 he left the RN to join a General Practice in Waterlooville, but this did not work out, and within a year he was back in the Service.

Over the following 10 years, as a General Duties Medical Officer, Ramsay served in Singapore at RM SIMBANG, had a further appointment in Malta, and served in HMS GLAMORGAN and HMS VERNON.

At HMS VERNON, then the home of the RN Diving School, he developed an interest in divers and their medical problems, and this led to his next appointment to the Underwater Division of the Institute of Naval Medicine. By 1976 he was involved with the development of the RN’s saturation diving tables, participating in the trials in Panama City, Florida. He then went on to become the INM’s Head of Undersea Medicine Division and Senior Medical Officer Diving.

After promotion to Surgeon Captain in 1983, Ramsay was appointed to HMS DOLPHIN as the Staff Medical Officer to Flag Officer Submarines. Expecting this to be his last appointment, his Commission was extended to enable him to fill a vacancy in the Exchange Programme with the US Navy. He spent his final years in the Service as the RN Exchange Officer at the US Navy’s Medical Research Facility at Bethesda in Washington DC. He retired in 1992.

With his wife Margaret, a tower of strength over the years, Ramsay had a long and full retirement. He had a passion for music of the baroque and much enjoyed singing with the Froxfield Choir. His other interests included model railways, sport and crosswords. He and Margaret travelled extensively, often visiting friends they had made in the US.

Ramsay was a warm and generous man to friends and colleagues. He was very highly regarded by the RN diving community who recognised his exceptional commitment to the care of divers as individuals.

He leaves his wife, Margaret, with their son and two daughters, as well as friends and colleagues throughout the world. He will be missed.

Dr Donald Bruce  
Dr Bob Hanson

Notice has been received of the death of the following:

Surgeon Captain Peter Warren Head OBE, L/Q.H.S FRCS. RN (Rtd) 26 November 2013.

Surgeon Lieutenant Commander Alexander ‘Alex’ James Shearman RN 3 February 2014.

Any words in memory of them would be gratefully received.