Franklin D. Roosevelt Library
Map Room Papers, 1941-1945
Box 162

Folder:
Naval Aide's Files
(A1-1) Habbakuks (Floating Airdromes for Asia Theatre) July 1942-January 1945
MEMORANDUM FOR CAPTAIN JOHN L. McCREA

Subject: 45,000-ton Aircraft Carriers.

Enclosure (herewith):

(A) SECRET correspondence on the subject.

1. The questions raised by the President have been weighed very carefully and I am giving herein my personal opinions, which have the support of the opinions of my own organization. I have not discussed the questions with authorities outside the Bureau of Ships since my conference with the President last month.

(a) I believe very sincerely that we should go ahead with the big carriers. The initial undertaking of two of the four recommended by the Department would accomplish the most important part of the program, namely, starting the only two ships which we could lay down during 1943 and getting the detail drafting and design work in hand. Should subsequent circumstances dictate need for additional ships of the type they can be ordered later with very small loss in time of delivery and small increase in cost.

My very earnest and honest answer to the first question therefore is in the affirmative.

Incidentally, I have just heard that the British Admiralty has in hand a new carrier design for ships considerably larger than the ILLUSTRIOUS Class, although not so large as our proposed 45,000-ton CV's.

(b) As to other types of ships which we could more profitably build using the steel which would go into the big carriers, the present building programs are, in my opinion, very well balanced as they stand. I personally have confidence in the 6000-ton, 5-inch cruisers of the ATLANTA Class. We have seven of them on order but the scheduled deliveries stretch out until the summer of 1945, largely because of the difficulty in meeting the delivery requirements for main machinery.

Actually today, and the situation will apparently continue, hull steel, particularly plates, is very much less critical than is manufacture of main and auxiliary machinery for ships, especially large reduction gears.

Regraded Unclassified
The special treatment (ballistic) steel is still tight but even that will be far less troublesome than it has been during the past year when enormous demands came in for alterations to ships in the fleet as well as for the building program.

Actually, the two big carriers will help to balance the materials situation because they will require only eight sets of main machinery (four shafts per ship) against a large weight of hull steel and armor.

My answer to the second question is therefore that the programs for other types appear to be adequate and, further, that a material increase in numbers of ships of other combatant types would throw us out of balance as to machinery deliveries.

E. C. Cochrane
8 December 1942

SECRET

MEMORANDUM FOR

REAR ADMIRAL E. L. COCHRANE, U.S.N.
Chief of the Bureau of Ships

The President read the attached memorandum
with interest. He asked specifically for a recommenda-
tion from you in regard to this matter:

"In Cochrane's opinion are we justified in building
two of these large aircraft carriers?

What does he honestly think about the matter?

Are there any other types which we could more
profitably build, using the steel that would
necessarily go into the carriers?"

Very respectfully,

JOHN L. McCREA
Captain, U.S. Navy
Naval Aide to the President

Attachments

Memo for the President from Adm. Cochrane,
dated 11-25-42; subject: 45,000 ton Aircraft
Carriers; letter to the President from SecNav
dated 10-31-42; subject: same; memo dated
10-28-42 from Chairman Navy General Board to
SecNav; subject: same; photostated copy of
graph; subject: Carrier Program as of 8-1-42.
SECRET

November 25, 1942

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: 45,000-ton Aircraft Carriers.

Enclosure:
(A) Correspondence on the subject.

1. The original estimates for building the big aircraft carriers were made on the basis that all four of them would be allocated to Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company—the first ship being laid down in June 1943 and finishing in July 1945, and succeeding ships two months apart.

2. Several circumstances have developed since those estimates were made which dictate a change in this allocation of all four ships to Newport News:—namely

   (a) Newport News ways schedule has been delayed by the landing craft program.

   (b) The suspension of work on the big battleships—BB67-71—has greatly reduced the work load in the Drafting Room at the New York Navy Yard.

   (c) The Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company has requested, because of the limited clearances for launching their ships from their building ways, that they be released from any responsibility for damage incident to such launchings.

   (d) Last but not least, the desirability of speeding up the big carrier program.

3. By reallocating two of these ships to the New York Navy Yard, we can speed up the construction by laying down two ships during the summer of 1943, one each at Newport News and New York, and one at each yard at the end of 1943. These are big ships—
the biggest, in dimensions at least, so far built in this country — and I doubt that we can finish them in less than twenty-four months from keel laying. The first ships then would finish in the summer of 1945 and the other two at about the end of that year.

4. This plan would permit pooling the two drafting rooms, which would assure rapid construction and would also permit all four ships to be laid down in the recently constructed shipbuilding docks, which would eliminate launching expense and hazard. These docks were designed for just such big ships.

