

TRANSCRIPT OF ADMIRAL VICKERY'S INTERVIEW
WITH MR. GERALD GRIFFIN OF
THE BALTIMORE SUN
DECEMBER 6, 1943, 4:30 P.M.

Mr. Griffin: Here is what I had in mind, Admiral Vickery, in just a few seconds. James Newton of the Washington Star and I were wanting to get some information about how the 1944 shipbuilding program looks now, and there were several different factors that we thought might figure in the matter.

One was to what extent the favorable submarine record may be a factor. Another was the emphasis on building landing craft. Another as information from the Manpower Commission that on the West Coast, at least, there is an increasing emphasis on ship repair work. Then, the other was whether there has been any change in the Victory Ship program during the first six months of next year; that is, whether the conversion to Victories may not be carried as promptly as was indicated a few months ago.

That is the general field that we wanted to cover, and we wanted to come to you. Mr. Newton couldn't make it today.

Admiral Vickery: As far as the production program for next year goes, ^{practically} all contracts have been let for the 1944 construction program. Whether the increasing availability of tonnage will eventually affect that, I don't know. It isn't apparent at the present moment. There is a sufficiently increased tonnage to do it.

As far as the Victory program is concerned, the keels are already going down, and the conversions are going on. The shipyards are already starting on the Victories. Take, for instance, the Portland, Oreg., yard, which is the first yard to go into Victories. They have

only ten keels to lay for Libertys. They will deliver their last Liberty in January and launch their first Victory in January.

Now, Calship has started in on Victoriys, and Richmond yard No. 1 will start in on Victoriys. The Bethlehem-Fairfield yard will be the last one to come in to Victoriys, because they have approximately 100 Libertys still to go, and then they will go into Victoriys. But they are all set.

The program is tied in with the availability of machinery. We are actually getting our turbines and gears. The first straight Victory type will have a C-3 power plant in it, and they are already at the yards. And the first Victory turbine gear, that is for the AP-2, will be delivered in February. The original date was March, but we have moved it back because we have expedited the Victory Ship program. Rather than delaying, we have expedited.

The other thing that comes in here--this can't be talked about too much--is a big group of combat ships that have to be built. These are conversions from the ships I am doing in the yards. There is a tendency for these to slow down the yards while they are being built. I have a certain amount that I have to produce before the end of the year, which affects Oregon, Richmond, and Calship, and I have even had to go into some of my C-class yards to do it. That is something that is tied up with war plans that can't be published.

I hate to tell you these things and then tell you that you can't publish them, but they are a part of the war plans.

Mr. Griffin: Those are conversions?

Admiral Vickery: Those are conversions, and they come out as transports. I am building a lot of those ships at the present moment. This slows down those yards, so I won't get as many Victoriys in the 1944 program as I originally contemplated, due to the fact that there

is 180 per cent of the man-hours in one of these jobs thatⁿ there is in a straight Victory. I will get some straight Victorys, but all the keels laid after April 1 will come out as this other type. We will not have as many Victorys in 1944 as we would have had, had we not had to do this conversion program.

I think I have contracted for my last Liberty Ship. And the ones that are contracted for will be finished. At the same time, with these conversions, what I have done is to take the Vancouver yard, which is now building aircraft carriers and which would have gone into tankers, and have shifted it out of tankers and put it into some of these Victorys.

We will have more ways building Victorys than we had before, but we won't get as many due to the fact that these conversions slow down the yards.

That cuts back the tanker tonnage to some extent, but this year we will deliver about three and a half million deadweight tons of tankers, and next year I had nearly five million tons in the program. This will cut the program to about 4,200,000 tons for next year. The thing is rolling now, and we may have to go farther back in the tanker tonnage. At the present time it looks like all those tankers will be required, depending upon what happens in the war picture before the end of next year.

Mr. Griffin: A figure was published on the number of Victorys that were planned, I think along about August. Was it about 319?

Admiral Vickery: It was 339. Actually, it is going to slow down a great deal; we aren't going to get that many Victory Ships next year.

Mr. Griffin: Is it because of the conversions?

Admiral Vickery: Yes. We have more ways building Victories than I had originally intended to have, but there is more work in the ship and more man-hours and it takes longer to build them. We will get the total number, but it will go into the first quarter of '45. That is the way it looks at present.

Mr. Griffin: Will there be any renewal of the points that were made last summer by Gibbs of the WPB?

Admiral Vickery: I think those were all effectively answered, and the thing was absolutely based on a false premise. What you are actually doing is getting carrying capacity. You have more carrying capacity for less steel in shifting into the faster ships than in slow ships. That has never been published, but it was worked up and presented to the joint Chiefs of Staff, and it was directed that we build the maximum number of fast ships that we are capable of building. Had we not done that it would not have been possible to do what we are doing now.

Mr. Griffin: There hasn't been any change?

Admiral Vickery: That's finished business. It was settled amicably.

Mr. Griffin: One other point that I have heard mentioned in that connection was the argument that, even if we had more fast ships, the present speed of convoys is such that the extra speed wouldn't be valuable. Is that true?

Admiral Vickery: That's funny because we run some very fast convoys. If you get all fast ships in a convoy, you don't run the convoy at a slow speed. Make the convoy fast in the first place, and then run it over a certain speed. That was a misconception.

Mr. Griffin: I gathered there was some feeling about it.

Admiral Vickery: You may feel very strongly on something that isn't absolutely right.

As far as repair work on the West Coast is concerned, all our yards have shifted into the high class tonnage. The West Coast yards--- you won't find them building anything that isn't primarily for the war effort, and therefore, you ~~can~~^{can't} expect many conversions to repair work there. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ It is not true of the Navy.

