

## THE EARLY YEARS

It does not take long to see all of interest in St Helena and two days pretty well wore out the hosts. The next stop was Rio de Janeiro, surely one of the best visit ports in the world. The world famous beaches - Copacabana and Ipenema, the gorgeous girls in their skimpy targas (just a minuscule bikini really), the Corcovado and the great figure of Christ with arms outstretched, the bars and nightlife, and so much more. Some of the Ship's Company met Ronnie Biggs - the Great Train Robber - at the time mostly interested in cadging drinks.

The visit to Rio was the venue for the first change of command as Captain Oswald handed over to Captain Norman King. He arrived in time for the run home across the Atlantic via Recife with quick stops at Madeira and the Cape Verde islands for compassionate cases and a weekend in Gibraltar. After a period of maintenance the ship held a second families day before heading to the Aberporth Firing Range in June 1979 for the ship's first Sea Dart firings. The build up and preparations for a firing are lengthy and tense, quite apart from the difficulties of achieving a clear range, but after some false starts three missiles were successfully fired.



*Gunnery firing from HMS NEWCASTLE*

(Photo: Crown Copyright)

After summer leave, the Royal Naval Equipment Exhibition and some exercises, the ship was back at Aberporth for some more firings in September. It was there during a quiet Saturday afternoon at anchor off Fishguard that NEWCASTLE escaped a potentially disastrous catastrophe. Without warning the wind suddenly blew up and the ship, at anchor on a lee shore, yawed violently. Main engines and cable party were called for at the rush and as the cable officer ran on to the forecastle he was just in time to see the cable part. With no second anchor the engines were quickly started and ordered half ahead. NEWCASTLE escaped and steamed away to the safety of the Irish Sea to return the next morning to locate the anchor and cable from the seabed and collect 30 stranded liberty men from ashore.

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In November 1979 NEWCASTLE went to Portland for her first full period of Operational Sea Training having missed her first opportunity earlier in the year due to the problems with the controllable pitch propeller system. Flag Officer Sea Training (FOST) and his team rubbed their hands with glee. After a year in commission, two lots of Sea Dart firings, two exercises and several other tasks and duties the ship was finally in their clutches. The Ship's Company were a little apprehensive, particularly after the Staff Sea Check when the FOST staff compiled a huge list of all the things that the ship was doing wrong. Nevertheless the departments knuckled down with determination to put it all right and the Ship's Company eventually came away having learnt a great deal. But not before the ship suffered a further defect and had to return to Swan Hunters for repairs. That was fine but it was not easy to persuade an entire Ship's Company to leave behind the delights of Brown Ale and the wonderful hospitality of Newcastle to return to Portland in December for three more weeks of work-up.

### 1980

In early 1980 NEWCASTLE headed north for her first Joint Maritime Course (JMC) off the north coast of Scotland. This tri-annual exercise pitches ships against other ships and aircraft and is designed to hone war fighting skills. For NEWCASTLE JMC 801 also included Flag Officer First Flotilla's harbour and sea inspections of the ship to complete the process of working the ship up. After a busy and tiring exercise the ship returned to Rosyth for a debrief. Having secured in the dockyard in the early evening, the First Lieutenant, who never missed an opportunity for some fun or mischief, gathered together a team in order to celebrate what had been considered to be a good sea inspection, by rowing across to KENT, the Flagship, for a raid on their wardroom. Away went the team to find, perhaps to the relief of some, that the Admiral and all officers, except one on duty, were so worn out that they were all turned in!

Following a busy maintenance period the ship sailed for Exercise Springtrain and more Sea Dart firings. Uniquely the ship fired her missiles at Sea Slug targets launched by KENT. From there the ship headed to the West Indies and Belize Guardship duties. Visits included Bermuda, Fort Lauderdale, Belize, Vera Cruz, Grand Cayman, Barbados and Roosevelt Roads in Puerto Rico. Whilst away the ship won the Flcct Naval Gunfire Support trophy, giving rise to her nickname of the "Geordie Gunboat". It was also during this trip that the Ship's Company proved that the Royal Navy's newest destroyers could be used for water skiing!



