

Mr. RANKIN. I am talking about wooden barges.

Major PARTEN. If you will allow me to go through my statement, I will come to the matter of wooden barges later. We recognize the fact that wooden barges have a place in this picture.

Whatever plans are made for the use of barges, it must always be remembered that a barge is of no use whatever unless there is power to move it. At the present time there are 13 towboats under construction. The completion of these towboats will just about keep the proper ratio in balance between barges and towboats, if the barges now under construction are completed. This simply means that any large-scale barge-construction program must anticipate the building of a suitable number of tugs and towboats.

Steel is of such critical importance for military use in the war program that we cannot expect the allocation of any steel for the building of steel tank barges beyond the construction program now under way.

Our office, therefore, has had to examine thoroughly the use of substitute materials for such construction. Our conclusion has been announced that the tank barge constructed of wood will provide a necessary supplemental transportation facility under certain restrictive conditions. Barge experts recommend against the use of wooden barges for the general transportation of petroleum and its products.

Long experience has proved that it is impossible to construct wooden barges which in use will not develop leaks. In handling heavy fuels the necessity for heating for loading and unloading may be expected to cause warping with consequent leakage. Collisions in passing other tows, bridge abutments, and other obstacles along canals, jostling and maneuvering at loading and unloading terminals, all exaggerate the natural tendency of wooden barges to leak with consequent fire and pollution hazards.

The explosive and inflammable gases that accompany gasoline and other "low flash point" oils present such enormous hazards of fire and explosion in wooden barge operation that all the experts with whom we have consulted advise against the use of the wooden barge for such cargo.

Notwithstanding the disadvantages presented, the Office of Petroleum Coordinator supports a restricted use of wooden tank barges and has recommended relaxation of Government regulations to allow the construction and operation of these vessels under a Government policy as follows:

To construct and use wooden barges for the transportation of high-flash oils under the following conditions:

(1) Any wooden tank barge construction program should embrace simultaneous construction of required power equipment.

(2) Oil transported thereby should be limited to grade E oil (150° F. flash point or above) as defined by the rules and regulations of the Board of Supervising Inspectors.

(3) Such movements should be excluded from congested areas and locked waterways.

(4) The operation of such wooden tank barges should be eliminated as rapidly as possible when normal methods of transportation are resumed to reduce fire and pollution hazards.

The following factors limit large-scale barge operations:

1. Power equipment: Additional power equipment requires steel and engines of Diesel or steam design, all of which are at a premium