Specially-Built Boat Only Link on Treacherous Snake

Aboard the Motor Vessel Wenaha on Snake River — (U.P.) — Some weeks, Oliver McNabb works only two days. But—and he's not kidding—"they're the longest days there are."

McNabb is the captain of the motor vessel Wenaha that much of the year is the only link with civilization for the 75 families who live along the banks of the Snake river for 100 twisting, rapid-choked miles upstream from Lewiston, Ida.

The Wenaha is a specially-constructed, steel-hulled, aluminum superstructure craft operated by the Inland Navigation Company.

It weighs about 14 tons and can carry about half that weight in cargo—whether it's up to its limit of 45 passengers or a load of pigs.

The vessel is powered by a pair of 165 horsepower diesel engines driving 24-inch propellers. McNabb steers with an eight-spoked wheel that controls dual seven-by-four foot rudders.

All-Essential

The Wenaha has a draft of less than two feet. This is all-essential for operation on the Snake, particularly during the many months of "low water" when rocks in the continuous series of rapids are menacingly close to the surface.

Going downstream with the current, the vessel can make up to 24 miles an hour. Upstream, its progress can be measured sometimes in inches, mighty few of them at that, per minute as it groans over the rapids.

During the 100 miles travelled by the Wenaha, the Snake rises about 500 feet. Some of the steep canyon walls shelter rapids so violent that they resemble a set of stairs, rather than a navigable river.

McNabb, a husky-armed, freckled-shoulder man in his late 20s, has been captain of the Wenaha for six years. His mail contract provides he must make the 200-mile trip, upstream one day and down the next, once a week.

On the upstream voyage, the vessel carries a varied cargo of mail, gasoline, appliances, farm equipment, livestock and, as McNabb puts it, "just about anything you can name."

On the way back to the Lewiston dock, it hauls occasional passengers, farm produce and mail that includes letters to stores ordering supplies for delivery the next week on the Wenaha.

McNabb's a captain of much action but few words.

Asked why he threaded his way around the port side of a rifle-lined sandbar, instead of to the starboard, he replied simply, "Looks."

Subject Closed

Requested to elaborate, he added: "Looks better." And, with a twist of the wheel and a poke at the throttle, the subject was closed.

During the summer, many of the boat-supplied farmer residents of the central Snake River canyons leave their alfalfa patches and take their stock to the highlands for pasturage. Their places on McNabb's river route are taken by sportsmen and engineers working on power dam locations.

The mail contract requires the once weekly trip. Only three times in his six years has McNabb not been able to make it. This spring, the flood-crested waters were so littered with trees and other debris that there was no hope of making it for three weeks.

The Snake does not ice up in the winter, but it does snow down in the canyon, where the short days permit little sunlight to reach the river. When visibility is poor, McNabb turns on his spotlight, revs up his engines and jams on anyway.

He has only two crew members—both for the regular runs and the occasional charter trips. Keen-eyed Paul Redman, who is even less conversationally minded than the skipper, is pilot. Bill DeVault is the deck hand, grease monkey, mechanic and cook in the small galley.

Specialists Destroy Incendiary Bombs

Denver — (U.P.) — Highly specialized teams at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal are systematically destroying obsolete M-69 napalm incendiary bombs, Col. William A. Johnson, acting commander of the Army Chemical Corps at the arsenal has disclosed.

Johnson says destruction of the 30,000 500-pound bombs and 136,000 M-47, 100-pound napalm bombs would take at least two years. The larger bombs will be destroyed after all the M-69s are dissembled and burned, he said.

"The bombs are obsolete," Johnson said, "and there is no alternative but to destroy them. Storage costs are prohibitive and we've had them on hand too long. We have no further use for them."

The steel casings which hold the napalm mixture are being salvaged and sold for scrap. The mixture is being burned in a deep pit.

Johnson said only a few of the bombs can be destroyed each day.

Gen. Sherman's Home Tourist Attraction

Lancaster, O. — (U.P.) — More than 4,000 persons come here each year to visit the home of Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman, the man who led the famous "March to the Sea" during the Civil War.

The Sherman family home has been open to tourists for the past five years and more than 20,000 persons have viewed it since then.

The house was built in 1812 and is now operated by the Ohio State Historical Society.

WEEPING in total torment is Mrs. Dolores Clayton, 25, when she returned from a night out to learn two of her three children died in Oakland fire. *(International)*