

HEADQUARTERS  
U.S. STRATEGIC BOMBING SURVEY  
(PACIFIC)  
APO 234  
C/O POSTMASTER, SAN FRANCISCO

RESTRICTED

INTERROGATION NO: 336

PLACE: Tokyo  
DATE: 9 & 12 Nov45

Division of Origin: Basic Materials  
Subject: Wartime Coal Problems  
Personnel interrogated: MATSUMOTO, Kenjiro, President of Coal  
Toseikai since 1941; graduate of  
Wharton School of Finance, 1893; long-  
time president of Meiji Mining Co.  
Speaks English; very cooperative.  
Where interviewed: Meiji Bldg  
Interrogator: Lt Cdr D. A. BURR, Lt R. E. BURNES  
Interpreter: In English  
Allied Officers Present: Maj W. P. ARMSTRONG, Lt B. A. MANWING  
At interrogation of Nov 12 only Lt Cdr  
BURR present

SUMMARY

1. War planning for coal production was arbitrarily set by Cabinet at 70,000,000 tons, disregarding the industry's statement that such a level could not be attained without greatly increased allocations of labor and materials, and at the expense of so neglecting ordinary provisions for repair and new development that an extremely serious condition would arise by the fall of 1945. The industry was instructed to concentrate on maximum immediate production, and to disregard the effect on future production. Coal production would have fallen to 10-15,000,000 ton level by end of 1945 if war had continued.

2. Rationalization was attempted on small scale late in the war, but was ineffective.

3. Labor Shortage was very serious, resulting from conscription and by inducements to take other jobs, such as construction of airfields. This continued in spite of laws and agreements freezing labor which were not actively enforced in local areas.

4. Materials shortage was aggravated because the many small, local iron works on which mines had depended for much equipment and repairs were "taken over by the military". The TOSEI KAI kept fairly good control of allocated steel supplies, but other materials were very largely subject to the black market. Lack of local truck transportation was a great hindrance to upkeep.

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Transcript of Interrogation with Mr. MATSUMOTO  
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## TRANSCRIPT

Q. Please describe for us your career, especially as it touches on coal.

A. My father started coal mining and that is where I got my start. I was at the Wharton School in the United States in 1893. When the war started with China in 1894 I came back to Japan. Some years afterwards I succeeded my father as President of Kyushu Mining Association. Then the Coal Mining Association was organized in 1921 and a few years afterwards I became President of this Coal Association. Then I became President of the Showa Company. Then afterwards it became more necessary to organize a stronger organization to control distribution of coal and we organized TOSEI KAI.

Q. Were you President of the Meiji Mining Company?

A. Yes, for some years.

Q. Please tell us what relationship there was between the coal association, TOSEI KAI, and the government planning board. Did they consult with you about possibilities of production of coal, etc.?

A. Yes. The Planning Board wanted 70 million tons to correspond with the needs of other lines of commodities. But that it was impossible to do. The government was not able to fulfill the coal industry's needs for equipment, repairs, materials, laborers, etc. They never furnished us with enough of those things to make the goal possible. I told them our maximum was 60 million tons. Even this, it turned out, we were not able to realize. The Planning Board insisted we do our best in fulfilling their requirements.

Q. Was it your opinion that the Planning Board, immediately before the war, appreciated the necessity for coal production to support the war production in general?

A. Yes. They were always asking for more than we could produce. My opinion was, and I told those concerned, that only by some extraordinary means could we get the maximum, by seeking out the richest seams, neglecting safety pillars and other mining precautions, to an extent where we would have to stop mining altogether after about two years until this backlog was caught up.

Q. What was the attitude of the Planning Board at the start of the war in 1941?

A. At the start of the war they did not think much of coal supply. They thought that if there were a shortage they could always bring some from China or Manchuria. In general plan making they never put things together. When they talk about coal they never gave us full information. It was not possible to get full information from the officials because if they talked some about coal, they would not talk about transportation, etc.

See Note

Q. Could you give us any explanation of the conditions at that time which caused the Planning Board to ignore the coal situation so much?

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A. I think they thought they could get full supply from Karafuto and Manchuria.

Q. Do you know whether at that time Japan made a study of the coal situation of England and America during the previous war?

A. That is what I thought from the beginning. We must keep our experienced men in the mines and keep them from being called into service, but they didn't pay attention. Our technicians and engineers were called into the service and we had to fill in with Koreans.

