



'Otago' shows true colours at launching

By Debbie Porteous

Melbourne: With a flash of blue and gold, the New Zealand navy's newest warship, the 1600-tonne HMNZS *Otago*, slipped into Melbourne Port for the first time on Saturday.

As tribute to the ship's home port a blue and gold-striped sock covered the traditional bottle of champagne as launch lady, Dame Silvia Cartwright did the honours before a crowd of Royal New Zealand Navy and civilian dignitaries, including Defence minister Phil Goff, at ship-builder Tenix's Williamstown shipyard about noon.

A huge crowd of well-wishers cheered, the crew of the navy's new multi-role vessel, HMNZS *Canterbury*, which is also berthed at the shipyard, performed a haka and planes from the Australian Airforce Museum completed a fly-past, as the 85m vessel slid into the sea.

Official proceedings began with a fanfare from the Royal Australian Naval band, followed by speeches from the chief executive of Tenix, Robeter Alteri, Victorian Minister For Manufacturing and Export Andre Haermeyer, the New Zealand Chief of Navy, Rear-admiral David Ledson, and Mr Goff.

In a brief speech R-adm Ledson said he took great pride in the launching of the ship.

The occasion was a tribute to the many individuals who had put aside self-interest and dis-

tractions to come together to form and shape the inanimate bits of steel that made *Otago*, he said.

Those included people from Tenix, the New Zealand Defence Force, the Ministry of Defence and the navy, who had shared a dedication and passion for the project.

"It is an immensely memorable day for the ship — because, as a sailor, I can't resist giving the ship human qualities — a day on which the *Otago* tentatively kisses the environment that will be her home for many, many years," Rear-adm Ledson said.

Otago's launch also made clear the substantial progress being made on Project Protector, a very complex undertaking, which delivered fantastic value for money, he said.

Otago was built by Tenix Shipbuilders in Whangarei and Williamstown. The company also built the navy's frigates *Te Mana* and *Te Kaha* and has the contract to complete five more ships for it before 2008.

The ships cost about \$500 million altogether and are part of the project to introduce seven new ships to the New Zealand Defence force, including *Canterbury*, *Otago*, its sister ship *Wellington*, being constructed at Williamstown, and four smaller in-shore patrol vessels.

All ships will be commissioned before 2008 and will be operated by the navy on behalf of a number of New Zealand

government agencies, including Customs and Fisheries.

Otago shares its name with the rough-sea class frigate HMNZS *Otago*, which served between 1961 and 1983.

The original *Otago* was sent in June 1973 to monitor French atmospheric nuclear tests at Mururoa Atoll, as part of a protest by the New Zealand Government.

The type-12 frigate was decommissioned in November 1983 and subsequently scrapped in Auckland.

However, it is not only Otago people who are looking forward to seeing the new ship when it arrives in the South some time next year.

Southland honorary naval officer Lieutenant-commander Nigel Finnerty said, because the ship would be affiliated with both Otago and Southland, there was a lot of interest from Southlanders as well.

Many people had asked him if the ship would replace the frigate HMNZS *Southland*.

While it would not replace *Southland*, it was capable of doing nearly the same job and would have the same significance for people in the South, he said.

Otago, as it sits, is only the shell of a ship. It will be fitted out over the next few months and will be commissioned by the New Zealand navy in mid to late 2007.

No date has been set for its first arrival in Dunedin.



PHOTO: CRAIG BAXTER

Tales of the sea . . . Retired navy Lieutenant-commander David Humphrey, of Dunedin, chats with HMNZS Otago commanding officer Lieutenant-commander John Butcher, at the ship's launch in Melbourne on Saturday.

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