

# An 'Otago' home-coming

By Debbie Porteous

Melbourne: The commanding officer of *HMNZS Otago*, which was launched in Melbourne on Saturday, is no stranger to the provinces with which his new ship is affiliated.

Lieutenant-commander John Butcher (37) was born in Dunedin, grew up in Invercargill and attended the University of Otago before joining the Royal New Zealand Navy in 1989.

He said he was delighted to be appointed the first commanding officer (CO) of *Otago*.

"I recall the day I received the appointment," Lt-cmdr Butcher said.

"I quietly mused will she be named after the *Otago* or *Southland*? Of course, I am very much looking forward to taking her home into both Dunedin and Bluff to show the people of Otago and Southland their ship."

Looking up at *Otago* on Saturday Lt-cmdr Butcher said it was important for COs to try to get involved with the ship early, right from the building stage.

"There will come a day when we actually have to use her, and we need

to get to know the beast as soon as possible."

Although a date for commissioning the vessel was not known, he and most of the 35 crew would start training on the ship in Melbourne for a significant time before making the first voyage to New Zealand.

"I am elated. It is an honour to be the CO of *Otago* and an honour to be the CO of the first of a new class of ships and one that will be the lead ship of the new patrol boats."

Rapidly climbing the navy ladder, Lt-cmdr Butcher has served on most of the navy's ships and was appointed navigation training officer and fleet navigation officer in 2003. In 2005, he was executive officer of *HMNZS Te Kaha*. He was appointed a member of the New Zealand Order of Merit (MNZM) in the 2006 New Year's honours for his work as navigation training officer.

Earlier this year, he attended the United States Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, graduating from the naval staff college.

Lt-cmdr Butcher and his wife, Susan, live in Devonport, Auckland.



New command . . . The commanding officer of *HMNZS Otago*, Dunedin-born Lieutenant-commander John Butcher, stands in front of his new ship before its launch in Melbourne on Saturday.

PHOTO: CRAIG BAXTER