

Tug Newsletter

all about tugs

All about “Georges”...



*TIGER 6 is seen here on 25 February, 2025, operating as a shiphandling tug at Nawiliwili, Kauai, Hawaii. The tug is one of a series of nearly identical shiphandling tugs. Operators are **P and R Water Taxi Company** and **P&M Marine Services Inc.***

*Founded in 1978 as **J.D. PRINGLE LLC.**, the company has grown into a group of companies that owns and operates eighteen vessels both in Hawaii, and the Gulf of Mexico. All of these were built at the company's shipyard – Honolulu Marine - in downtown Honolulu, Hawaii.*

Currently the fleet consists of TIGER 1 (ex ASD NEIL ABERCROMBIE, TIGER 2 (ex ASD KAIMANA HILA), TIGER # (ex ASD DANIEL K. AKAKA), TIGER 4 (ex ASD PATSY MINK), TIGER 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 21 and 22. All Tiger's have an output of 4.400 bhp and identical dimensions except for 21 and 22 which are 3 metres shorter and a tiny bit smaller. MOI (1.560 bhp) and NEHU (4.400 bhp) are former offshore supply vessels upgraded for towing when acquired in 2022.

photo: Reinier van de Wetering

TugeZine No. 29 in part was dedicated to Belgian Towage and salvage. Although now turned into scrap the Belgian tug *Georges Letzer* is an example of creative re-construction and upgrading. This tug dates from 1945 when built by **Cochrane** as the steam tug *Empire Martha*. When she was bought in 1949 she was fitted with an 850 ihp steam engine. In 1964 she was rebuilt by **Mercantile Marine**, Antwerp, into a 2.200 bhp motor tug to take advantage of the increasing short and medium distance towing opportunities in the North Sea area. By the 1980's she was withdrawn from deepsea work and slightly adapted for shiphandling.

Empire Martha was one of some 1.400 ships that during World War 2 carried an 'Empire'-prefixed name. These included 147 tugs – all except two being wartime constructions. The tugs were a requirement as during the war there was increased traffic to and from British ports as well as a lot of Government-originating towage work. At the same time the Government chartered suitable tugs from the British tug operators for

services not required in peace time, such as inspection and guard duties.

A further problem was the foreseen requirement for tugs that were able to carry out sustained deepsea towage and rescue operations. The British ocean tug fleet pre-war had been depleted to the point where – apart from some Government tugs – only five such tugs were available from United Towing and Overseas Towage & Salvage combined. This situation was remedied to some extent when Germany invaded The Netherlands, Belgium and France. Several of these countries deepsea tugs escaped to the U.K.

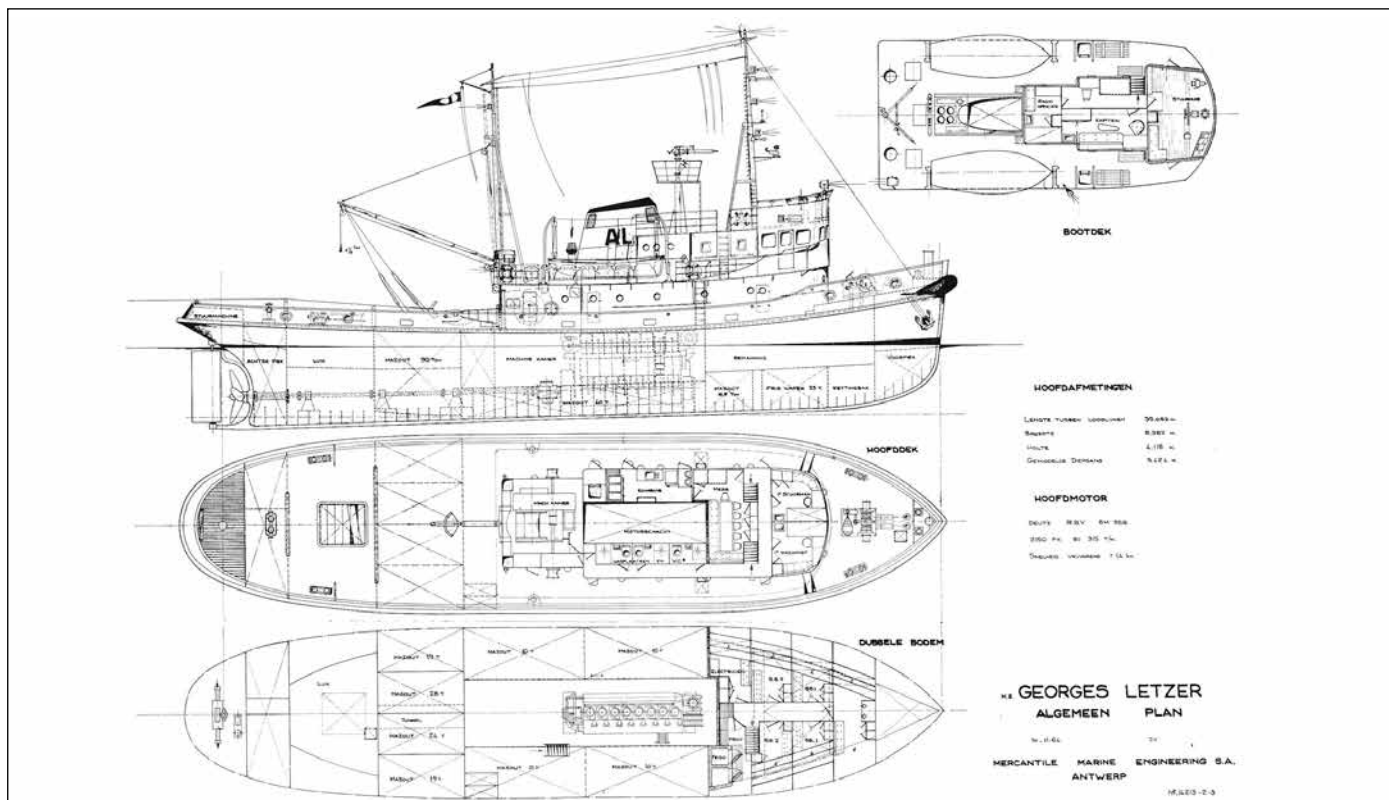
The Government set up a **Tug Distribution Committee** that was tasked to solve the problem. Consisting of tugowners and suitable Government officials the conclusion could only be to start an ambitious newbuilding program. It ranged from the rescue / salvage tugs of the 'Bustler' class (8 units), 'Envoy' class (6 units) and 'Assurance' class (21 units) to the tiny TID's (183 units).





