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## [Biographical sketch of Bob Kinoshita and the camouflage project]

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### 173. Camouflage.

Dictated by Bob Kinoshita, 4-7-43

Subjects: Factory Committee, Working Conditions, Work cr. Trust Fund. U.S.E.D. habits. cr. Relocation Management. Organization

Biographical Sketch of B. Kinoshita.

Bud was born and raised in Los Angeles, and has been a member of the Golden Bear Boys Organization for about 10, or 12 years. This is significant, because from Block 46, which is the center of the organization in Camp, had at one time 31 residents\*working in the factory. This was by far the largest representation in camp, from any one block.

Bud was graduated from U.S.C. school of architecture in 1937, worked as a draftsman, and his last job prior to evacuation was in the Los Angeles Water and Power Co. His specialty has been in ceramics, and when he arrived in camp, his efforts were expended towards the organization of that project. The kiln has arrived, but to date, no further progress has been made due to the fact that there is no available space. For many months, Bud worked as the Block carpenter of 46.

He is now 29 years of age, married, and with the evacuation, feels that he has been "gyped" out, but is currently trying to make his way into the Eastman Kodak Co. as a model builder, for the various departments.

4-7-43

### CAMOUFLAGE

By Bob Kinoshita

The main reason why I worked in the camouflage factory was that I was very short of cash and camouflage was the only place where I can make anything. My objective was \$200 at first to go out. My view point applies to about half of the people working there.

From what I understand about the factory committee it is more or less a group of workers chosen by the fellow workers to represent them in all grievances to the management and it is more or less a voice for the workers really. Because from what I understand in Gila they don't have factory committee of any sort and they really get pushed around and an example of that is working hours. Here they work from 8 to 10 hours and come during the lunch hour and work and Saturday afternoon they work and some of the crew are working on Sundays. Well, that's one thing that should be stopped —becomes overtime. Piece work should be time and a half for the over-time work. But according to their selfishness I think they let the management benefit by their selfishness and bring their own earnings down to a point where it just becomes a sweat shop. That is one thing that the factory committee is discouraging; that sort of working conditions. One thing we found out is that

when we work at top speed too long you become fatigued mentally and physically to a point where efficiency drops about 25%. You lose incentive to work. You are physically incapable to put the best you have. Work becomes drudgery. Good example of that is you have a lay off of two or four days and then you go back and then after two days you have a sort of ambition to go faster again. And like myself I laid off, I think, 12 days and feel like going back again. Well, at the time I was working there I was so disgusted and fatigued I couldn't take weaving another day.

The Factory Committee was composed of about 9 people from each department of the camouflage plant. The names were such as chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, weaving shed No. 1 steward, weaving shed No. 2 steward, warehouse steward, reefer steward, cutting shed steward, offices and miscellaneous steward. These people were elected by the workers themselves. All their respective departments like all the weavers would elect their own weaving shed steward, warehouse theirs and so forth.

The theory of the factory committee was essentially very good. But it fell down when it came to working on a specific case 8 hours a day because of the fact that the members on this committee were employed in the factory itself, and working 8 hours a day. So whenever a problem came up we couldn't contact the administration office when it was open or work freely with the management on the case because it was more or less negotiated during working. It hurt the weavers if they were committeemen because they left the crews to work on each case and it hurt the non-weavers help because they were more or less cheating the management of their working hours. So a plan which is still in the formative stage is to elect a permanent executive secretary and a secretary to represent the workers at all times including working hours. The executive secretary and the secretary would be employed by the workers who will be assessed a membership fee or dues to alleviate the expenses of the permanent staff.

The factory committee I think was formed by Mr. Vernon Kennedy. Mr. Kennedy, WRA Employment Officer, attended all the meetings during the negotiation period by the management and the Community Council and the Temporary Factory Committee. He has also attended all the meetings of the Camouflage Worker's Division of Unit I. Because of this close contact with the factory committee and the management Mr. Kennedy is the only individual who has all the answers concerning the camouflage plant.

