

The first woman in the Royal Navy's history to be selected to command a major warship is taking up her post today. Commander Sarah West, 40, joins Type 23 frigate HMS Portland in Rosyth. In another milestone for the Royal Navy, Commander Sue Moore, 43, has recently become the first woman to command a squadron of minor war vessels, the First Patrol Boat Squadron (1PBS).

Sue and Sarah, both experienced Commanding Officers, are part of a cohort of talented female officers and ratings who joined the Royal Navy to serve at sea and who are now undertaking or approaching key appointments in their naval careers. Their achievements are based on a combined 36 years of hard work and experience in the Royal Navy, with deployments ranging from the Gulf to the Balkans to counter-narcotics patrols in the Caribbean.

Since women went to sea in the Royal Navy in 1990, they have achieved success in many fields and have become pilots, observers and mine clearance divers. In December last year, it was announced that women will join their male counterparts in submarines from 2013. Sue was one of the first two female officers to command a Royal Navy warship, HMS Dasher, in 1998. In addition to Sarah West commanding HMS Portland, it is expected that three minor war vessels will be commanded by females by the end of this year.

HMS Portland is currently in refit in Rosyth, Scotland, and Sarah will face the challenge of leading HMS Portland from refit to operational tasking, a significant challenge for the command. On completion of the refit, the ship will complete a series of trials before returning to her base port in Devonport before the end of the year and preparing for her next tasking.

Commander Sarah West said:

"Taking command of HMS Portland is definitely the highlight of my 16 years in the RN so far. It is a challenge that I am fully trained for and ready to undertake. I am very proud to be taking command of a Type 23 frigate, which is an extremely flexible warship, and I'm looking forward to taking HMS Portland on operations with a professional and focused team."

Sue has 14 P2000 Archer Class training vessels, based around the UK, under her command, with 14 University Royal Naval Units attached. She oversees a further four P2000s which carry out maritime security operations roles. 1PBS, based in Portsmouth, was involved in the recent Olympic security exercise on the Thames and two P2000s will be part of the Honour Guard during the forthcoming Queen's Diamond Jubilee Pageant.

Commander Sue Moore said:

"The First Patrol Boat Squadron is an extremely busy component of the Fleet, and as an ex-P2000 commanding officer myself, I consider it to be a privilege to be commanding such a motivated and talented group of people, and such a diverse organisation. My ships, sailors and university units are responsible for influencing high calibre undergraduates in military and maritime issues, but also for providing a platform for young commanding officers to develop into the future leaders of the Royal Navy. It is also a once in a lifetime opportunity for my squadron to provide close support to Her Majesty the Queen during the forthcoming River Pageant."

Sue Moore, who is single and lives in Bath, grew up in Sussex before completing a degree at Carnegie College in Leeds. She joined the Royal Navy as a warfare officer in 1992 and spent the next few years qualifying as a bridge watch-keeper, deploying to the Balkans, the Persian Gulf and the Far East. In 1996, she qualified as a navigator and was selected to navigate HMS Chatham, the last ship to leave Hong Kong on the handover to China, before becoming CO of HMS Dasher in 1998.

Sue qualified as a principal warfare officer in 2001 and completed a counter-narcotics tour in the Caribbean as the operations officer on HMS Sheffield, followed by a NATO deployment to the Mediterranean in support of actions after 9/11. After running the Maritime Special Operations unit at Northwood, specialising in counter-terror and counter-narcotics ops, she returned to sea as a Lieutenant Commander in 2007 and served in HMS Portland as Executive Officer.

Sarah West, who is single and lives in Middlesex, joined the RN in 1995. Sarah was born and educated in Lincolnshire and she graduated from the University of Hertfordshire with an honours degree in mathematics. Trained as a warfare officer, she has had a number of sea appointments, which included a deployment to the Gulf in HMS Sheffield within her first two years. Her appointment to the Commander Amphibious Task Group as the under water specialist included the planning and execution of operations and exercises around the world, including the evacuation in Beirut. Moving to the staff at the Permanent Joint Headquarters in Northwood, she helped coordinate UK operations in the Gulf and contributed to Operation Telic in Iraq.

Between April 2009 and December 2011, Sarah commanded HMS Ramsey, HMS Penzance, HMS Pembroke and most recently HMS Shoreham as part of the 1ST Mine Countermeasures Squadron. Her time on HMS Pembroke included eight and a half months deployed on operations in the Arabian Gulf.