Q. To what extent was mining in Japan dependant on skilled labor? How long did it take to train a man?

A. 1 or 2 years. (Note: Other authorities have set this period at six months)

Q. Was production of coal hindered in the early years because miners left their jobs for other industries?

A. Yes, the other industries paid higher wages.

Q. Did the coal industry and TOSEI KAI attempt to have wages increased so miners would stay in the mines?

A. We pay according to their output. We have a standard wage which is the lowest; then when they put out more than standard tonnage, they get so much increase.

Q. Was the standard wage fixed by the government?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you try to get that standard wage increased?

A. Yes.

Q. What success did you have?

A. The government had the balance of these wages and they were very strict. Other industries had to be considered and the effect of wage increase on them.

Q. Was that handled by the Ministry of Welfare?

A. Yes.

Q. Did the coal industry tell the Ministry of Welfare they were losing their miners?

A. Yes.

Q. Could you tell us what reply the Ministry gave you?

A. They only allotted us engineers, but we were never able to fully obtain all the men we required. That is on account of distributing of these engineers and men. They get different requirements from different industries. They count up. Then, let us suppose, they count coal or steel as the most important factor for distributing new labor. The military, we will say, is last. What happens is that the military will get the first requirement for engineers and men and other industries get what is left.

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Q. Did you ask the Ministry of Welfare to pass a law prohibiting miners from leaving mines for other industries?

A. Yes. But leaving the mine has never been effectively applied.

Q. Whose responsibility was it to apply it?

A. We think ourselves. If our miners got more wages than other laborers, and also living accommodations, housing, and food, by this special care labor would be more appreciative. We found that what happened was that after a year or two in the mines the workers left. The rate of turnover each year was 100%. Some 20% of the miners stayed at work a long time, while most of them were in and out of the mines within a year's time.

Q. What attempts did the TOSEI KAI make to freeze the men to their jobs?

A. A great deal was made thru improving living conditions, etc.

Q. We are interested in discovering whether the Japanese government took an action similar to that by England and America in making it impossible for workers in a certain industry to change their jobs without the permission of their government. I understand this was done in Japan quite late in the war.

A. Yes, very late.

Q. Could you tell us why it wasn't done earlier? Was it considered earlier and rejected?

A. I hardly think there is any reason.

Q. Was it neglect on the part of the government to appreciate the importance of coal production?

A. It is difficult to find out the true reason why they didn't consider it more seriously. They just didn't.

Q. Have you an opinion on it? Was it because there was an objection on the part of the Welfare Ministry?

A. I don't think that point was very seriously taken up, that is all.

Q. Did the Army object to such a law?

A. No. I don't think such a condition was brought up.

Q. We have heard that the Army did not show any consideration for coal miners in calling up the men for the Army, that they even took technicians and engineers and put them in the Army as privates. Was there an attempt on the part of the coal industry to have the Army leave these men?

A. Yes. Before last year we came to an understanding. At beginning they ordered to return from the service those who were needed at home. That was carried out year before last. That included only a small number, a few thousand men. Those men who were returned did not want to work underground. Many of these men were promoted to Sergeant and they did not want underground work.

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Q. We would also like to have your opinion on the effect on production of giving miners special bonus payments as an incentive payment for work in mines. Would you have to exceed the limits placed by the Welfare Ministry in order to keep them from leaving for other industries?

A. Before the war the miners' pay was rather poor and limited. After a few years of service it became necessary to give him some savings but our pay was not enough to do it. It was decided by some mines to give 3 or 5 thousand yen to workers after 3 or 5 years, but this was not done in general.

See Note

Q. We would like to get your opinion on rationalization in the mines. We have heard that from '37 to '40 and '41 the government had encouraged the opening of very many small mines and that these mines were not very efficiently operated, and that the coal was not so good. We are wondering what measures were taken by the government to consolidate those mines and turn them over to more efficient operators, especially when material and labor became so scarce.

A. We ought to have had this. By our coal conditions, they have a limit of extension of concession mining rights. At the beginning these mines were very, very small. After it became scientifically recognized that mining could be done more economically if done on a larger scale, there were many mergers into large mines. However the old concessions still remain. Even at present, the term "large mine" is used to describe a mine with an output of 50,000 ton, this, as you know, is a very small output for a mine. The number of these small mines makes about 80% of all mines. This 80% of mines produces only about 20% of all of Japan's coal.

Q. The TOSEI KAI was organized to promote the consolidation of small to large mines?

A. Yes, we have done that a great deal, but during the war we had to pay a compensation to the small mine. So many of these small mines still remain which we will have to amalgamate if we plan to work rationally.

Q. Did the TOSEI KAI make a study of the mines in Japan and make a report on the extent to which they could be amalgamated?