As a worker I started about the middle of February weaving in shed No. 1. The first thing that I noticed was the attitude of the workers. Some had the WRA habits with them and some had the real ambition to work and make their carfare and whatever money they needed in a hurry. This WRA attitude I think was the most demoralizing thing I could see in the factory because it would affect all the workers, especially, within their own crews; the whole plant reefers, cutters, and warehousemen. The whole factory set-up was piece work which meant production by one's own initiative then more the production then more the money. But some of these workers just didn't seem to have that will to work in there. The next thing that struck me was the condition of the plant itself—the weaving sheds and the cutting sheds—the amount of lint and the debris that was lying on the floor. The lint and the thread of the burlap were lying all over the floor. Some were so large that they were just large balls lying around. This was a very annoying condition because whenever the nets were changed or moved this lint would fly around and get in your eyes, through the mask, down your neck and whenever one has lint just thrown at them like that it is very uncomfortable because it irritates one's skin and also promotes rash. This condition was one of the controversies with the management. The management refused to hire janitors to clean up the plant as recommended by the Fire Department and the Health Department. Written memorandums were sent to the management by these departments for two important reasons. One was the fire hazard and the second was the health hazard. The lack of janitors for these sheds and the latrines was caused by no other reason than the saving of a few dollars per day by the management because one could see with plain every day mathematics that the management was making several hundred dollars per day possibly over \$2,000 on the production of nets. Two janitors per camouflage plant would cost no more than \$12 a day. So what other reason could be held for this lack of sanitation.

Another thing was the lack of non-weaver help during that period of very high production. The non-weaver help were far behind in the handling of the finished nets because of the lack of various workers in the various non-weaver departments. Instead of trying to alleviate this problem the management insisted on holding the workers to their 18% non-weaver help. They also kept insisting that we, the workers of Unit I, wait until Camp 2 and 3 opened their camouflage plant so that we could get additional non-weaver help and stay within the 18%. But during the period of high production human possibilities are quite limited so in the face of emergencies compromises should be made instead of pinching pennies. This problem during this high production was aggravated by the misjudgment of the U.S. Engineers Division on the amount of special wrapping paper for the nets, and also the face mask for workers. The engineers didn't anticipate such a high production and also didn't heed the warnings given by the management considering this high production. Because of this misjudgment masks were not available for the workers for about two days and the warehouse work was made extremely difficult by the pile up of unbaled nets. Because of this pile up the weavers were forced to lay off for a period of 2 1/2 days. This sort of misjudgment seemed to be the main factor in the drawing up of the present inadequate agreement by the workers and the management. Most of the facts, for example, the production, materials, and so forth based on the production at Santa Anita and Manzanar. Such a comparison should never have been made for the wage scale is too great a difference. Different as night and day. Here in Poston it is possible to earn a hundred dollars the net profit per month while in Santa Anita and Manzanar the wages were \$16 and \$19 per month. To top it all after repeated advices not to base any comparison with Santa Anita and Manzanar engineers and the management here in Poston still quote figures and facts from these two other projects. Another condition in the factory is the method of weaving. The instructors who showed us that so-called wrong method of weaving, an example, weaving from the top of the net down to the center then flipping the raw net and the pattern and finishing the raw net.