On 17 April, 1967, in dense fog, the Liberian tanker DIANA - 60.193 dwt - collided with the German coaster ANNEISE CHRISTOPHERSEN some 30 nm SW of the Rotterdam Waterway. Four explosions on the tanker ripped open some cargo tanks and additionally set fire to the bunker tanks. From the Scheldt the URS tugs SCALDIS and GEORGES LETZER put to sea, from Hook of Holland the Smit tugs MAASBANK and SCHOUWENBANK, from Dover the German Bugsier tug HEROS and from IJmuiden the Wijsmuller tugs TITAN and NESTOR. One of the first vessels on scene was the Tak salvage vessel BISON which happened to be in the vicinity. Later, with the fire under control, the tanker set course for the Rotterdam Waterway, running astern, and escorted by the Smit tugs ZWARTE ZEE and THAMES and Doeksen's tug STORTEMELK II which was on charter to the Dutch Ministry of Transport and Waterways as a survey vessel out of Hoek van Holland. This fragment of a newspaper clipping shows GEORGES LETZER fighting the fire from alongside the tanker

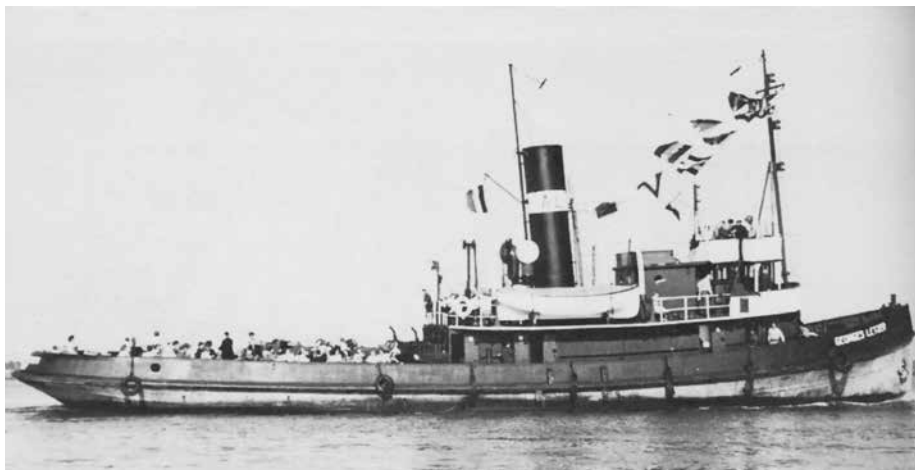
newspaper clipping: Daily Telegraph 18-4-1967 / Kenneth Mason



General Arrangement GEORGES LETZER after reconstruction in 1964

drawing: U.R.S.





GEORGES LETZER as steam tug

photo: coll. Ken Turrell



GEORGES LETZER after the 1964 reconstruction in Remorquage Letzer colours

photo: coll. Job van Eijk

The 'Empire' tugs, however, were to cover harbour, coastal as well as deepsea work. This required different designs. The initial prototypes were *Englishman* (1.100 hp) for coastal and deepsea work, *Warrior* (1.000 ihp) for

river and estuary work and *Maple* (500 ihp) for harbour and dock work. Later, several sub-classes were introduced that incorporated modifications and upgrades. All were powered by triple-expansion steam engines.



