

CCGS Wilfred Templeman – Not just another marine platform.



In 1999, when I first stepped on board CCGS Wilfred Templeman in Argentia, NL there was one image that immediately struck me. There was not the usual deserted look on deck of a Coast Guard vessel on crew change day, nor the look of a pile of red kit bags tossed on the wharf with peering eyes from countless portholes awaiting the bus. Nor was there any PA announcement overheard that said - the bus is here. No need, as they were all still working on deck.

I thought the vessel; her crew and shore support personnel that day more resembled the look of a miniature containership with an orchestrated stevedore team loading stores and provisions, offloading cargo and spare gear and replacing or repairing trawls. The engineering personnel scurried around with deck equipment apart for maintenance and fuel trucks waited patiently on the dock. To the landsmen, this resembled a beehive of activity but for the crew of WT, it was just the chaos of a normal crew change day.

Known to many as Templeman, WT, Willy T and to Mastercard as Sir W. Templeman and some names that cannot be put into print, she stirred many first impressions when seeing her alongside showing her signs of extended sea duty. I once heard from a WT “indoctrinated” management colleague ashore that the Wilfred Templeman was more like a submarine making ready for a long extended patrol. I think that best described the atmosphere on board. If you have ever watched the epic submarine movie “Das Boot”, you will have an image of how the ship was stored, with every conceivable space utilized for everything right down to a place for the box of bananas. Settles in cabins were not for cloths, or boots, but for parts, toilet paper, coffee cups and all those other luxuries of life including lifeboat rations if you were the 2nd Cook.

The vessel had a valiant career first as a ship of the science fleet within DFO when she sported the white hull and topsides traditionally known for a research vessel. After the merger, she got used to her new CG Fleet colours reluctantly, not unlike many of her resident draggermen. She was no five star hotel and she was a cranky vessel to say the least. As Commanding Officer, she often conned you and all the men and women that sailed as Master often needed a trick or two up their sleeve when docking.

There were mechanical issues from day one of her launch in 1982 and the first few years of operation were a challenge as many of her original crew recount. Over the years there were fires, engine failures at sea, engine failures while towing trawl, constant gear box problems, hydraulic and winch issues that on a single engine/screw ship made each day exciting. There was always a “big problem” in the words of one Chief Engineer and I grew to wonder if there was such a thing as a small one. There were regular blackouts (Y2K was a non-issue for us), fouled propeller incidents and even one cook said he had control of her pitch and rudder with his steam tray and serving spoons. To top it all off, many believed she was actually haunted by the ghost of a shipyard worker from Pictou N.S. where she was built. However, at the end of the day, her mission completion success was as good, or better than the other science vessels.

WT was our home on the water and well known on the Grand Banks and all around the waters off Newfoundland and Labrador. She also sailed many times in her career from Greenland to the U.S. waters off Maine and all through the seas off Atlantic Canada to the waters of the St. Lawrence River and the Laurentian Region. Distances steamed for a routine shift of 28 days often amounted to over 5000 nm



and very often those on board saw 28 days at sea as well as days on board. It is also said one of her crewmembers holds the record for the most travelled drift bottle containing a greeting message.

The Templeman was not always just about fishing. She was involved in many multi-tasked missions over the years but one that sticks out for many is the 1995 Turbot War, when the Wilfred Templeman (still white hulled at the time) helped support the arrest of the Spanish vessel fishing trawler Estai

and along with other Coast Guard and Fisheries Patrol vessels WT helped escort her to St. John's. However, she was not allowed to join the victory parade through the narrows and arrived much later securing on the south side of the harbour. For those that know the whole story there will always be a chuckle to remember, but let us just say she was a good "water boy" for the team. Yet, she conducted her ancillary role as a worthy search and rescue resource admirably. She responded to distress calls on an opportunity basis all over her operating areas including venturing offshore more than 600 nm to rescue a lone sailor on the sailing vessel S/V Mirelle Sousy to being the only SAR resource to respond to a fishing vessel in distress in the Gulf of St. Lawrence during 2003's Hurricane Juan.

CCGS Wilfred Templeman was named after a pioneer in the scientific study of the Newfoundland fishery. Dr. Wilfred Templeman. He was the first appointed J.L. Paton Professor of Marine Biology and Fisheries at Memorial University after a distinctive career in DFO. He was also a recipient of a Public Service Merit Award for high and constant achievements as a scientist, administrator, educator, and advisor to government and industry. I believe no less an acknowledgement should be awarded this ship that served DFO, Coast Guard and so many other fishery interests so well over an equally recognizable career on the water.

This ship, like so many vessels within the CG Fleet was not just a mere platform to work from, nor was she a mere vehicle to get scientific personnel to the next station for a "tow" or CTD cast. She was home for many of us for six months of the year. She was where some ship's crew and science personnel first learned of a new family birth, where they missed their children's birthdays and high school graduations or where some learned tragically of loved ones that passed. Riding out a hurricane was routine for this vessel and she often faced seas that you would think would swallow her whole. However, she was a duck on the water and one of the best sea going vessels on which I have had the pleasure to sail.

Now renamed, CCGS Wilfred Templeman was purchased by a Canadian company to serve the private marine industry like some of our former vessels. I believe that speaks to the efforts and talents of dedicated CG crews and support staff ashore that believe in the personal and financial investment of proper long term care of our present fleet of ships. Where she sails next, is for her new owners to decide but I will always remember CCGS Wilfred Templeman – Call Sign CGDV (IMO 7907099) as a good ship with a dedicated crew and a safe refuge when on the high seas.

Captain Jim Ewart.