

The Three Sisters

In a previous article, “Unsung Hero”, I examined the life and times of HMCS/CNAV *Eastore* (510GT, 176 ft). In the course of researching that subject, I came across a number of references indicating that she had two sister ships of the FS (Freight and Supply) class, *Laymore* and *Westore*. The available information relating to these two vessels contain a number of anomalies that I put aside for further examination when I had the time. This brief note is an attempt to clarify the record.

The history of *Laymore* has been well documented elsewhere, including on the web site “For Posterity’s Sake”, from her commissioning in Halifax in June, 1945, to her ultimate demise on the B.C. coast some seventy years later. However her birthplace is variously given as either the Kewaunee Wisconsin Shipyard or the FMG Bay Shipuilding Company of Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin. Knowing that *Eastore* had been built in the Brunswick Marine Shipyard in Georgia, it seemed to me unusual that her sister ship would be constructed in Wisconsin. My doubts were reinforced by Don Gorham’s web site that gives her birthplace as Brunswick, Georgia. So I turned to Tim Colton’s web site on “U.S. Shipbuilding History, Shipbuilding Records” which shows that all six ships of the FS class from the Kewaunee yard and all fourteen from FMG built during the war years were delivered to the USCG or the USN and none to Canada. In fact no other U.S. shipyard building this class of vessel during WW2 sent any to Canada with the sole exception of Brunswick Marine. The shipbuilding history of that yard is also included in Tim Colton’s web site, updated as recently as November 20, 2016. It shows that only three FS 510-tonners were ever built there and all were completed in late 1944/early 1945. They were:

1. Hull No.139, designated FS 552, delivered to Canada in November 1944 and becoming HMCS *Eastore*;
2. Hull No.140, designated FS 553, delivered to the US Army in January 1945 and ultimately sold in 1965;
3. Hull No.141, designated FS 554, shown as “Disposition unknown”.

The only feasible conclusion appears to be that the three sister ships (*Eastore*, *Laymore* and *Westore*) were all built more or less simultaneously in the Brunswick Marine shipyard with:

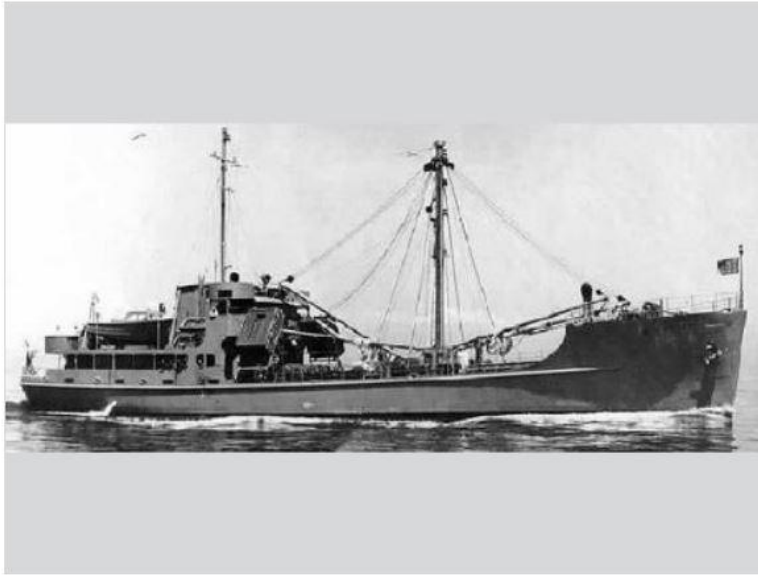
1. FS 552 becoming HMCS/CNAV *Eastore* which I have documented as noted above;

2. FS 554 becoming HMCS/CNAV *Laymore* whose long life in Canada is well recorded (see “For Posterity’s Sake” et al); and
3. FS 553 intended to be HMCS *Westore* but in fact retained by the US Army.

The third sister, *Westore* (designate), is noteworthy for the near total absence of recorded information about her history. It is clear that orders must have been placed by Canada with, or perhaps an offer received from, US authorities for all three vessels. Two were delivered, *Eastore* and *Laymore*, with the third being pre-assigned her name (*Westore*), pendant(Z58) and radio call sign(CGGD) by the RCN in anticipation of her joining the fleet. Although these have lingered on in some records to this day, it appears that her order was cancelled late in her construction. As a result *Westore*(designate) was retained by the US Army as FS 553 where she served until 1964 before being sold.

The bare bones of the life of FS 553 beyond 1964 can be tracked using her IMO number 6511398. She was first bought by the Caribbean Shipping Company in 1964 and rechristened as *Sonic II*. A mere two years later she was sold to the Florida-Panama Lines, becoming *Tauros*, where she seems to have remained until 1979 when she was again sold to an organization called Yankee Endeavor(?). There she was rebuilt and renamed *Taurus*, evidently retained for twenty-one years, in what role I do not know, before changing hands once again in 1998 at 53 years of age. She promptly reappeared with a new name, *Apemagu*, and flying the Honduran flag. This turned out to be a fatal move.

FS 553 had no sooner become *Apemagu* when a Reuters report of 19 Aug. 1998 records that: “On Aug. 7, (customs) agents found 1,100 pounds of cocaine on the Honduran freighter *Apemagu* at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.” She was evidently confiscated, put on the block and sold for the final time to Florida Sportsman magazine founder and editor Karl Wickstrom and the Martin County Anglers Club for the purpose of creating an artificial reef. On Jan.21, 2003, *Westore* (designate), now renamed *Wickstrom Reef*, took her final voyage to the bottom of the sea as a haven for marine life. This event is well documented on the web site of the MCAC Artificial Reef Fund together with before and after photos showing her last moments and final resting place. I include two of those photos here. One, taken many years earlier, shows her as she would have looked had she been delivered to the RCN to become HMCS *Westore*. The other was taken just as she began her dive to the bottom as *Wickstrom Reef* and shows the extent to which she had been modified over her lifetime leaving her funnel abaft the beam as the only visible clue to her origins as a Freight and Supply vessel.



US ARMY FS 553

Reprinted from the web site of the
MCAC Artificial Reef Fund



Final moments

Reprinted from the web site of the
MCAC Artificial Reef Fund

Hopefully this brings closure to the life stories of the three sisters *Eastore*, *Laymore* and *Westore*(designate) who were separated at birth or shortly thereafter, never to meet again. Gone but not forgotten.

Capt. J. G. R. (Rod) Hutcheson, RCN(ret'd)
Chelsea, Que.,
October 2018.