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PIT PROP SHIPMENT PROBLEMS IN NORTHERN FRANCE (1944)

Comment: The available material shows only the railroad side of the emergency program aimed at supplying the mines of Northern France with pit props.

On 12 May 1944, the Railroad Administration in Lille informed the Main Administration for the Transportation System in Brussels that the need for pit props had increased strongly. Request, therefore, was made that the shipment of pit props be exempted from Freight Embargo Order No. 88/44 of the Main Administration for the Transportation System Brussels.

In its answer, the Main Administration points out that in the district of the Railroad Administration Nancy, 300 freight cars with pit props were held up because of line interruptions by enemy action. The same condition applies to the Paris region, where a considerable number of freight cars were held back for the same reason. The Main Administration was going to move the freight cars in the Nancy district as soon as possible. Only after all the accumulated cars were removed, could pit props be exempted from the transportation embargo. With respect to the bottleneck in the Paris region, the Main Administration in Brussels suggests to the Main Administration for the Transportation System in Paris that pit props from the Landes region be trans-shipped to water transportation, since most of the mines in Northern France have waterway connections.

On 18 May 1944, the Railroad Administration in Lille was informed that the Main Administration in Paris was exempting 1 complete freight train daily with pit props from the Landes region from the Transportation Embargo Order No 40 of the Paris Main Administration (= Embargo Order No 95 of the Brussels Main Administration.)

On 25 July 1944 the Railroad Administration in Lille was informed about the Shipping program for pit props for the northern part of the Department Aisne. (Railroad Administration Lille.)

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As of end of July 1944:

<u>Railroad station</u>	<u>pit props on hand (in cubic meters)</u>	<u>number of trains to be formed</u>
Rend d'Orleans St. Gabain	3,100	4
Anizy	500	1
Chailvet-Urcel	600	2
Landricourt	450	
Marle-Lomont (?)	300	1
Serbais	450	
La Bouteille	550	1
St. Gobert	400	
Bulronfosse	250	1
Le Nouvion	300	
St. Erme	4,300	7
Coury les Eppes	1,000	
Tavaux	2,800	4
Agnicourt	3,000	4
	<u>17,950</u>	<u>24</u>

Conference at the Railroad Administration Lille, 24 July 1944:

The conference was called in order to ensure that:

- a. the loadings of pit props in the different shipping regions could be handled systematically.
- b. the loading programs of the different regions which up to then were established independently could be brought into mutual agreement.

Coordination of the different shipping programs proved necessary in order to avoid a transportation bottleneck in the railroad district of Lille, which would have grave consequences for the loading programs of the railroad stations of origin. Comment: The railroad district of Lille, especially in its eastern sector, was the funneling region for ~~the pit-prop-transport from the different contributing region for the~~ pit prop transports from the different contributing regions to the mines.⁷

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During the period 8-20 July, only 17 trains with pit props had arrived at the mines, an insufficient quantity to cover requirements. Therefore, the following monthly program for the transportation of pit props was set up:

20 trains per month from the Departement Marne -- to be shipped by Railroad District Paris-East

30 trains per month from the Departement Meuse Meurthe et Moselle and the Departement Ardennes -- to be shipped by Railroad District Nancy

26 trains per month from the northern part of the Departement Aisne -- to be shipped by Railroad Districts Lille and Paris-North

45-50 trains per month from the northern Departements.

Comment: If one takes the figures given for the transportation program of the northern part of the Departement Aisne, one arrives at an average load per freight car of about 750 cubic meters. Applying this figure to the 126 trains of the above program, one obtains a figure of about 92,500 cubic meters as the total monthly delivery of pit props.

The representative of the Railroad District Lille declared that no definite commitments could be made with respect to transportation from the Railroad District Lille to the mines. Sabotage, air attacks and completely insufficient security measures along the rail lines led to an increasing number of transportation interruptions, especially in the eastern part of the district, through which almost all of the pit prop trains had to pass.

In order to facilitate transportation of pit props, it was decided that better control over the available empty return freight cars be instituted and locomotives of the mines be utilized for the transportation of pit props.

It was pointed out that because of the necessity of dispatching complete trains and because of the low number of loading stations available, even loading delays of 4-5 days are admissable.

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Comment: The monthly delivery program, as outlined above, probably never was carried out in its entirety. The conditions in the St. Quentin sector of the Lille Railroad District probably are indicative of the situation in most of the other regions.

Transportation of pit props in the St. Quentin area:

The Control Office for Rail Movements at St. Quentin had been put in charge of the special transportation program for pit props. Since transportation was not forthcoming, an on-the-spot investigation was carried out by the office, and on 14 August 1944 it reported to the Railroad Administration in Lille that the transportation bottleneck was not caused by a lack of freight cars. In fact, by 7 August, there were 257 freight cars awaiting loading at different railroad stations of the area, but no pit props had arrived. By the middle of the month, not a single freight car had been loaded; therefore, fulfillment of the August quota was out of question.

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