

TRANSCRIPT OF ADMIRAL VICKERY'S INTERVIEW
WITH MR. JAMES G. CROWLEY OF WHALEY-EATON SERVICE
NOVEMBER 18, 1943, 4:30 P.M.

Mr. Crowley: I was hopeful that maybe you could get me up to date on the construction picture. Are you behind now? There are those, you know, who say the program is 40 per cent behind schedule.

Admiral Vickery: We were asked to deliver 16,000,000 million tons this year. We have delivered it.

Mr. Crowley: You have already delivered it?

Admiral Vickery: Yes.

Mr. Crowley: How many will you have delivered by the end of the year?

Admiral Vickery: I think I said we could deliver 19,000,000 tons this year.

Mr. Crowley: And we will?

Admiral Vickery: Yes.

Mr. Crowley: Wonder where I got the idea of 20,000,000?

Admiral Vickery: People have talked of 20,000,000 to 22,000,000. I said I could deliver 20,000,000 if anybody gave me the materials for it.

(Telephone call interruption)

Mr. Crowley: The construction picture is good?

Admiral Vickery: The construction picture is good. We will meet every commitment we have made.

Mr. Crowley: You have all the materials you need? How can we be assured that a shortage of materials may not enter into the picture?

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Admiral Vickery: There are two different sides to it. You say we have all the materials we need. We could build a lot more ships if we had more material. When we don't get it, all I can say is that nobody sleeps peacefully because everybody's ridden all around the Country. Around Newport News, or rather at Wilmington, N. C., these new C-2 ships have been held up on account of valves. We had to give up certain pumps and valves for the high octane program. When we saw that we weren't getting a single complete ship's worth, we saw that it got on trucks and was trucked down to Wilmington.

Mr. Crowley: Is the C-2 program behind?

Admiral Vickery: It is behind my expectations, yes.

Mr. Crowley: Is there any way we can have a picture on that?

Admiral Vickery: I expected to get four ships out of Wilmington this month. I shifted them from Liberty Ships. I won't get four ships -- if I get two I'll be doing well. I hope to make ^{it} /up next month.

We have had some trouble in steering engines out at Moore. For two months we haven't had a ship out of Moore, but now that we have found out what was wrong we are getting them.

The frigate program is somewhat behind because the materials were behind. We are two months late in getting that. We are now caught in the ice on the Lakes.

Where we fall down on one part of the program we catch it up on another part. I don't know whether we will get the identical ships we expected, but we will get the 19,000,000 tons.

Mr. Crowley: What about the barge program? We have discussed that twice.

Admiral Vickery: Concrete or wooden barges?

Mr. Crowley: Both.

Admiral Vickery: Concrete barges from the San Diego yard have been coming out regularly, and the ones from San Francisco have been coming out steadily. And at San Jacinto we have cut back the program -- we are going to build four and those four have been launched. We have cut back at MacEvoy at Savannah, and we haven't gotten any out of those two yards.

We got our first self-propelled concrete ship last week.

Mr. Crowley: Then that program is behind, isn't it? You are not yet bringing oil up?

Admiral Vickery: No, because we are using the barges for something else. The situation got much more acute in the Solomons and we are using them there.

Mr. Crowley: Are they giving satisfactory service?

Admiral Vickery: Very. They towed them out there in heavy squalls and heavy seas. I had one letter around here from a chief petty officer who went out there on a barge, and he says she was towed out with her full load of oil. He had some qualms when he saw the ship, but he says he had just as soon be at sea on her as on any other ship he had been to sea on.

The dry cargo barges -- we have turned some over to the Army and some of them have been used in Alaska. And we are hauling grain down the West Coast with some of them. We are turning some over to the Navy now.

Mr. Crowley: When will you get into the oil traffic from Latin America?

Admiral Vickery: I doubt if we ever get into it. The barges will be used for other things. The tanker program has come so far along that we won't have to. We have a bigger tanker fleet today than we had before the war -- that is the Allied Nations -- we have replaced everything and have a margin.

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Mr. Crowley: What are the figures on that -- 800 and something, isn't that right?

Admiral Vickery: Those figures are confidential, and you can't publish them.

Mr. Crowley: What were the figures that I have seen published?

Admiral Vickery: I frankly don't know.

Mr. Crowley: It was either the Navy or the Maritime Commission and it was along the general line that we had had three hundred and some ships and now we have eight hundred and some. It is a question in my mind.

Admiral Vickery: That won't quite fit any picture.

Mr. Richards: Those were fighting ships -- combat ships.

Admiral Vickery: I saw those figures on fighting ships.