*Bullet leaving barrel*

(Photo: Crown Copyright)

On 1 June 1980 the Third Destroyer Squadron was formed with D87 as leader. The top of the funnel was painted black and NEWCASTLE took on the mantle of leader of the first Royal Navy destroyer squadron for 20 years with five other Type 42s in the Squadron.

After her first docking period in the summer of 1980 the ship headed to Denmark and Finland. Early one Sunday morning in Aarhus NEWCASTLE was ordered to sail to intercept the brand new Soviet Missile Cruiser KIROV which was about to exit the Baltic for the first time. The Soviet ship was quickly found steaming out of the Skaggerak with six



*HMS NEWCASTLE as leader of the Third Destroyer Squadron  
with the Soviet Missile Cruiser KIROV 25 September 1980*

(Photo: Crown Copyright)

escorts around her and was soon clearly not entirely happy to have a seventh flying a foreign flag in close company. Care was needed while shadowing her, particularly at night, as her escort stations were frequently changed. As NEWCASTLE approached each Soviet ship in turn, the normal courtesies of the sea were observed by piping the still. Some returned the courtesy while others including the KIROV deliberately ignored it. The Soviet group formed a most impressive force and an invigorating 48 hours was enjoyed by all.

After a trip to Helsinki and more exercises the ship returned to Portsmouth. During the transit of the Kiel Canal it was discovered that there is only one overtaking lane and if there is one slow vessel already in this lane coming towards you it is safer to bide your time!

Back in Portsmouth Captain King handed over to Captain Derek Wallis. His parting gesture was to put to bed questions over the value of the Type 42 destroyers. From the time the ships had entered service a number of problems had emerged - the controllable pitch propeller system, the sophisticated 909 radars, queries over hull strength, and questions over the size of Type 42 complements in comparison with frigates. This meant that in some quarters Type 42s did not have the reputation they deserved. A comprehensive report was written detailing measures that were being undertaken to resolve the problems, highlighting just what the new destroyers had done since they had joined the Fleet and how much more they could contribute to worldwide operations.

Back at sea in late 1980 the ship completed a Fleet Trial, some navigation training and a JMC before heading once more to Newcastle for a well-earned break. By now it was apparent that while many of the Type 42s had splendid affiliated cities, few came close to Newcastle. The year was completed with a winter families' day, a maintenance period and leave.

### **1981**

In early 1981 the ship undertook further Operational Sea Training and a maintenance period prior to sailing from Portsmouth in March for her first deployment to the Gulf region. Three days were spent on the Rock of Gibraltar before proceeding east and through the Suez Canal. NEWCASTLE visited Hoddeida, in North Yemen, the first time a Royal Navy ship had visited for many years. In late March the ship took over the Gulf Patrol in company with ROTHESAY. Long maritime patrols were made less tedious by frequent exercises with the US Navy Battle Group in the area. At the time the USN had just introduced the sale of beer in ships that exceeded a certain number of days continuously at sea but they never carried enough stocks. A mutually popular exchange of Coca-Cola and fruit juice for beer supplied by NEWCASTLE quickly developed.





*Making ship's crests*

(Photo: (Crown Copyright))

After four weeks in the Gulf, the ship proceeded to Mombassa, where many wives flew out. Each member of the Ship's Company was able to have a few days away, either on safari or at one of the good beach hotels. A great deal of community work was also tackled. Back in the Gulf the ship completed several more periods on patrol before heading home at the end of five months away.

## **1982**

The autumn of 1981 was spent in UK waters before the ship entered her first refit in early 1982. Thus it was that NEWCASTLE was unavailable when the Falklands Conflict occurred in the Spring of 1982. Though deep in refit, Portsmouth Dockyard worked night and day to get her back to sea - a task made increasingly urgent as first SHEFFIELD then COVENTRY were sunk. Post-Refit Trials began in late July with the whole Ship's Company keen to brush up on anti-Exocet and anti-air warfare skills as well as implementing other lessons learnt from the Conflict. Captain Anthony Hutton OBE became the fourth Commanding Officer in August 1982 as Sea Trials and a rapid work-up were crammed into three months.

