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The Other Pope

The world renowned forensic engineer and designer of advanced wire ropes, Roland Verreet, sometimes referred to as the 'rope whisperer' or even the 'pope of rope' celebrated 50 years in the business earlier this month.



Roland Verreet

Having completed his studies at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering at RWTH Aachen University in Germany, Roland joined the family wire rope firm of Casar Drahtweil Saar, which was already well established as a manufacturer and developer of high quality specialist wire ropes. The business grew rapidly as the demand for higher capacity cranes gained pace, with German manufacturers such as Mannesmann Demag, Gottwald and Krupp.

Casar became well known for making high strength and anti-rotational hoist ropes that made it possible for crane manufacturers to develop ever larger practical cranes. Over the next 10 years Verreet and his team developed several revolutionary rope technologies inventing steel wire ropes with plastic infill, a technology still used today by most of the world's leading wire rope manufacturers.

The team went on to design the first steel wire ropes with compacted strands, which increased the breaking strengths by around 15 percent and enabled crane manufacturers to use smaller diameters, which in turn enabled smaller sheaves and hoist drums to be used, as well as gearboxes and motors, helping reduce the weight of a crane's overall reeving system as well as its counterweight. Few inventions have had such an impact on crane design.

While at Casar he also developed some of the world's first computer aided design software for designing and testing wire rope constructions. Casar was eventually sold to international investors and was **acquired by the global Wireco group in 2007**. It still produces a wide range of innovative wire ropes used all over the world.



Roland Verreet aboard the SSCV Thialf semi-submersible crane vessel operated by Heerema, for many years the world's largest crane vessel

In 1984, at the age of 34, Roland Verreet founded his own company - Wire Rope Technology Aachen, often collaborating with a friend, Jean Marc Teissier of Dep Engineering, France. Together they designed several advanced rope applications for projects such as the Space Mountain catapult at EuroDisney, Paris and developed several unique wire rope testing machines.

As a self-employed engineer, he continued to push the boundaries of what was possible in wire rope design. Inventing steel wire ropes with variable lay lengths used in deep shaft mining and offshore applications, which some consider his greatest achievement. He also developed the first automated visual rope inspection system and, his latest patent, a rope design which always touches the sheave with the same wire, ensuring ropes last much longer than conventional designs.

He went on to build a highly respected wire rope forensic consultancy business using his deep knowledge and experience of wire rope behaviour and mechanical issues, along with advanced forensic techniques he developed along the way, to investigate catastrophic or premature rope failures. Over the years he has gained a reputation for being something of a 'wire rope whisperer, and, as already mentioned often called the 'pope of rope'.

His website www.ropetechnology.com remains the Internet's most popular source of information on steel wire ropes. He has also penned several illustrated books on the subject.

Over the last 50 years, Roland Verreet has worked for most of the leading crane and equipment manufacturers as well as for high profile rope users like NASA and intends to do so for a few more years, in spite of being past the age when most people have left the workplace behind.