The tanker tonnage -- that is, in number of ships and in carrying capacity, leaving out the question of speed--there are more tankers available now than before the war. They are rolling out at an amazing speed at the present moment.

Mr. Crowley: Can we go into the manpower matter?

Admiral Vickery: Whether I am short of manpower or not?

Mr. Crowley: Yes, and if you are, what your plans are.

Admiral Vickery: Of course we are on the emergency committee on the West Coast. I don't want to publish it now, but on the first of the year I am going on a six-day week. I have been running on a seven-day week, a rotating shift. A rotating shift means that I have one-seventh of the men off all the time, and I am going back to the six-day shift that makes one-seventh more men available.

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I have always had the problem of high absenteeism on Sunday. Say what you will, Sunday is the worst day for absenteeism. Even on this rotating shift Sunday has always been bad.

I have gotten over the hump. 1943 is the big production year. We will not build as many ships next year as we built this year because the requirements aren't there. The requirements are different -- I have been diverting more of my facilities to the Navy all the time. I have got to do certain things next year, which will cut down on the things I had planned to do.

Mr. Crowley: How much is the tonnage for the Navy -- about 4,000,000 tons?

Admiral Vickery: That again is something that can't be published because it is a secret.

Mr. Crowley: When do you expect the program to start slumping off in a major way?

Admiral Vickery: I wouldn't expect much slumping off until next July, with what I have in view now. And the shift takes more time in the yards -- doing what the Navy wants me to do. What we were doing before was in the repair yards. Now we are taking them on in the building yards. So many ships won't come out of the building yards because your man-hours are limited. If you put twice as many hours in a ship you don't turn out as many ships, so you slow down the whole program.

Mr. Crowley: Up to now the emphasis has been on oceangoing ships, which, presumably draw too much water to go up the rivers and into the various little coastal places. Presumably we are going to have to build some of these small vessels when we get through with this program, aren't we?

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Admiral Vickery: You mean coastal vessels?

Mr. Crowley: Yes.

Admiral Vickery: I built 36 of the coastal type for the British under lease-lend, and I am building 33 more of that small type. It is just a material question as to when I will get those ships.

I have 100 of those vessels under contract for the Army and Navy. These are 4,000 ton ships on a lighter draft, and a 320-foot ship -- coastal ship.

Then I have built a certain amount of small coastal tankers, most of which I have turned over to the Navy. Some were turned over to the British and some were turned over to the Army. I am continuing that program. I am undertaking to build 24 more.

Mr. Crowley: I have never had an opportunity to ask anybody what the expectations are as to the lease-lend ships which went to the British and others. If they are still afloat at the end of this war, is it assumed that they will come back to this Country, or will they continue to be operated by the Allied Nations?

Admiral Vickery: It depends on what the final terms of settlement are. Title remains in the United States.

Mr. Crowley: What plan do you have for the shipyards when they have ceased to be of value or of use.? What will we do with them?

Admiral Vickery: I think there isn't just one single answer to that. Take, for instance, certain yards. As your repair load increases with your operations in the Pacific, there are going to have to be additional repair facilities, and probably certain of them will be modified so as to shift into repair work. We

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have kept that in mind and have done certain work with it in view.

After the war is over there are certain yards that will have a number of Liberty Ships laid up there. We must face the fact that there will have to be a reserve fleet. And my theory on the thing is to take the ships that are old -- and we are beginning to weed them out now as the tonnage gets easier -- and the ships that are breaking down and are getting into a bad state of repair and scrap them, and utilize some of these shipyards for proper lay-up to keep the reserve fleet in good condition so that it can be used in case of an emergency.

There are other yards that will be dismantled, and the policy on that isn't definitely determined but will depend a great deal on what the picture is when this thing ends.

Suppose we have to repatriate the Chinese coastal trade. There's an opportunity for taking up some of the slack.

Mr. Crowley: We would build them here rather than send some of that equipment to China?

Admiral Vickery: I think we could build them quicker and probably do a better job, and their yards are all going to be gone over there. I don't think the Japanese will leave any more than the Germans did.

Mr. Crowley: You seem quite satisfied with the picture as a whole? Everything seems to be running pretty much as you want it to?

Admiral Vickery: Yes, I think so. I think that a more tremendous job has been done than anybody thought could be done. We have delivered more than the President and Mr. Churchill asked us to deliver two years ago, and when they set the program they thought they had gotten it up to astronomical figures.

Mr. Crowley: Yes, I should think your chest would be stuck out.

Admiral Vickery: All I do is set at a desk -- the other boys do the work.

Mr. Crowley: I don't want to take any more of your time.