

**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**

A1-3

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY  
WASHINGTON

51271

September 15, 1942

(SC)L11-1/QS1  
(044300A)

**SECRET**  
**SECRET**

My dear Mr. President:

I have received your memorandum replying to my letter recommending that the Maritime Commission reduce the number of cargo ships they are building and build as a substitute for them a very simple, easily constructed type of escort vessel.

Your comment on the tendency of the Bureau of Ships to constantly add to and increase the size of all types of ships constitutes one of the most acute problems I have had to deal with. As you know, far better than I do, this is not the only tendency of this character that must be overcome. There is also the tendency to try to improve constantly on accepted plans and thus delay completion of the ships in question. Even if the Joint Staff should act favorably on my proposal to substitute some corvette type of escort vessels for cargo ships, I know I am going to need your help to get out of the Navy a very simple design of escort ship the Maritime people can build.

On my last inspection tour down the Atlantic, Admiral Edwards and I looked over a very simple type of British corvette, about 1400 tons, speed of about 17 knots, which was in reality not much more than a steel hull, a very simple type of a reciprocating engine and the crudest and most primitive kind of quarters for the crew. It was armed with two 3" guns, some machine guns and depth charges. It carried a type of listening device which we are now producing in quantities. There is nothing in this inventory which is not available for the production of this very simple type of escort. The kind of shipyard labor that could produce a cargo ship could produce this escort vessel. It would obviously take less steel plate than would be required for the cargo ship it displaced. It would take a smaller engine than the one which it would displace in a cargo ship and the engine could be made in the same plant where the engine for the cargo ship would have been made. We have plenty of 3" guns and machine guns with which to arm her and, as I have said, we are producing the listening device required in quantities. The product when finished would be a rough, uncomfortable ship but it could go to sea in wintertime and have sufficient speed to be effective against submarines.

**SECRET**

SCJLH-1/QS1  
(044300A)

S E C R E T

The President

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September 15, 1942

It is not as good, obviously, as the more expensive better built and better armed escort vessels that we are building, but I believe it can be built in half the time and, by turning the job of building them over to the Maritime Commission, I believe we can get them in very much greater numbers than if they were built in shipyards controlled by the Navy.

There are two very cogent reasons for anxiety: one, the present success of the German subs in attacking North Atlantic convoys, successful because of the weakness of the escort; and two, the near approach of winter weather when many of the small craft now being used for escort purposes will not be able to keep to sea.

If the Joint Staff does approve this suggestion of mine, I know I will need your help in getting a sufficiently simple plan of a ship so as not to defeat the primary purpose of the whole thing, which is speedy production.

Yours sincerely,

*Frank Knox*

The President

The White House

A1-3

Navy Folder

September 14, 1942.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE  
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY:

I have not had a chance to answer yours of September first in regard to the problem of building more escort vessels. I think you are right and this should be done even at the cost of a few cargo ships.

However, there is and always has been a natural tendency in the Navy itself constantly to increase the size, cost and time of construction for ships of all kinds.

It is perhaps well said that in the case of destroyers, the additional requirements for ordnance, fire control, etc. makes the increase in their tonnage necessary. They have now gone up from the 1500 ton destroyer to the 2200 ton type. There is no question it takes more time, etc. to build a 2200 ton destroyer than a 1500 ton destroyer.

We have undertaken the building of corvettes on a large scale. The original corvette was a thousand tons. The size grew to 1200 tons and before you and I know it, the Navy will be demanding 2000 ton corvettes.

I think it is vital to keep the size down because we get more ships the lower the tonnage is kept.

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This is, of course, not only an historic but a thoroughly understandable tendency in the Navy. I do wish the Navy would agree to a type which has proven successful, keep the tonnage down and multiply the actual numbers.

As I understand it, the Navy shipping board program has been worked out. If not, it should be in a conference between the Joint Board and the Maritime Commission.

F.D.R.