This method exaggerates any flaws in the pattern and also encourages leaving out of strips in the raw net. Nets finished by this method are found to be lacking in strips as high as fifteen percent or 100 to 150 strips according to the engineer. This condition could very well have been avoided if the contractors had shown the weavers the right method of weaving. Not only would the nets have been made right, but the attitude of the workers would have been unruffled if they did not have to unlearn the old habits and learn a new habit. Another bad condition is the inadequate masks furnished by the management. According to the Health Department they are very inadequate as this lint filter does not enclose the nose and the mouth in such a way as to filter out all the lint and dust. The weaving rigs are another bad condition. These are constructed rather flimsy and in one case a bad tragedy could have happened. Nails were found to be used in place of carter pins in the bolt holding the counterbalance weight. And in this specific incident the nail worked loose and the other came off of the weight. Approximately 150 pounds or more came crashing down from a height of 25 feet. It was pure luck that no one had been hurt. By flimsy I mean the rigs are breaking down daily. They have been in use only two and a half months and if the factory is to produce nets for at least six months this condition should not exist, not only for safety sake, but for production also. The breakdown of the rig means anywhere from three or more nets per break down. A very bad condition exists in the weaving sheds and the cutting sheds is the lack of coolers and ventilating system to exhaust the lint laden air out of the sheds. During the last hot spell many cases of rash broke out within all the crews of the weaving sheds. Some as high as seven people out of twelve, This is not susceptibility, but irritation caused by the worker exposing and by the burlap because of the heat in the sheds. The problem of coolers has been presented to the management and the army engineers over seven times. Up to the present there answers have been more or less evasive or downright lies. At one time the engineers had told the workers that the coolers had been ordered, but were not available due to priority. Upon further investigation it was found that the army..... office had no intention of putting in coolers for the life of this present contract. The termination date which we don't know because it was based on a production figure instead of a definite date. This again entails a few dollars versus comfort of the workers and the health of the workers which in the end means production.

As a worker I feel that the army engineers should take over the plant and try to run it for maximum production instead of allowing a private company composed of penny pinchers exploiting evacuee labor. The contractor has no overhead except for his own personal hired help and office supplies. The building, utilities, and so forth are furnished by the U. S. Engineers. The contractor is more or less a middle man taking in the so called gravy. With the engineers running the factory there would be a better understanding between the workers and the engineers because we find that we can get along with the inspectors and the other engineers much better than we can with the contractors representatives. There is one exception and that is Mr. Finney, the Chief Engineer. I have heard rumors that he is anti-Japanese and my personal contacts with him at grievances meetings has proven to me that the rumors were right. His pet phrase is that "We can make it awfully tough for you weavers. Our patterns could be made tougher for the weaver than it is now and slow your production down 25%." Another threat that he holds over us is the cry of "sabotage" by the Japanese workers in the camouflage factory. A newspaper headline carrying this statement would more or less blacken all future hopes for the Niseis in America. This attitude of Mr. Finney should be just the reverse and the Nisei need a helping hand from the Caucasians to prove ourselves to the doubting Caucasians. The Replacement of Mr. Finney by a more understanding man would also help the camouflage plant run more smoothly and foster better cooperation from everyone. The ousting of Mr. Billikie and Mr. Rosenbloom is a very good idea for it seems that Rosenbloom was much too shrewd a person to represent the contractors. Mr. Rosenbloom was in charge of the office management. Therefore, he had the say-so in the wage scale of the workers and the percentage of the non-weaver help. Mr. Rosenbloom I think was the "fly in the ointment", but Mr. Billikie seemed to have taken most of the rap. And therefore he has earned the dislike of everyone in the plant. It was Mr. Rosenbloom's idea of cutting down the non-weavers' wages to 87 cents from \$1.37 that caused the disagreement between the workers and the management. Instead of cooperating with the workers by interpreting the contract as interpreted by the factory committee Mr. Rosenbloom was more or less analyzing this contract for loop holes through which he could suggest such unfavorable idea. His favorite saying was, "What the hell. What they kicking about? They are making enough money." Another saying was, "You people are the highest paid non-skilled workers in the United States and in fact in the world." Such attitudes bring on hatred between workers and the management. And a person with such an attitudes should be replaced for the good of the project. In Poston the attitude of the people toward the dividend seems that people in Poston should get a larger cut of the so-called "melon". But to some of these same persons who are advocating a larger cut than the 35% to Poston reversed their statement after working in the factory for a short period of time. They found that it's really work with a capital "W". The attitude of some people in Poston seems that the camouflage workers owe a lot to Poston. Their questions are, "Who cooks for you? Who feeds you? Who collects the garbage for you? and who does all the dirty work for you?" I, myself, as a worker is very glad to give a portion of my pay to Poston as city tax, but when it becomes forced on me through such statements there's a feeling of just "thumbing my nowe" at these people. My attitude is let the workers keep practically all he makes for if a person is willing to risk getting the rash, physical tiredness, dirty smelly clothes, and chances of getting tuberculosis he deserves what he earns.