Mr. Griffin: It is more a Naval matter than it is your yards?

Admiral Vickery: Yes. They tried to do it with us. It had some bearing on ~~xxx~~ which yard they picked out. Maybe, toward the end of next year, when we get this thing finished, it is quite possible we will do some of it. Most of the yards aren't fitted for repair--it is an entirely different set-up.

Mr. Griffin: Is there any possibility that, with the favorable submarine situation for the last few months, we would have more merchant tonnage than we could use and it would be necessary to cut back?

Admiral Vickery: I expected there to be a cut-back next year, but when the figures came up of what they wanted us to build there wasn't. The figures are going to be controlled by the number¹ of steel plates I can get. I had to cut back some yards because I can't furnish the steel plates for them.

Mr. Griffin: There is no indication yet of having too many ships?

Admiral Vickery: No, there isn't. There is still a shortage. When I say shortage, I mean there is a shortage for the various planned movements.. I believe with you, and probably in 1944....

I don't believe they will furnish enough cargo to take all these ships.

I believe they are getting more cargo carried than they are getting cargo.

The biggest production year will be this one of '43. What we have done in '43 will never be hit again. That is one of the reasons I wanted to shift into faster tonnage. Actually, you get a better ship and you free the escorts, and by the same terms you get a better job out of it. You can see that you have to look quite a way ahead.

In North Carolina, for instance, the first yard out of Liberty Ships, they finished their last Liberty contract in August. They were to ^{have} delivered their first C-2 in October. We didn't get it until the first of December, and now they are beginning to come. That is one yard with nine ways that I took right out of Liberty Ship construction. I have already taken three out at Oregon, and I think all 11 ways up there will be out by the middle of January. Calship has started to shift, and they have got one keel and they will shift three ways, and start a few more to work. They are doing it by groups of three, moving through the yard.

Mr. Griffin: I have seen and heard some indications about the landing craft program. There have been a few mentions made of it. Can you say anything about it?

Admiral Vickery: We are not building any landing craft, but if they take the steel it means less ships we can build. That, again, is off the record, because it is a Navy problem. They have cut back their escort program tremendously. At the rate the escort vessels were coming they found they wouldn't need them all.

Mr. Griffin: At the same time their demand for landing craft increased?

Admiral Vickery: They have been yelling for more.

Mr. Griffin: Does that affect your program?

Admiral Vickery: As far as steel goes, yes.

Mr. Griffin: Not the yards?

Admiral Vickery: I have built 75 for them, that's all.

Mr. Griffin: That straightens out that question that I had in mind, that in looking at the general picture, the need for landing craft might affect the merchant ship program.

Admiral Vickery: It does on the question of steel plates. Also for propulsion machinery and gears.

Mr. Griffin: You mean for landing craft?

Admiral Vickery: No. They had a certain requirement they had to build up to. Now they are cutting back. There are a lot of components involved. Those ships are all X Diesel-driven, ~~as much~~ as much as they can be.

Mr. Griffin: It is somewhat comparable to the situation some months ago between escort vessels and merchant ships, then?

Admiral Vickery: Yes, but we actually built for them a lot of gears and turbines in our facilities, particularly turbines. But we made our schedules. We have what we needed for merchant ships, and in addition, we actually turned out a lot of turbines for them.

Mr. Griffin: The program, generally, as far as can be told now, stands pretty well as it did then? There are certain factors involved.

Admiral Vickery: There are, but 1943 is going to be the biggest year. We won't build as many ships in '44 as we will build in '43. I am just talking in deadweight tonnage. If anybody would give me as much steel as I could use, I could have built 25,000,000 tons without much difficulty, if I didn't have to do conversions and go into other types.

Mr. Griffin: There is still a continuing large demand for Libertys?

Admiral Vickery: There is still a large demand for carrying capacity, yes, better served by a faster ship. We delivered, I guess, about 1,730 Liberty, and I think we have a total of ^{2,600}~~2,700~~ Libertys to be built.

Mr. Griffin: I expect that nothing could be printed about this. Is there any indication that, if the war with Germany ended within the next six months or so, ~~that~~ shipping requirements would drop sharply?

Admiral Vickery: Nobody has said very much about it, but it seems to me it would. If you free the military load you have to carry over to Britain, and all escort work, it seems to me there would be a hell of a lot of extra ~~of~~ tonnage. That's the way it looks to me.

Mr. Griffin: I'm not a shipping man, of course, but that was the reason I asked the question.

Admiral Vickery: They may move a lot of stuff through India. Don't publish anything like this because I'm not a ^{Trage}strategist. They might move a lot through the Mediterranean and take up a lot of that gap. Frankly, the handling of cargoes and unloading of ships down the Mediterranean is one of the biggest users of tonnage that I know of.

I certainly don't want to go on record for that.

Mr. Griffin: Our man in Italy, Mark Watson, has been writing pieces about how well he thought they put the Naples harbor back into use.

Admiral Vickery: I quite agree with him, but if you take a look at some of the ships that are tied up, particularly where the British are handling the damn ships, you'll find out that it is ~~pre~~ pretty sad.

Mr. Griffin: It keeps a lot of them tied up?

Admiral Vickery: Yes, it takes a long while.

Mr. Griffin: I believe you have answered everything I had in mind. We have come across some people who thought this program might be in the process of being changed again, and I wanted to get it straight.

Admiral Vickery: Well, ^{if} it is changed any way, it will be changed to speed it

. When the cuts come they will be in Liberty Ships.