

HMS Edinburgh over and out



The last of the Royal Navy's fleet of Type 42 destroyers which have served across the globe for 40 years bows out of service today.

HMS Edinburgh's White Ensign will be lowered for the last time during her decommissioning ceremony at Portsmouth Naval Base, ending an era which began with the launch of HMS Sheffield in 1971.

The ageing Type 42s have gradually been phased out of service to make way for the successor Type 45s which are among the most modern and powerful warships in the world.

Among hundreds of guests at the decommissioning ceremony will be Lady Heseltine, HMS Edinburgh's sponsor and wife of former Defence Secretary Michael Heseltine, who launched the ship on 14 April 1983. Seventeen former Edinburgh Commanding Officers and dozens of Type 42 veterans will also attend.

Edinburgh's 270 ship's company will be on parade during the 50-minute ceremony and will be inspected by Lady Heseltine and senior Naval officers. RAF Typhoon and Hawk aircraft, together with a Sea Fury from the RN Historic Flight, will perform a flypast before the final lowering of the ship's White Ensign.

Edinburgh's Commanding Officer, Commander Nick Borbone, said: "It will be a poignant day for all of us associated with HMS Edinburgh. It is also a day of celebration when we remember the 40 years of faithful service that 'The Fighting 42s' have given, manned by dedicated men and women, proud to serve in this world renowned class of ship."

Built by Cammell Laird at Birkenhead, Edinburgh was commissioned in December 1985 – the 14th and final Type 42 to

enter service.

Her first deployment was to the Arabian Gulf in 1987, escorting numerous merchant ships safely through the region.

The following year HRH The Duke of York joined as one of the ship's officers, serving on board during a six-month round-the-world deployment.

In 1996 Edinburgh rescued the crew of a crippled sailing boat while on patrol in the Gulf. She despatched her Lynx helicopter to rescue all nine Pakistani crewmen from the vessel after it took on water in stormy conditions and eventually sank.

She took part in the second Gulf War in 2003, supporting Royal Marines ashore and acting as escort to the helicopter carrier HMS Ocean.

The following year Edinburgh deployed to the Mediterranean and was involved in Operation Active Endeavour, monitoring sea lanes as part of the war on terror.

And in 2008 during operations in the Gulf she seized a drugs cargo – stashed on board a sailing boat – worth several million pounds.

Edinburgh entered refit in 2010 and spent most of the following year in the South Atlantic. She returned from her final deployment – conducting security patrols across the South and North Atlantic – in March.

Type 42 air defence destroyers have been the backbone of the Royal Navy's fleet since the first – HMS Sheffield – was commissioned in 1975.

They have served on operations across the globe, including the Falklands conflict of 1982 and the Gulf War in 1991. As recently as 2011, HMS Liverpool was ordered to Libya as part of the Navy's contribution to NATO's naval blockade of the

country during its civil war. She supported the no-fly zone by controlling NATO aircraft from the sea, enforced the embargo on arms sales to the Gaddafi regime, and fired 111 high-explosive rounds against targets ashore.

Britain's Type 45 destroyers are the most advanced warships the nation has ever built and have already deployed operationally to the Middle East and across the Atlantic. Their mission is to shield the Fleet from air attack using the Sea Viper missile which can knock targets out of the sky up to 70 miles away if necessary.

The Type 45s can also be used as general-purpose warships; they have huge flight decks to accommodate helicopters up to the size of a Chinook. There's enough space on board to host a Royal Marines detachment up to 60-men strong.

As for the ship's company, they enjoy 'creature comforts' only dreamed of by their forebears: no sailor lives in a mess square for more than six people and there are no communal heads (toilets) or showers.

All Type 45s are based in Portsmouth and will serve until around 2040.