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SUBJECT: River Shipbuilding in the Soviet Union

The craft of shipbuilding is one of the most ancient, as well as one of the most diverse, in the Soviet Union. Each river, because of its individual peculiarities, has lent itself to the development of specific types of ship construction suitable for the particular river. To the present time this variety of construction has confused and confounded not only the operators, but the planners as well, for this variety has not permitted the industry to standardize its product for maximum production.

In 1954 the rivers of the Soviet Union will carry about 8 to 10 percent of the entire cargo of the nation. This cargo is transported over a net of rivers totaling some 450,000 kilometers, of which not more than 25 percent, or some 115,000 kilometers, are considered suitable for self-propelled vessels. ^{1/} In 1954 the estimated total cargo hauled on the rivers of the Soviet Union will amount to approximately 129 million tons.

The rather large fleet needed to haul this amount of cargo is the product, in the main, of the Soviet river shipbuilding industry. It is estimated that there are, on the banks of the rivers of the Soviet Union, some 500 shipbuilding and ship repair yards. Of this number not more than 50 are engaged in actual shipbuilding activities; the rest are engaged in keeping operating vessels

^{1/} N.N. Izhunkovskiy and A.R. Berezinskiy, Vnutrenniye Vodnyiye Puti (The Internal Waterways) Moscow, 1948, p. 8.

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in a reasonably good state of repair. The majority of these building yards belong to the Ministry of the River Fleet*, which Ministry is also directly concerned with the transporting of cargo on the inland water ways of the Soviet Union.

Regarding the over-all importance of the industry, it should be borne in mind that what is, today, a river yard can be, tomorrow, a yard under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Shipbuilding, which Ministry concerns itself almost wholly with the construction of naval vessels. An example of this shift in jurisdiction is the Komsomolsk Shipyard, which, when initially planned in 1932, was to be a large merchant ship building yard. Today the Komsomolsk Shipyard is building submarines and destroyers. Another example of the transformation of a river yard into a major naval building complex is that which has taken place in the Gorkiy area, where extensive naval shipbuilding is now going on. In spite of these shifts, the building yards on the rivers of the Soviet Union are presently able to keep up with the river shipping demands placed upon them for new construction.

It is estimated that new construction during the current Five Year Plan by Soviet river yards for the Ministry of the River Fleet will be: 2/

Year	Self-Propelled**		Non Self-Propelled***	
	No. Vessels	Horsepower	No. Vessels	Cargo-Carrying capacity, metric tons
1951	460	92,000	1200	846,000
1952	480	93,000	1200	865,000
1953	480	89,000	1200	850,000
1954****	400	66,000	1000	740,000
1955	480	99,000	1200	860,000

2/ From estimates compiled for ORR Project 35.503, in progress. Figures rounded.

* On 29 August 1954 a Moscow broadcast reported formation of two separate ministries, the Ministry of the Maritime Fleet and the Ministry of the River Fleet. This is the situation which existed prior to 15 March 1953, the date of the last major re-organization in the water transportation field. It will be some time before specific breakdowns of each ministry will become apparent. (NY Times, 30 August 1954, p. 4.)

** cargo, cargo-passenger vessels

*** Dumb craft

**** Based on scattered half year reports indicating approximately 85-90% plan fulfillment

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Production of this order appears to satisfy the needs of the river fleet for tugs and barges, some 60 per cent of which are of wooden construction. At maximum wartime conversion, it is estimated that these river yards could produce annually some 2000 landing craft of the LCT type.

Over and above the tabulated construction and not included, is construction for the ocean-going fleet, and such building as may be undertaken under the auspices of the Ministry of the Light and Food Industry and the Ministry of the Timber and Paper Industry. Each of these ministries controls its own river yards and engages in the construction of special vessels for its particular needs. Yet another source of shipbuilding is that undertaken for the small rivers which are under the control of various oblast administrations.

The shipyards are, in general, divided into three main types: 3/

1. The shipbuilding zavod* an enterprise which includes shops capable of fashioning raw steel into hull shapes, manufacturing parts, units and hull sections. Ideally such an enterprise will also include specialized shops for carrying out installation work as well as shops for finishing the construction of the vessel after it has been launched. Also included will be yard ways, docks, and shore installations. Finally, the enterprise in this category generally will have a machine building section containing a foundry, forge, and machine assembly shop. In addition there may be a sawmill and carpenter shop for finishing raw timber and manufacturing wooden items.
2. The shipbuilding verf, an enterprise which includes a shop in which hull steel is shaped, an assembly-welding shop, in which sectional assembly may take place, a building way shop, a ship installation shop, and a shop engaged in completing construction. An enterprise of this type usually does not have a machine building section; if it does, its production is of a limited nature.
3. The ship assembly verf, an enterprise of much more restricted scope than the shipbuilding verf, engaged only in the assembly of ships from prefabricated sections, parts, and units delivered from external sources. This type of enterprise does engage, however, in all the installation work necessary for building the ship, conducts moored and underway trials, and actually carries out delivery to the owner, just as do the other types of enterprises.

3/ V.P. Mamontov, Organizatsiya Proizvodstva Stapelnovo Tsekha (Organization of Production of the Buildingway Shop) 1952, pp. 12-14.

* In US practice both zavod and verf would be classed as "yards". They are here used in transliterated form for definition purposes.

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What is the future of the river shipbuilding industry? There is evidence that Soviet planners are not happy with results obtained thus far. One writer points out that "...the shipbuilding industry has had to, and still must, search for newer, more modern, methods of organizing the building of ships so as to decrease the building cycle and reduce production costs..."

4/ The very complexity of the shipbuilding industry makes effective control over it somewhat sketchy. Shipbuilders working in distant compartments and divisions of ships under construction makes supervision of their work a difficult task. Complicating the picture is the lack of needed materials at the proper time, with attendant waste of time and disrupted production schedules. Such tardy deliveries (and the Soviet press does not hide the facts) range from steel, to such small parts as nuts and bolts. Disrupted schedules lead to disrupted plans, for once the rivers have frozen, work stops for the winter unless the yard is one of the few fitted for winter work.

Thus, the complexities and delays in the Soviet shipbuilding system and consequent Soviet press criticism make it difficult to obtain a truly accurate picture of construction capability. Best evidence is that shipbuilding plans are being met. It is the ship repair worker, rather than the ship builder, who is the target of critical articles found in the Soviet press and periodicals. This is, perhaps, the best indication that Soviet river shipbuilders are approaching the goals set for them.

4/ Ibid., pp. 14-15

Coordinated with: 5.

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