A. No. Only partly.

Q. Do you consider that it was an important factor in increasing production?

A. I think so. Now during the war, on account of shortages, repairs were very neglected. So first of all, we have to fulfill the labor; then, it is important to get the mines opened and put in order for work. Some mines may be readied for work in six months. Other large mines may require as much as two years to be readied. I am told repairs are needed about four times a year in the mine. We neglected these repairs and now our job is made bigger. Whenever the mines were shorthanded the first thing they did was to pull a repairman off and put him on regular work. These repairs will now need much attention.

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Q. Were there any cases where poor mines were closed down and miners were taken to a good mine?

A. Yes, that was our purpose. It worked as far as equipment was concerned, but men who were accustomed to work in small mines would not like to work in larger mines. They did not have as much freedom in a larger mine where operations were more standardized. It is a peculiar fact. We could move them, but they would not stay.

Q. Have you a rough estimate of how many mines were actually closed out in that process?

A. I can't tell you, but roughly speaking maybe 20 or 30 mines.

Q. Did you think it should have been done more widely?

A. No, I don't think so. It is only in Kyushu we had a few mines. It would not have helped production very much to have done that. It took time to transfer that equipment and sometimes transportation could not be found to make the transfer.

Q. Did the equipment from the KUSHIRO mines arrive at the other mines?

A. Yes, it took a longer time for moving it than I expected.

Q. Did you have very much difficulty in paying the compensation?

A. No. We had a committee and we had worked out a general plan.

Q. Would you say that a plan for rationalization was not executed because the government considered it too expensive?

A. No.

Q. At what stage in the war was this plan for rationalization carried out?

A. Later in the war.

Q. We will ask your people for the number of mines that were rationalized. They will have those?

A. Yes.

Q. Was there much objection to rationalization on political grounds?

A. No. You know that before the war these small miners got their funds from coal merchants in advance and they get the coal for a little while. When the market is bad they stop mining. After a few years if the market is good they open up the same way. They get new funds and start again.

Q. Mr. MATSUMOTO, we have wondered what the attitude during the war was regarding delegation of large authority for war production to certain individuals, to one man, to do the kind of thing that Dr. Speer did in Germany, having authority over the entire economic structure of the country. Was that seriously considered in Japan?

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A. That was seriously considered by ourselves. We proposed a government with regards to this economic organization, somewhat like the situation you mentioned, to let experienced people do it without any interference. This has never been done.

Q. Was there particular objection to it in certain quarters?

A. No. Except that the bureaucrats might have objected to it.

Q. Was there any particularly able man in Japan to handle that type of job?

A. That is a delicate question. In coal business I am quite old enough to retire, but there is no other man to replace me. That is the reason I have been forced to continue.

Q. Do you think production during the war could have been substantially improved if there had been a central authority to coordinate?

A. Yes, I think it was possible to some extent. If I had full control I could get complete supplies, machinery, labor and make plans for all mines. That would make mining easy.

Q. When the Ministry of Munitions was established, was it intended that the Minister of Munitions have such authority over all of war production?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you have very much difficulty with the bureaucrats, fuel bureau, because they did not appreciate the practical considerations of coal mining?

A. Yes.

NOTE: In a brief interview on Nov 12, Mr. MATSUMOTO stated that in 1943 he warned the Planning Board that unless more attention could be devoted to maintaining repair of pits and equipment and developing new pits, coal production in the fall of 1945 would fall to an annual rate of 10-15,000,000 tons. The reply he received was that such an eventuality would have to be accepted, that by the fall of 1945 the war would be over and then it would not matter if two or three years should be required to restore production.

He amplified his previous statements regarding labor. Even after the fixed employment regulation to include coal miners in freezing jobs early in 1944, there was almost no attempt at enforcement. Workers were given employment registration books, but when they felt like leaving they would simply tear up the books and forget about the rule. Government officials in Tokyo promised repeatedly to secure enforcement, but nothing was done at the local police level. As usual, the military were the worst offenders, even resorting to driving their trucks to the mining towns at night and smuggling workers off to build airfields, etc. When protests were made to the Army Ministry, apologies were received but no action.

Additional information was also provided regarding materials shortage. Many mines had long been dependent for repairs on small local iron works, but these were preempted by military orders. With the exception of Steel, over which the TOSEI KAI was able to exercise its allocation authority to a generally satisfactory extent, most materials were widely dependent on the black market at inflated prices. Also critical was the breakdown in local motor transportation for such needs as hauling materials and equipment needing repair.