LA-BUILT BOATS ARE IN VIET NAM

Will Be Joined by Others Made in State

By DON LEE KEITH
(Times-Picayune Staff Correspondent)

The 104 vessels being built by Stewar• under government contract costs of $3.1 million under the known as the official Naval designation of PCH (P 17 1 01) are known locally as Swiffs. Measuring 30 feet in length with a beam of 7 feet, their value is valued at slightly in excess of $93,000 and is being classified as minelayers.

BOATS' ARMAMENT

Kenneth J. Hidalgo, vice-president and engineer of the screw plant, described the general armament of a vessel as a 75 mm. Gun mounted on the gun mount on the forward wheelhouse. An additional 3.75 mm. gun is carried piggyback atop a breeching gun mount on the afterdeck. A 20 mm. machine gun is also used to fire the five enlisted men and one officer, the boats also have pilots from the U.S. Department of Transportation and a Vietnamese naval man who will instruct the crewmen of the boats which are stationed in the U.S. Navy's anti-infiltration patrol in the Southeast Asia conflict.

In a usual 90-day period of construction and trial runs in the Atchafalaya River, the screws are built in the Berwick plant and are then towed to New Orleans via the Intracoastal Waterway and are then forwarded to Vietnam by steamship. Each leaves the Stewart plant carrying five individuals and is equipped with a welder's crane in which it rests while aboard ship. It has been used for repair, splicing, welding, armament, radio, radar, etc., and needs only to be fueled at sea.

Weight was also a factor in selection, since its aluminum hulls are only one tenth of the total weight of steel. The boat weighs about 46,000 pounds. Hidalgo explains that he is entirely satisfied. (Continued on page 3)
Patrol Boat for Viet Nam in Trial Run

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high speeds, the boat can operate about 10 hours without stopping to be refueled, but on patrol work, when high speeds are not necessary, it can go for perhaps 18 hours.

Sewart, the only firm now manufacturing the special boats, employs approximately 350 craftsmen in the Swift program, which accounts for about 90 per cent of the company's workload. The labor force is drawn primarily from a five-parish area surrounding Berwick and a large number of the employees are trained by Sewart.

Originating in Berwick some 25 years ago, the company is presently the world's largest builder of high speed crewboats or personnel transport boats for the offshore oil industry, according to company officials.

IN HURRICANE

A pair of 45-foot Sewart boats similar in design to the Swifts were sent to Venezuela under their own power in 1969. They encountered a full-fledged hurricane with waves up to 49 feet and neither boat sustained the slightest structural damage.

Begun last summer, the Swift building program will be completed in August, according to P. W. Sewart, president of the company. All 104 boats, each expected to last in excess of 50 years, will have been delivered by that time. Eight are to be used as training boats, and the Navy will determine how many others will be shipped to Viet Nam, to augment activities of the two which have already arrived there.

The expanded facilities of Sewart Seacraft will be opened to the public Saturday in ceremonies expected to be attended by several members of the Louisiana Congressional delegation and other political and business figures.

The public and the visiting dignitaries will inspect the construction procedures at the plant and will be informed of the Louisiana-built vessels now serving the Navy in Viet Nam.

Two 50-foot boats, known as Swifts, are being built for service in Viet Nam under a $13.2 million contract. Construction will continue until August.

Examining the armament of patrol boats specially built for action in Viet Nam at Sewart Seacraft Inc. in Berwick, La. (from left) F. W. Sewart, president; John W. Tolliver, representing the supervisor of shipbuilding, Eighth Naval District, and Kenneth Hidalgo, Sewart vice-president. The vessels can exceed 25 knots.