5. The limitations of ways and materials to which the General Board referred in its earlier memorandum still confront us and will, if we go ahead with the big carriers, require shifting some of the 27,000-ton carriers and accepting moderate delays on three of them out of twenty-three — i.e.:

- **CV15**  Six months delay — from August 1944 to January 1945 — to be shifted to keep a building dock clear at Newport News for a big carrier.

- **CV21**  Four months delay — from January 1945 to May 1945 — to be shifted to clear ways for CV15.

- **CV32**  Eight months delay — from January 1945 to August 1945 — to be shifted from New York to Philadelphia or Norfolk to clear a building dock.

6. A third big carrier could be started at the Philadelphia Navy Yard in the summer of 1943 in a new building dock, but it would displace two heavy cruisers which could not be rescheduled for over a year. While this appeared desirable at first, further study indicates too great a cost in ships delayed and added expense of preparations, molds, templates, etc. for building at a third yard.

7. The plan to carry on the design work at two yards will require more effort in coordination and planning, but we are prepared to furnish that extra effort to speed up the ships. There will be a very much better balance in the work load at the two yards and more force available for the design work, which of course is the critical element in rapid building.

8. All of this has been planned without interfering with the present schedule for battleships of the IOWA Class (BB61-66), although two of them are not now scheduled for completion until late in 1946.
9. If the big carriers are started now, they will be available in 1945 should the need for them persist. They can be suspended if that need is terminated. These ships are, of course, designed to meet the lessons of the war as we have gleaned them so far. Further, they will accommodate the heavier planes which seem to be inevitable in the not distant future. For the early carriers of the ESSEX Class, the limit on individual plane weights is about 18,000 lbs. The 26,000-lb. limit first considered for airplanes for the big carriers is, I understand, already being approached by Bureau of Aeronautics' studies.

10. The big carriers are the most forward looking design we now have for any type. If we push ahead on the first two as suggested above, following with two more about six months later at the same yards, the completions of the first two will be speeded up with minimum interference with the rest of the program, and a distinct gain will accrue in the completion for the second pair over present prospects.

E. L. Cochrane
Rear Admiral, U.S.N.
Chief of Bureau
THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY.
WASHINGTON.

October 31, 1942

My dear Mr. President:

Recently you made a contingent approval of the project for four large 45,000-ton airplane carriers. In your approval, you directed me to have the General Board certify in writing the answer to two queries that you put to them. I am attaching hereto their reply.

Their answer to your first query is unequivocal.

To the second query, they adhere to the original estimates for time necessary to construct these ships. However, I think this answer is dictated by a regard for their own reputation more than anything else. If they say they can be finished in a shorter time and they are not, they will hurt themselves in your estimation. If they say the time cannot be shortened and it is, they won't suffer any from that sort of a situation. In other words, we have here a typical naval psychology in action.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

The President
The White House

Enclosure
From: Chairman General Board
To: The Secretary of the Navy.

SUBJECT: 45,000-ton Airplane Carriers - Construction of.

References: (a) SecNav Memo SC 1014101 of 13 October 1942.
(b) General Board letter G.B. No. 420-7 (Serial No. 223) of 11 September 1942.

1. The General Board has reviewed the question of constructing four 45,000-ton air- plane carriers, giving particular and careful consideration to reference (a) and to the memorandum from the President of the United States dated October 8, 1942. In this memorandum the President states:

"I am, therefore, willing to approve the immediate laying down of these four large carriers on two conditions:

1. That the General Board will certify that the program for the immediate construction of smaller carriers is adequate for the next two years.

2. That greater speed can be made in the construction of these 45,000-ton carriers than is indicated in the report of the General Board of September 11th."

2. In view of the discussion in reference (b) the General Board assumes that the "smaller carriers" referred to by the President relates to:

(a) carriers now being converted from light cruisers, and

(b) carriers now being constructed from merchant hulls or provided for by the conversion of existing merchant ships.

With respect to the first of these two categories, the number cannot be increased except at the expense of cruiser tonnage. In view of the critical need for more cruisers, the Board does not believe that the allocation of any additional cruisers now building or projected for conversion to carriers is justified. With respect to the vessels of the second category, the Board is of the opinion that the number converted, in process or projected is adequate.
The question of adequacy is a relative one, involving comparative strengths in numbers and in design features, plans for the conduct of the war, and the unpredictable results of hostilities over a long period. Having all of these matters in mind, the Board can only state that, in its judgment, the number of these smaller carriers projected is adequate.

3. The agencies of the Navy Department having to do with ship construction have been consulted and the General Board is of the opinion that greater speed can not be made in the construction of the 45,000-ton carriers than is indicated in its report of September 11th. In fact, it is possible that the dates given in the above-mentioned report are over-optimistic on account of present less favorable prospects as regards man power in addition to the other limitations discussed in reference (a).

Copy to V.C.N.O.