



Meet the Crew

PETER KLASSEN & ANDY LECLERC



First Mate Andy Leclerc (left) and Captain Klassen.

Getting back on the water

Captain Klassen, first mate work
Canadian Ranger through its new start

BY PATRICK LAPINSKI

Captain Peter Klassen, walking nearly the length of the deck of the *Canadian Ranger*, stoops beneath the ship's port-side conveyor gallery and winds his way between hatch covers and around mooring wires as he heads toward the forecastle. The ship is surrounded by intense bursts of lightning.

"We had wind gusts up to 45 mph coming up the channel," he says, surprised as anyone to see hundreds of four-and five-foot foam-capped waves fan out before him once he cleared Duluth's lift bridge. "I wasn't in any hurry to get to the dock in that wind."

With his ship secured to the dock, Captain Klassen relaxes a little bit, for now. A blackened sky is hurrying evening along as the dangerous fall thunderstorm recharges to the southwest.

Peter started sailing at the age of 14 aboard square-rigged brigantines as part of a summer youth program in Toronto.

"That was sailing," he says.

"This?" he shrugs, momentarily unsure how to respond, as he looks back aft. "This is not much different than driving a car."

Captain Klassen talks knowledgeably about some experimental hybrid cargo vessels he has heard of, ships rigged with "skysails," designed for the transoceanic trades. "If they were to bring back a commercial cargo vessel with sails, I'd be very interested."

Peter's affinity with sailing translated to his enrollment in Georgian College maritime school, at Owen Sound. He graduated in 1989, beginning his career on the Lakes as a Third Mate aboard the *Canadian Leader*. Since 2005, Peter has worked as a captain for the ULS group, operated by Seaway Marine Transport.

Captain Klassen knows well how hybrid ships can be utilized. His first command, the *Canadian Transfer*, was a bulk freighter pieced together from two different ships. Not quite a true hybrid, but a ship with a similar history is his newest command. Looking back aft toward the *Ranger's* pilothouse, he can almost picture the shipyard piecing this ship together, the after end of the coastal freighter *Chimo* with the forward body of the freighter *Hilda Marjanne*.

The ship's unloading system, unlike anything on the Great Lakes

today, is positioned on the forecastle and is fed by a raised conveyor system running along the spar deck on the port side. An unloading gantry fitted with buckets to lift the grain, similar to a marine leg on a grain elevator, was attached to the ship's hatch crane.

This summer, prior to sailing, the unloading gantry was removed from the vessel, rendering the unloading system inoperable until a final decision is made on the *Ranger's* viability as a self-unloading vessel. While operational, the system could offload an effective average of 300-400 tons per hour. Without it, shoreside unloading equipment will be required to discharge the grain.

This is only the second trip of the season for the *Canadian Ranger* since returning to active service in early September. The ship did not sail during the 2006 season. While in Superior, the *Canadian Ranger* loaded approximately 24,000 metric tons of spring wheat bound for Quebec City.

In charge of loading the *Ranger* is 46-year-old First Mate Andy Leclerc, of Midland, Ontario.

"I've always enjoyed geography and water," says Leclerc. "When I was a kid, I was very interested in working on a research vessel. Jacques Cousteau was my hero."

While he has never quite attained his initial quest, Leclerc has made a good life for himself in the Canadian maritime industry. He shares a good laugh with his shipmates when he recalls his first ship on the Lakes.

"It was the *Frankcliffe Hall*, in early June, 1981. They were unloading stone at Peach Island, in Windsor. I was about 20 years old."

Leclerc remembers how unfamiliar everything was to him. The ship was huge and the work was dirty, but he stuck it out, sailing the remainder of the year on the Hall Company ship before returning to the Lakes the following year with a job on the Algoma vessel *A.S. Glossbrenner*.

After those first few seasons, the years flew past. He spent nearly a dozen years working aboard fuel tankers for Texaco and Soconav, running the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the East Coast and up into the Arctic circle, relishing his chance to see new places and experience diverse geography from the mariner's perspective.

Beginning in 1994, with a stint as Third Mate on the *James Norris*, Leclerc began his association with the Upper Lakes Group. His first experience with the *Canadian Ranger* began in October, 2004 when he was appointed First Mate, a position that he held that year and through the next season, until the *Ranger* was placed in temporary lay-up in Toronto in 2005.

Because of their combined experience on the *Canadian Ranger*, both Leclerc and Captain Klassen were asked to bring the ship back to service in the fall of 2007.

"When a ship sits this long, there is a lot of work that needs to be done, but we're making progress," says Captain Klassen as he walks alongside the loading spouts at the Peavey elevator in Superior. "On our first trip out we only did about eight knots. We have some things to work on, but we're getting there," he smiles. ■