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Vichy Fleet Now Holds Balance of World Sea Power

Darlan Has Mighty Forces, Ready to Put to Sea at Once

By OSCAR J. KRITZER

With the new evidence of all-out Vichy-Hitler collaboration the question of the fate of the French Fleet once more comes to the fore. Vichy's naval forces—now scattered at Toulon, Marseilles and other French Mediterranean ports and at Dakar, Casablanca, Oran and Bizerta on the North and West African coasts—could seriously affect the balance of naval power between the United Nations and the Axis.

According to the best available estimates the combined fleets of the U. S. A., Britain and Russia today have only a ratio of five to four of the naval strength of Germany, Italy and Japan. If the Vichy ships stay put, therefore, we shall continue to enjoy that naval superiority and accelerated U. S. shipbuilding will even increase it.

Big Units

But if, despite repeated protestations to the contrary, Laval and Admiral Jean Darlan decide to turn over French warships to Hitler, the balance of naval power will swing to the Axis.

Admiral Darlan still has a formidable fleet under his command, despite losses in sinkings, internments by the United Nations, and defections to the Fighting French. Here's how it shapes up:

The Richelieu, 35,000-ton battleship, was damaged by the British at Dakar and is still there, probably repaired by now; Jean Bart, 35,000-ton sister ship of the Richelieu, was towed incomplete to Casablanca after the fall of France, but probably had been completely fitted and armed by now.

The 26,500-ton battleships, Strasbourg and Dunkerque, are at Toulon. The Dunkerque and the old 22,000-ton Provence, also at Toulon, were damaged by the British at Oran but are now repaired.

Vichy Fleet

Four heavy and four light cruisers are either at Toulon or some other French Mediterranean or African port. Between 40 and 50 destroyers are scattered at various Vichy bases, as are 50 to 60 submarines, plus an unspecified number of torpedo, patrol and other auxiliary craft.

A hint as to where Hitler would get the manpower to run these ships if he chose to use his own men instead of trusting French sailors was given last May 26. It was then reported from reliable underground sources in France that Laval was permitting Nazi sailors to be trained at French naval yards.

French ship construction and machinery differs radically from that employed by the German Navy. The Nazi sailors have had time since May to become familiar with the operation of French warships.

Units of the Vichy fleet have not been allowed to deteriorate. Rumors circulated to that effect no doubt emanate from Axis sources seeking to throw the Allies off their guard. Those ships based in the Mediterranean have been "exercised" regularly and probably would be ready to put to sea at an hour's notice.

New Ships

At the time of the fall of France, there were more than 40 warships building in French shipyards. The fate of these ships remains a closely guarded secret of Vichy to the present day, but in all probability Hitler has given permission for their completion so that he could take them over at the appropriate time.

Fighting French circles in London and Washington have charged repeatedly that a good part of the submarine fleet based at Toulon has been turned over to the Nazis. As the exact number of submarines in Vichy's possession has varied, Laval already may have begun naval collaboration with his Nazi master.

PM

Nazis Get Foreign Ships from Vichy

By FREDERICK KUH

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LONDON, Sept. 14.—Reports have reached London that Vichy has agreed to turn over to the Germans a number of foreign ships which were interned in French ports after the French collapse.

The Germans asked Vichy for 200,000 tons of ships, mostly flying the French flag. Laval is reported to have been unwilling to transfer French sailors to the Nazis, and Vichy and Berlin then began discussing a compromise.

Of the 200,000 tons of ships Hitler was demanding, about 70,000 were foreign, and of those 70,000 something like 30,000 to 40,000 tons belonged to countries now under German military occupation, notably Belgium, Denmark and Holland.

To Charter Them

All of these 30,000 to 40,000 tons are to be turned over to Germany. A pretense of legality may be kept up by the Germans chartering those vessels from Vichy instead of just taking them at the muzzle of a gun.

There also has been some question of Vichy letting the Nazis have a considerable number of British ships sequestered in France. For the moment, however, that idea seems to have been dropped, for the British in turn also have under their control a quite respectable number of French ships and thus could retaliate. Vichy wishes to avoid prejudicing the ultimate fate of French ships in British hands.

The arrangement agreed upon falls short of German hopes. The Germans evidently are getting only a fraction of the tonnage they asked for. They were and still are especially eager to obtain tankers from Vichy, and on that score they have drawn a blank altogether. Most of the tankers the Germans were after are French, and Laval has declined to part with them.

Need Tankers

The Nazis' need for oil tankers is connected with their plans for deriving the biggest possible advantage from the Soviet oil fields which they have taken and those which they believe will before long be in their hands in the Caucasus.

The Caucasian oil wells at Maikop, with an annual output of at least 2,500,000 tons, already are under German control, thought it will be months before the Germans can begin exploiting them. The German dream, of course, is to capture the enormously rich

Ships from Vichy

petroleum of Baku, but they still have plenty of fighting to look forward to before they get there, if they ever do.

Hitler's hope is to enjoy a steady flow of oil from the Russian fields. To transport that oil to Germany and the fighting fronts, he needs tankers. Rumania has an excess refining capacity of 94,000,000 tons yearly, and the Germans want to transport the Russian oil there for refining.

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