In the autumn of 1982 NEWCASTLE led a group of five destroyers and frigates south to the Falkland Islands, too late to help in the fight yet in time to help maintain the status quo. With no declared peace, it was a nervous time in the islands and there was a requirement to maintain a strong and vigilant presence. For the Operations Room and weapons crews it meant remaining in constant defence watches with one day's break every week. But there was no monotony. With the numbers of assets in theatre there was endless scope for challenging weapons and sensor training. The ship also hosted numerous visitors including the Archbishop of Canterbury, Margaret Thatcher, the Secretary of State for Defence, Service Chiefs and Colonel H Jones' widow to visit her VC husband's grave. On Pebble Island, a memorial cross to HMS COVENTRY was dedicated, overlooking her

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watery grave. Whenever possible parties were landed for walks ashore, an activity spiced up by the allocation of four shotguns in pursuit of a goose for the pot, or to collect mussels or trade whiskey for mutton. Penguins, albatross and seals abounded but they were off limits to the guns. Port Stanley was not much of a run ashore but its one and only pub did a splendid trade. The year ended back in Portsmouth for Christmas and a well-earned but rather brief break.



*Falkland's wildlife*

(Photo: Crown Copyright)



*The pub in Stanley*

(Courtesy of James Cooper)

### 1983

1983 began with a 10-day spell at Portland for refresher training and air defence exercises in the North Sea before another wonderful visit to Newcastle where the ship was overwhelmed by the warmth of the welcome. Afterwards the ship headed north-east for a visit to Copenhagen and back via the Kiel Canal. After a hard year of refit and on South Atlantic operational deployment with no visits, the Ship's Company were relieved to find that "follies" were not exclusively for other ships.

But there was austere news in the offing. A Type 42 was needed in the South Atlantic and for various reasons NEWCASTLE was suddenly the only one available. As a sweetener prior to the deployment the ship was given free choice of two port calls in the Mediterranean. The ship chose Corfu and Naples and unashamedly relaxed into "cruise liner routine" with all onboard personnel in plain clothes save for a skeleton duty watch. The only crisis was that of running out of iodine. Motor scooters do not take kindly to hard turns when cornering loose gravel roads, olive groves were inspected from ground level and extra iodine was flown out!



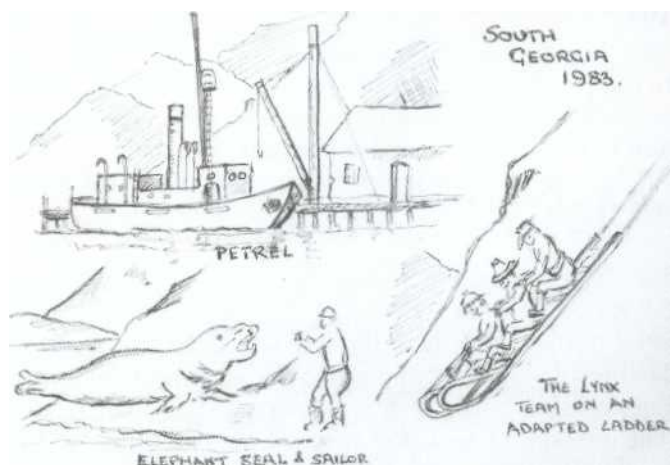
Chipping ice from the gun in South Georgia. NEWCASTLE led a group of four ships south on 15 July for a second five month deployment to the Falkland Islands in a year. (Photo: Crown Copyright)

South Atlantic patrol second time around, while not welcome, was much more enjoyable than anticipated. Within a month of leaving home the ship was frozen in Grytviken, South Georgia. Snowballing, tobogganing and expeditions with cameras in search of penguins and elephant seals became the order of the day. The Petty Officers Mess set up downhill races in metal baths discovered on a scrap metal heap. Round bilged they slid and rolled with hilarious results, casting revellers into deep snow, their waving legs serving as the only markers for their rescue. Meanwhile the engineers fell in love with an abandoned 1920s-built Norwegian whaling ship, so beautifully preserved in the permafrost that they could scarcely bear to leave her behind.

