

TRANSCRIPT OF ADMIRAL VICKERY'S CONFERENCE WITH
MR. WALTER WOOD OF THE WASHINGTON POST, 4:30 P.M.
NOVEMBER 1, 1943

Mr. Wood: I have here the War Production Board reports on ship construction for July and August, and I was wondering if you could tell me why there was only 69 percent production by August when, I believe, it should have been up to 75 percent?

Admiral Vickery: That started with the schedules for the Maritime Commission, which originally were for 16,000,000 tons in 1943. That was what we were asked to produce. Beginning about last December I kept telling them we could build 20,000,000 tons this year, so eventually they got around to putting the last 2,800,000 on A-2 priority. Sixteen million tons are on A-1 priority, and if the material is available for the others, we will build them. There has been a shortage ever since the beginning of this year. We have crowded the program until we probably will get -- in the first place we hit ^a about 20,000,000 ton rate in May of this year, and we have been on a 21,000,000 average rate ever since.

We took on certain conversions in the yards, so that certain ships that would have been finished and delivered aren't being finished and delivered, because we are doing certain things that we wouldn't have done under the original schedule. Actually, at the end of the year -- the last few months -- the program always goes up, and you would have three quarters of the tonnage built anyway. The last months are always heavier, because we are running about a 21,000,000 ton program to catch up the deficit.

You can see up there (indicating chart on wall) the curve of last January. We were only delivering a million tons of shipping a month then, and since May

we have gotten up around a million six or seven, in fact we have gotten up to pretty nearly a million eight on an average. And then the conversions came into the picture. We have taken certain yards out of Libertys and put them into conversions. Some of them are converting Libertys into tankers.

Mr. Wood: Is that what the conversions were?

Admiral Vickery: No, a great many of them were for special Army and Navy work. Instead of finishing ships as cargo ships we have been converting them into troop transports.

Mr. Wood: Is it all right to use that?

Admiral Vickery: You can say conversions, but you can't say what we have been converting them into. We have taken Libertys and made tankers out of a lot of them.

For two months I didn't get any ships at all out of Delta, which normally delivers eight ships a month, on account of diversions. And now they are yelling that they want my valves and pumps on the high-octane program. All of those things are causing delays in turning out the ships.

I have eight ships ^{up there} on which the steering engines didn't pan out. As soon as we get that straightened out, we'll have those ships. But we didn't get a ship in September and we didn't get a ship in October because the steering engines went bad.

Mr. Wood: Would you say then that the situation as you were speaking of it is unusual?

Admiral Vickery: It is not unusual, but it isn't as good as I would like it to be.

Mr. Wood: Do you think you will meet the goal?

Admiral Vickery: We will meet the 16,000,000 ton goal; we will meet that in November because we have over 15,000,000 tons turned in now. About the middle of November we will have turned in the original goal for 1943, but 19,000,000 tons is going to be tight.

Mr. Wood: Do you hold out hopes for meeting the 19,000,000 tons?

Admiral Vickery: Yes, it is going to be tight, though.

Mr. Wood: I wonder if you would reiterate for me one or two certain points that I can use in addition to the conversions that are delaying the program at present. What was the other one, or was there another?

Admiral Vickery: One of them is lack of material. Good ships are tied up for the lack of valves and fittings, which are going to the high-octane program.

Mr. Wood: Is it all right to use that?

Admiral Vickery: Sure -- go ahead, I don't care.

Conversions and lack of material -- and then I have had some mechanical troubles in machinery. But I'll get those ships before the end of the year -- this is only temporary.

Mr. Wood: Would you say what caused that?

Admiral Vickery: I would say it was a damned poor manufacturing job. If you would like to know the name of the manufacturing concern -- no, I don't think I had better publish it.

Mr. Wood: Can you say it is attributable to poor manufacturing? I don't think that would hurt too much, would it?

Admiral Vickery: No, certain ships have been held up because of manufacturing difficulties in machinery.

Mr. Wood: Of certain machinery?

Admiral Vickery: Yes.

Mr. Wood: Would you care to make any forecast of the outlook for 1944?

Admiral Vickery: No, because I don't know exactly what they are going to want. They are still in the process of making up their minds. I don't know what we are going to be called upon to do in 1944 -- nobody will tell me.

Mr. Wood: Will you say that you will at least meet the 16,000,000 ton goal by the middle of November?

Admiral Vickery: By the middle of November we will have completed all of the tonnage we were called upon to build at the 1942 Conference. We have delivered twice as much as we delivered last year.

Mr. Wood: Will that offset the reduction in last month's production?

Admiral Vickery: No, it will be just normal.

Mr. Wood: It will be back to normal?

Admiral Vickery: Last month's reduction -- well, I don't think this month is going to be any better than last month, to tell the truth.

Mr. Wood: What can you tell me about this month?

Admiral Vickery: You mean November?

Mr. Wood: No, October.

Admiral Vickery: The final figures aren't in yet, but there isn't going to be any great increase, I'll tell you that. We will hold our own, but we won't do a lot. On certain things we have done very well -- on the tanker program, for instance. The Liberty Ship program is all right, but the conversions and other difficulties --

Mr. Wood: (interposing) The other difficulties were the three things you outlined?

Admiral Vickery: Yes.

Mr. Wood: You say you'll be doing well to hold your own -- but you will hold your own?

Admiral Vickery: By just a few ships. I don't know what the deliveries are because I haven't got the West Coast reports in. I don't know exactly what the picture is.

Certain ships I refused to take because of machinery troubles, and I have to straighten them out now.

Mr. Wood: Can you give me any figures on the number of ships in which machinery troubles carry?

Admiral Vickery: There are two series of ships that have had machinery trouble.

Mr. Wood: Which ones were they?

Admiral Vickery: One was the long range ships, and ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ the C2 ships. And another was seagoing tugs.

Mr. Wood: I am not familiar with the term, long range ships.

Admiral Vickery: They are the ships like the C1, C2, C3 and C4 types. These happen to be in the C2 class. Auxiliary machinery is the main difficulty.

Mr. Wood: In the conversion work is there any type of ship that I can identify?

Admiral Vickery: I don't think you can, because I don't think the Navy and Army would want to put out the information.

Mr. Wood: Those are the only questions I have, sir. Is there anything you would like for me to know about that I haven't asked you?

Admiral Vickery: Nobody will let me say what I think. I get censored.

Mr. Wood: I certainly would print it -- you just say it.

Admiral Vickery: I think I'd better skip it.