

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



INTERROGATION NO. 296

PLACE: Tokyo
DATE: 10 November 1945

Division of Origin: Basic Materials
Subject: Coal handling facilities at Japan Seaports.
Personnel Interrogated:
TAKAHASHI, T. Koeki Eidan, former manager Mitsui coal depot at Kawasaki.
Where Interviewed: Meiji Building
Interrogator: Lt. R. E. BURNES
Interpreter: None
Allied Officers Present: Lt. Comdr. HATFIELD, Lt. Comdr. BURR, Lt. MANNING

SUMMARY

General discussion and request for submission of detailed information.

1. Condition of coal handling at Japan Sea Ports.
2. Measures adopted for improvement.

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Background of person interviewed.

Mr. Takahashi served with the Mitsui Company until June 1944 at which time he joined the Koeki Eidan. From 1941-1944 he was manager of Mitsui's coal depot at Kawasaki. He speaks English well and is most cooperative.

Unloading facilities at the Japan Sea Ports.

In 1943, according to Mr. Takahashi, the shipping route from Hokkaido to the Tokyo-Yokohama area became very dangerous as a result of allied submarine activity. The amount of Hokkaido coal unloaded at the Mitsui wharf in Kawasaki alone dropped in that year to about 500,000 tons as compared with the pre-war annual rate of 2,000,000 tons. At that time the government was doing nothing to improve the inadequate unloading facilities at the Japan Sea ports largely because of disagreement between the Railway and Shipping Ministries. Finally, irritated by this situation, Mr. Takahashi in December 1943 volunteered to undertake an investigation of those ports.

For about a month he studied the unloading and transportation facilities at the following Japan Sea ports: Armori, Funakawa, Akita, Sakata, Niigata, Naretsu, Fushiki, Narao, Tsuruga, Maisuru and Toyama. Mr. Takahashi agreed to submit to us detailed information on the conditions he found prevailing at each of the above ports. In general, he described the situation as most inefficient. Some of the ports did possess some mechanical unloading equipment, but it was very inadequate. Also the coal, after being unloaded, had to be carried by human labor to the railways, some distance away, for transportation to the main consuming centers. As a result so much coal was being piled up along the sea walls that other coal ships were frequently unable to discharge their cargoes.

Toward the end of January 1944 Mr. Takahashi submitted a report of his findings to the Ministry of Transportation. However, it was not until March 1945 that the Ministry, torn by dissension between the groups representing railway and shipping interests, finally decided to accept his proposals. According to Mr. Takahashi this decision was reached largely because of the acute food situation in Japan and the necessity of utilizing the Japan Sea ports for the importation of foodstuffs from Manchuria. Experimental work was first to be undertaken at the port of Toyama. Yet by then the government found it impossible to secure the necessary machinery. Mr. Takahashi had advocated the utilization of derrick cranes used by civil engineers in the building industry, for there was a sufficient number of those available and they could be moved in a relatively short time. The government, however, wished to transfer the unloading machinery then installed in the Tokyo-Yokohama area, an undertaking which Mr. Takahashi estimated would have required about a year and half. Actually the Koeki Eidan did succeed in acquiring 8 cranes for use at Narao, but the war ended before they could be installed. Thus practically nothing was ever done to improve the unloading facilities at any of the Japan Sea ports.

Mr. Takahashi agreed to submit a copy of the report which he made to the government and which will contain a full description of port facilities together with his recommendations.