

BIG CONCRETE SHIP AFLOAT IN PACIFIC

Launching of the Faith So Successful That 54 Others Are to be Built at Once.

FLOAT 3 STEEL VESSELS

New 9-000 Ton Craft Takes the Water Thirty Days Ahead of Schedule at Oakland, Cal.

A PACIFIC PORT, March 14.—So successful was the launching here today of the world's largest reinforced concrete ship that her builders announced that they immediately would begin construction of fifty-four similar ships, and expected that all would be completed within eighteen months.

Six weeks from the day the concrete was poured into the forms the 7,900-ton ship, named the Faith, took the water. The huge hull, careening sharply as it slid sidewise down a steeply pitched incline, threw up a big wave in the narrow estuary, then righted sharply and rode like a buoy. Not a hitch marred the operation, and engineers declared themselves so satisfied with the launching that it would be unnecessary, in their opinion, to give the Faith a trans-pacific towing tryout, as had been intended. Engines will be installed at once, and the Faith will be put into commission as soon as she can be fitted out.

Experts who witnessed the launching predicted that concrete construction would mark a new era in shipbuilding, and that the speed with which such ships could be turned out undoubtedly would have an important bearing on the successful prosecution of the war.

Utility rather than grace is expressed in the concrete ship's lines. She looks as if she might have been carved out of rock, so massive is her build.

The launching was from a broad meadow, with none of the usual appurtenances of commerce except a spur track and a couple of construction sheds. It is the contention of the builders that concrete vessels can be built with no greater preparation, wherever land and water meet and that material always is at hand or near by. This obviates the necessity for costly yards required to handle wooden and steel ships, and long hauls of material.

Engineers for the company also said that, contrary to popular impression, reinforced concrete had notable flexibility under strain and would, therefore, be able to stand the stress of sea duty. The reinforcing is expected to prevent possibility of a hole in the side from collision or other sources, "except dynamite." The worst that could happen, it was declared, would be a crack in the hull.

The vessel is 320 feet long, 44.6 feet wide, and 30 feet deep, and will carry 5,000 tons of cargo.

Advantages claimed for the vessel are that concrete construction does not interfere with steel construction, plenty of concrete can be had; concrete vessels can be built for the present cost of wooden vessels; concrete vessels of 7,-

500 tons can be launched within ninety days after work starts, while the cost of the "plant" is "as \$25,000 to \$500,000" compared with a steel shipyard.

"When the first steel vessels were built people said they would not float, or if they did they would be too heavy to be serviceable," said W. Leslie Comyn, President of the concern which built the boat. "Now they say the same thing about concrete. But all the engineers we have taken over this boat, including many who said it was an impossible undertaking, now agree that it is a success."

The floor of the vessel is about four and one-half inches thick; the side four inches, with a great steel shoe down the bow. Imbedded in the concrete are 540 tons of steel; a continuous basket-work of welded steel mesh, and hundreds of heavy iron bars, also welded together.

A watertight wood flooring resting on the bottom beams constitutes the double bottom of the vessel. No provision is made for water ballast, the theory being that the vessel will travel without ballast, riding safely with her heavy bottom. Six concrete bulkheads divide the vessel. The main deck is wood, laid on concrete stringers; the shelter deck is concrete. The dead weight is put at 600 tons more than that of a steel vessel of like capacity. The vessel will burn oil, using 160 barrels a day, and her reinforced concrete tank will carry thirty days' supply.

OAKLAND, Cal., March 14.—The first triple launching on the Pacific Coast took place today, when three 9,400-ton steel merchantmen slid into the waters of Oakland Harbor. In less than an hour there was thus added 28,200 tons to the nation's merchant marine. The vessels were the steamships Shintaka, Aniwa, and Oakland, each 425 feet long, 53 feet beam, and 26½ feet in depth of hold. The Shintaka and Aniwa were built under contract with the Emergency Fleet Corporation of the United States Shipping Board and the Oakland was commandeered from the Cunard Steamship Company.

They are the product of 4,000 men working day and night in eight-hour shifts. The keels of the Shintaka and the Aniwa were laid on Nov. 16 and that of the Oakland on Nov. 12. When the vessels were put into the water the work was thirty days ahead of schedule.