Back on patrol around the Falklands the ship weathered many a stormy day in the South Atlantic winter with occasional breaks at anchor to visit tiny settlements and their attended flocks of sheep. Once again the availability of assets in theatre allowed the ship to do lots of weapon training. So much so that in 1983 the ship won the Fleet Sea Dart trophy, the gunnery trophy again and, delightfully for an air defence ship, the anti-submarine warfare trophy. And so, home again, this time calling in at Dakar en route and arriving home just in time for Christmas.

**1984**

The year began with four months of docking, weapons upgrading and ship's maintenance. With a big turnover of crew the ship had to almost start from scratch that summer with a long period of trials and Sea Dart firings. But the ship managed visits to Antwerp, Lisbon and Bordeaux. Captain Peter Erskine relieved Captain Hutton in September 1984.



Memories of South Georgia

(Courtesy of Captain A I) Hutton)



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With him went the black top to the funnel - a distinction sadly missed. The autumn was spent exercising off Norway and conducting air defence exercises in the North Sea as a shakedown prior to undertaking Operational Sea Training at Portland once again during the late autumn.

### 1985

Visits to Malaga and Amsterdam interspersed with Christmas leave preceded the final stage of the ship's work-up during JMC 851 in February. Thereafter the spring was spent undertaking Exercise Cold Winter in Norway, calling at Hamburg and then Avonmouth for a 'Meet the Navy' visit whilst undertaking a variety of trials.

At the end of June NEWCASTLE sailed for Operation Equinox in the Barents Sea. This annual opportunity to observe the Soviet Navy exercising was an exciting time for the Ship's Company. Several gunnery and missile firings were observed and the ship spent many days in and amongst a large Soviet battle group. On 21 July NEWCASTLE was trailing the aircraft carrier KIEV when a Forger aircraft crashed into the sea within a few hundred yards as it attempted to recover to the Soviet carrier. NEWCASTLE's sea boat was quickly on the scene to help the pilot, who had ejected, into a search and rescue strop lowered from a Soviet helicopter.

That October NEWCASTLE sailed with a large group of warships and auxiliaries for Exercise Autumn Train on the way to Gibraltar and the start of her second deployment to the Gulf region. Between the long periods on patrol visits were made to Djibouti, Karachi, Muscat and Bandar Khayran. Christmas was spent in Doha before the ship set off for a 10-day break in Mombassa where once again a number of wives and families flew out to join in the rest and relaxation.

### 1986

On 14 January 1986, the day after leaving Mombassa, the ship was diverted to Aden to assist HMY BRITANNIA in the evacuation of foreign nationals following a coup. For the next two weeks the ship remained in the vicinity of Aden assisting where she could. On 23 January, 247 evacuees were transferred from a merchant ship by winch transfer using the Lynx helicopter (some kind of record) and were landed the following day in Djibouti.

Following the handover of Armilla Patrol duties in early February NEWCASTLE headed home via Aqaba and Piraeus arriving back in Portsmouth in late February. The following month the ship entered a long 18-month refit in Portsmouth. The ship had been in commission for eight years. Great changes were required in the aftermath of the Falklands Conflict to fit new weapons, sensors and other equipment and this was the first opportunity to tackle many of the deep maintenance tasks and systems upgrades that the ship needed for its next period of active service.



*New joiner in Gibraltar*

(Photo: crown Copyright)

## HMS NEWCASTLE – *the middle years*

### 1987

Commander Rob Davies joined NEWCASTLE as the sixth Commanding Officer in the summer of 1987. Now the Fleet canteen boat, the Ship's Company was brought up to full strength and through their hard work and good humour the ship emerged from the detritus of the naval base, being transformed from workbench to warship and home. Twice during this period, the windy hammers and spanners were joined by BBC television cameras shooting the Food and Drink Programme and Jim'll Fix It... - sadly Jimmy Saville's skills did not extend to solving the multitude of problems and tasks that bedevil a ship at the end of a refit!

The ship eventually proceeded to sea for trials in the welcoming November gales of 1987. A minor collision in the English Channel with a small yacht seeking assistance dented the Captain's pride more than the yacht itself, but christened the Chief Bosun's Mate immortal words: "Nice one boss!"