GEORGES LETZER after transfer to U.R.S.

photo: Job van Eijk

Empire Martha belonged to the 'Stella' class which was introduced in 1944. The class was designed especially for service in the Far East. There the tows were over considerable distance but relatively light. This required displacement and freeboard as well as large bunker capacity. The tugs were equipped for service in the tropics. They were also fitted with a salvage / fire pump with a capacity of 130 t / hr.

The tugs were also unique due to being fitted with **American-built engines** which were surplus to requirements in the U.S. These engines were an unfortunate match with tugs as they were designed for 1.000 ihp at 210 rpm requiring steam at a pressure of 300 lb per square inch to drive fast-running propellers. The engines were thus modified to run at 130 rpm at which the engine delivered 525 ihp with a steam pressure of 220 lb per square inch. The eight Franklin Machinery engines received from the U.S. were employed only in the first eight tugs of the class, the remaining 11 tugs were fitted with 800 ihp engines running at 120 rpm. This was the only adaption carried through in the 'Improved Stella' class.

Empire Martha was one of the first eight of class. She was completed by **Cochrane & Sons**, Selby, as yard number 1301. Launched on 28 April, 1945, she was completed on 8 October, 1945. The tug was handed to **William Watkins Ltd**, London, as the appointed managers. With the war ending the tug never saw employment in the Far East.

The first tow by *Empire Martha* was from Hull to Portsmouth. En route they encountered bad weather and discovered a weld had not been completed. She took on water but managed to return to Hull to fix the problem. Apart from one tow to deep water in the Atlantic to scuttle a ship loaded with obsolete ammunition she was employed on coastal tows. Her last tow in 1946 was an E-boat from Sheerness to Milford after which she sailed for Dublin where she was handed to **James Contracting & Shipping Co. Ltd**, Southampton. As this was a dredging and construction company she was probably mainly employed towing mud barges. In 1947 she changed name to *Foremost 106*.





GEORGES LETZER after the 1981 upgrade with secondary top deck wheelhouse and modified bow for shiphandling purposes
photo: Leen van der Meijden



HILDE ex GEORGES LETZER *photo: Richard Wisse*

In 1948 the triple-expansion engine was reconditioned by A Hall & Co Ltd, Aberdeen and uprated to 600 ihp. In 1949 she was purchased by **Remorquage Letzer** at Antwerp. Renamed *Georges Letzer* she remained in steam until 1964.

It was the time of the upcoming North Sea offshore industry that required lots of towing work so investment in the tug was deemed worthwhile. She was totally reconstructed as well as motorised by Mercantile Marine Engineering S.A., Antwerp.

The new dimensions were 38,14 / 35,05 x 9,05 / 8,42 x 4,57 m. Draught (aft) 4,30 m. Main engine 8-cyl Deutz, output 2.200 bhp. Bollard pull 23 tonnes (up from 8 tonnes under steam). Range 8.000 nm at full speed. Tonnage 295 grt – 99 nrt. Two 63 kW / 174 amp gen sets, one 40 kW / 174 amp gen set, one 6 kW / 26 amp harbour gen set.

Towing gear: one electrical Atlas towing winch with spooling

gear and 1.000 m x 5" towing wire. One hydraulic 30-tonne towing hook.

Salvage gear: One Ruhr fire pump with an output of 180 m³ / hr. One water / foam fire monitor aft of the wheelhouse at a height of 8 m from the water line. Foam capacity 10 tonnes. 15 20-mm fire hoses 70 mm diameter. One transportable diesel salvage pump (160 t / hr), one diesel salvage pump (60 t/hr), two submersible water pumps (100 t/hr each). Aft derrick 1,5 tonnes.

Accommodation: 16 crew. Five cabins situated below the forecastle deck, Chief Mate and Chief Engineer are housed forward in the superstructure on the main deck. Master and Radio Officer are housed on the boat deck aft of the wheelhouse.

In 1974 the tug was transferred to **U.R.S.** (Unie van Redding- en Sleepdienst / Union de Remorquage et Sauvetage) which merged Remorquage Letzer and S.A. de Remorquage à Hélice (Gerling) with their combined pool U.R.S.

In 1981 the tug was once again **upgraded** by, amongst others, the installation of a nozzle around the propeller, an extensive bow fender and a covered top-deck control stand. From that time onward she was increasingly to be seen at Terneuzen handling ships entering the locks.

She was finally **laid up** at Terneuzen in March 1992 and offered for sale. In November of that year she was sold to **Northern Europe Shipping Ltd** (De Neef Reederij BVBA). Renamed *Hilde* she hardly moved. In June, 1994, she was sold to **Jacques Bakker & Zonen BVBA**, Brugge and scrapped.

Built for war-only duty the tug reached an operational age of 49 years by timely being adapted to requirements.

Sources: files Job van Eijk, Henk de Winde, Bill Harvey, U.R.S. fact sheets, Empire Tugs – Harvey & Turrell – 1988, William Watkins Ltd – Reynolds – 2019, magazine De Blauwe Wimpel (1967), Lekko International nr. 158 March/April 2006.

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