

More on the pre history of the Arctic Discoverer and Lifeboat salvaged by Jouke Haanstra

Photos and text courtesy of Capt. Jouke Haanstra



In 1956 the Fisheries Research Board of Canada ordered the construction of this vessel from Marine Industries Ltd in Sorel, QC and it was delivered in late October 1958. Interestingly Canadian naval architects Milne Gilmore+German wrote the specifications for the ship, but it was designed by Graham+Wodnough of London, England. Built to trawler lines, it had an aluminum superstructure and was fitted with a second deck, except in the engine room. Dimensions were 177' 3" long x 32' 5" breadth and 12' 7" draft. Powered by a 1,000 BHP B+W Alpha engine, it had a range of 7500 miles. Its six officers, 19 crew and nine scientists trawled for fish but also trialed new gear, different nets and various methodologies, and conducted tests in the labs.

Delivered at 748 grt (later 753 grt), it was named for the the late Alexander Thomas Cameron, Chair of the Fisheries Research Board (FRB) from 1934 until his death in 1947. First skipper was Capt. Baxter Blackwood. To be based in St.John's, Newfoundland, it worked on the Grand Banks and in the Gulf of St.Lawrence for 2/3 of the year, but shifted to Halifax or St. Andrews, NB in winter where it worked as far south as George's Bank. There was a large FRB lab in Halifax at the time, and its field work was often conducted by the **Cameron**, although it also had its own research trawler, the **Harengus**.



The ship was ice strengthened, but that was more as a convenience, since the Grand Banks is more dangerous for freezing spray in winter, and the Gulf is too choked with ice to conduct most research, particularly with nets.



After twenty-three years of faithful service, although still in excellent condition, the boat had become outmoded. Since most commercial fishing was now conducted by stern trawlers, the Department ordered new ships of that type. **Wilfred Templeman** was the replacement, to be based in St. John's and **Alfred Needler**, a twin, based in Halifax.

A.T. Cameron was renamed **81-4** in 1981 and decommissioned. However there were teething problems with the engines in the new trawlers and **81-4** returned to service well into 1982.

When finally sold, it went to Central Fuel + Supplies Ltd of Glovertown, NL and was renamed **Arctic Ranger** (namesake was a famous Newfoundland sealer). It was used for research, patrol and standby duties until re-sold in 1988.

It then began an interesting phase of its career as **Arctic Discoverer** under the US flag, but owned by a Canadian sub-sea salvage firm. It is credited with finding and salvaging huge quantities of Spanish treasure from sunken ships in the Caribbean. By 2002 it has been laid up for some time at Green Cove Springs, FL and mouldered there until finally broken up in May 2013.



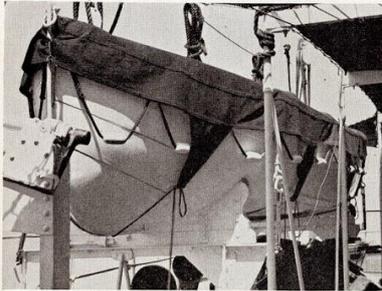
***Arctic Ranger** shows off her fine lines on the synchrolift at Newfoundland Dockyard. Marine Atlantic's **Marine Courier** is hauled out at left, and the tanker **Jennie W.** is in the middle.*

That might have been the end of the story except for one industrious mariner from the Netherlands, while visiting Fernandina Beach as master of a ship in 2002, found one of **A.T. Cameron's** original lifeboats, bought it, transported it back to the Netherlands as deck cargo and converted it into a delightful little cruiser. Named **Arctic Ranger**, the indestructible aluminum boat will likely keep **A.T. Cameron's** memory alive for some time to come.



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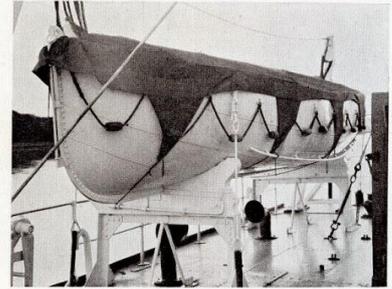


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I was pleased to provide the owner with some documentation about the likely builder of the boat, and the photos in this post. The one just above, shows a clinker built wooden skiff, and aft of that the port side lifeboat. There was a starboard side companion, but it disappeared during later conversions. Therefore the after most boat, just above the supervising gull, may well be the one that was restored to use.