

## Britannia - The Story of a Mine

by Bruce Ramsay

Extract from book about Ww2, including Japanese interment

In September 1939 the German army invaded Poland, and Canada, along with Britain and France declared war on the Third Reich. Recruiting officers appeared at both the Beach and the Townsite and many joined the three armed services. Manpower became increasingly short and unskilled workers stepped in to take the place of those who had enlisted to add to the seemingly unending problem of safety. Several programs were drawn up to try to educate the men that it was to their advantage to acquaint themselves with safety routines and courses, such as "Job Instruction Training," "Job Safety Training," "Job Relations Training" and "Job Method Training" were drawn up, and although the courses were not compulsory, the men were urged to take them, just as they were the St. John Ambulance first aid courses.

The employment situation grew particularly acute when the shipyards of the Lower Mainland began to lure away the miners and workmen by offering high wages, plus overtime. Eventually this drain-off was stopped by the federal government putting a manpower freeze on the mining industry, and those working in this endeavour couldn't leave their jobs.

The war created a demand for copper, but the war had taken away the manpower with which to operate the mine efficiently. Thus the mine could not be put into full production and there was nobody to undertake that work most vital to the life of the mine - development. And so there began that period of the mine's history in which it was, literally, "worked on its own fat," using up those reserves which had been previously blocked out, and not developing new ore bodies. In 1943 the ore problem became serious, and the following year, the mine was in a precarious position.

Meanwhile, the war had been going badly for the Allies. France had fallen, the Soviet Union was being attacked, and in December 1941, the war spread to the Pacific Region following the sneak attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. That night, December 7, as the people of Britannia huddled around their radio sets listening to the grim details of that "day of infamy" as President Roosevelt called it, some of the men recalled a rather strange conversation which had taken place a few months previously with one of the Japanese workmen. This man had called at one of the bunkhouses with a load of washing and asked the men to settle up their accounts with him immediately, as "we'll be leaving soon, but when we come back, we'll be the bosses." The remark

had, at the time, seemed rather silly, and it was treated as a joke. There were other stories, too, and considering the panic of the time, they were inevitable. There were reports of high frequency radio transmitters on the property or back in the woods. Such stories were a dime a dozen up and down the coast, and while these incidents, true or untrue, were being talked about, one point, strongly in favor of the Japanese in British Columbia, was largely overlooked: many had sons - and daughters - in the Canadian armed forces. Also, the majority of the Japanese were just as stunned and angry at the turn of events as were their white fellow workers. Nobody can be proud of the treatment meted out to those of Japanese origin living on the West Coast. They were all branded as security risks, and in a shocking manner, were uprooted from their homes and shipped off to camps in the interior of the province. The last of the Japanese left Britannia on May 8, 1942, never to come back. As the Japanese moved away, one family after another, their homes were taken over by the white workers. There were few expressions of regret, or of sympathy, but there was one which deserved at least a bit of recognition. A group of school boys down at the Beach pooled their savings to buy a watch for one of their schoolmates who, because of his racial background, was forced to move. It was not possible under the circumstances to make a formal presentation, but it was made outside the school building. There were no speeches, both the donors and the recipients were embarrassed, but in the manner of young boys, the thought was there and they had expressed it in the only way they could.