*HMS NEWCASTLE at sea in the English Channel. Changes in appearance include the fitting of Type 1022 radar, Phalanx Close In Weapons System, a jammer and other close-range guns*

(Photo: Crown Copyright)



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### 1988

With an entirely new team onboard after the refit, 1988 began with Safety Operational Sea Training and a series of sea checks at Portland. The weather challenged the ship as much as the staff with a severe Storm Force 11 cutting a swathe through the Channel and highlighting all those who had not secured for sea!

The ship left Portland with tails high and raring to go heading east to Amsterdam for a first run ashore following the refit. Exercise Mallet Blow in the North Sea provided some much needed initial air warfare training. This was punctuated however by the search for the crew of an RAF Phantom. Few will forget the long night search, the eerie oily calm of the sea, the snow and the sighting of the wreckage.

April saw the ship back in Newcastle and flying a huge "Pudsey Bear" flag for the BBC's Children in Need Appeal ahead of the arrival of a team of runners braving the 340 mile land route from Portsmouth to Newcastle. Once again the Geordie hospitality was wonderful and exhausting! A very quiet ship slipped back into the North Sea some five days later. "Make and Mend" was muttered by all, except the First Lieutenant!



*Exercising the Upper Deck Weapon Crews*

(Photo: Crown Copyright)

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The ship was back at Portland in the late spring for Basic Operational Sea Training with the challenges and frustration of the FOST staff accentuated by the addition of a four man BBC film crew shooting a "fly on the wall" documentary about stress! The Ship's Company became experts at being stars and, balancing the contrary demands of media and staff; managed to keep tempers locked away and stress under control for most of the time. A high seas firing followed by more air defence exercises in the North Sea completed the work-up and the ship was left alone again, the new team fully bonded, somewhat bloodied but ready for the next challenge.

That autumn saw the ship heading west for a short spell as West Indies Guardship. After a month undertaking anti-drugs operations in the West Indies with the US Coast Guard and Navy all enjoyed superb runs ashore in Mayport, Port Canaveral and in Grand Cayman for the annual Pirates Week where the ship provided a fair proportion of the pirates! By mid December the passage to the UK had been made and the West Indies had been swapped for mince pies and Portsmouth.

### 1989

In early 1989 it was again time to repair and prepare for another winter deployment to the Falkland Islands. Astro-navigation with the midshipman, upper-deck sports, swimming and the odd spot of water-skiing kept all in body and soul during the long passage south. Darkness and wind prevail in the winter months of the South Atlantic, it is beautiful but harsh. Much effort was needed to keep NEWCASTLE maintained and to undertake the all important but not very exciting patrolling, and to organise shore parties, visits, walks and diving for the whole Ship's Company.

The highlight of the deployment was once again the visit to South Georgia. The Marie Celeste nature of Grytviken, the beauty of Drygalski Fjord and King Haakon Bay, where Shackleton landed in the James Caird, are very special places for all those who visit. No member of the crew will forget the rugged, lonely beauty and the magnificent wildlife.



*Drygalski Fjord*

Photo: Courtesy of Rob Davies)

On the final day in the Falklands, Commander Hugh DGLISH joined as the seventh Commanding Officer. The route home took the ship into the Pacific for the first time and the ship rounded Cape Horn on 12 August. Fortunately the weather did not live up to the Cape's notorious reputation, although it worsened for a few days as the ship headed north.

The immediate destination was Robinson Crusoe Island, the place 300 miles off the Chilean Coast where Alexander Selkirk was marooned in 1792 for four years and four months and whose story formed the basis for the Daniel Defoe classic. The ship anchored in Cumberland Bay for just 10 hours to enjoy a banyan ashore, which was a welcome break for the Ship's Company after the long patrols around the Falklands. The last British warships to visit held much less benign intent. In 1915 HM Ships GLASGOW, KENT and ORAMA had found the German Cruiser DRESDEN at the island. She was the last of Graf von Spee's South Atlantic Fleet after the Battle of the Falklands, and she lies sunk in the bay. The impact from British shells could still be seen in the cliffs.