



*Winning
Hearts &
Mines*

Dr. Joel Boone and The Bituminous Coal Medical Survey of 1947

It was a spring day in 1946 when the admiral found himself drifting through a moment of self-reflection. As he sat in his office in the federal building near San Francisco's Embarcadero, Rear Admiral Joel T. Boone reflected upon a career that could be called storied, if not legendary. His 32 years of service included tours with the Marines in France and Haiti, physician to three presidents, commanding officer of hospitals, and Medical Officer of the Third Fleet. He realized his current duty as Inspector of Medical Department Activities for the Pacific Coast would surely be a twilight tour or else a stepping stone to the position of Surgeon General. Certainly, with Vice Admiral Ross McIntire retiring later in the year, it was not too bold to think of Boone as a fitting heir-apparent. His distinguished service record was heavily burnished with ribbons, citations, and medals that made him the most visible candidate, and the most decorated Navy medical officer in history.

Serving across the country from "the seat of political power" was a change of pace for Dr. Boone. The West Coast assignment now gave him and his wife Helen ample opportunity to see their daughter Suzanne and her family in nearby San

LEFT. Dressed in his admiral's uniform complete with seven rows of ribbons, Dr. Boone was not only the face of the Coal Medical Survey, for some he was the "government man" who symbolized the Federal Coal Mines Administration and the takeover of bituminous coal mines.

Courtesy of Mr. John Amberson

Mateo. On Sunday 26 May 1946, the Boones took the short drive and overdue respite from San Francisco. Arriving at Susan's door they were startled to see their daughter wearing a look of grave concern.

"Dad, Admiral McIntire just telephoned. He said it's urgent." Boone thought it odd that the Surgeon General could track him down to his daughter's home let alone call on a Sunday. Boone wondered if McIntire was reassigning him, or perhaps there was an impending announcement on the selection of the next Surgeon General.

Dr. Boone's call was answered by Admiral McIntire's calm but firm tone. "Joel, I can't tell you exactly what this is about over the phone, but I call tell you it is related to the new Federal Coal Mines Administration. We're going to need you to come to Washington right away."¹

THE COAL CRISIS

Historically, the Federal Coal Mines Administration (FCMA) existed in times of war. It was now being re-established because of the Bituminous Coal Strike of 1946. As negotiations between coal labor and management stretched into its seventh week and "brownouts" becoming increasingly common throughout the nation, President Harry Truman stepped into the tempered fray. On 21 May, Truman issued "Executive Order 9728" authorizing his Secretary of the Interior Julius A. Krug to seize all mines while re-establishing the FCMA to oversee coal operations. Negotiations now continued between FCMA—headed by Secretary Krug—and United Mine Workers (UMW) president, John

L. Lewis. To aide in negotiations, the administration designated Admiral Ben Moreell to serve as FCMA's Deputy Director and Administrative Officer.

As former Chief of the Bureau of Yards and Docks and founder of Navy Construction Battalions (better known as "Seabees"), Moreell was already a national figure by 1946. In World War II, "King Bee" Moreell earned the high opinion of many politicians for his affable and direct approach and by the end of the war had been promoted to four-star admiral, becoming the first non-Academy man to achieve such a rank. Trusting in the admiral's leadership abilities and famous personable nature, then Senator Harry Truman called upon Moreell to negotiate a deal with striking oil refinery workers in 1943. Now as a proven energy resource negotiator, they now needed his services again.²

Eight days after government seizure of mines, and 59 days since the strike's commencement, Krug and Moreell finally conceded to the UMW's demands. Major provisions in the "Krug-Lewis Agreement" included a reduction of the coal miners' work week from six to five days, an increase in wages by 18 1/2 cents an hour, workmen's compensation, a medical and hospital fund contributed by wage deduction, and an unprecedented nation-wide survey of "hospital and medical facilities, medical treatment, sanitation, community facilities and housing" in coal mining areas. Enter Admiral Joel T. Boone.

When Dr. Boone reported to Vice Admiral McIntire's office on 28 May—a day before the Krug-Lewis agreement was signed—he learned that Moreell had specifically requested him to serve as Medical Advisor to the Federal Coal Mines Administration and Director of a Medical Survey of the Bituminous Coal Industry. Moreell gave Admiral Boone free rein over his duties and implementation of the survey. Adequate offices were provided and he was responsible for assembling and organizing a staff as he saw fit.³ Or as Moreell put it to Boone, “You envision it, plan it as you see fit, and direct it and operate it according to your own convictions.” His only orders were to keep the FCMA informed and to make the agency look good. As Moreell explained, “It is intended that this survey should determine the steps which must be taken to establish medical, housing and sanitary facilities in the mining areas that will bring them up to the standards recognized as proper for American communities.”⁴

SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

Secretary Krug announced Boone's selection at the press conference on 31 May 1946. “I believe,” Krug said, “that the Coal Mines Administration can make substantial contributions to the future prosperity of the coal industry, and the betterment of the miners, by ascertaining at first hand what is needed to improve living conditions and then by providing the leadership to carry out the recommendations made by Admiral Boone. “The welfare of the miners,” he added “is the concern of the American people and their Government.”⁵

Boone's first task was to create a team to undertake the daunting sur-

vey of mines. He was given CAPT Charles T. Dickeman, CEC, USN, a housing expert with the Seabees to serve as engineering consultant. As his administrative officer, Boone recruited a Supply Corps officer named CDR John Balch, USNR. In World War I, Balch was a Navy pharmacist's mate who served with Boone in the 6th Regiment Marines in France; and like Boone was a Medal of Honor recipient. Boone saw Balch as a “Tremendous worker, great improviser, ...[and] knew how to get this done... He was watchful, looked after me like a hawk...He was really omnipresent.”⁶

Boone knew he also needed a team of medical and sanitation experts to conduct the survey. Vice Admiral McIntire authorized Boone to call upon personnel in the Navy Medical Department. Unique among this group was CDR Julius Amberson, MC, USN. Amberson was once a mining engineer whose career was interrupted by World War I. He served as a radioman aboard submarines in the war and then trained to become a physician, paying for medical school by working as a mining consultant. At the outbreak of World War II, Amberson rejoined the Navy as a physician where he would earn a reputation as a specialist in epidemic diseases; as such he was credited as saving hundreds of thousands of lives during the war.⁷

In all, Boone's Medical Survey Group consisted of headquarters staff including statistician LT Charles Curtis, HC, USN, and Public Relations Officer Allen Sherman (Bureau of Mines, Interior Department) and five teams of naval officers (each team including a medical officer in charge, an engineer familiar with housing, a recreation and welfare specialist, and a chief

yeoman as clerk). Their work was supplemented by photojournalist Russell Lee and his wife Jean.

Dr. Boone ordered all personnel to report to him by 3 June 1946. On the very same day, Boone received a letter from Admiral Chester Nimitz that read in part: “I have every confidence that you will be more than equal to the many difficulties and obstacles that will undoubtedly confront you in this undertaking.”⁸ The mission had begun.

THE MEDICAL SURVEY COMMENCES

The Medical Survey was the first of its kind conducted under government auspices. Owing to limited time and personnel, and the very fact it would be impossible to investigate all 8,000 bituminous mines in person, the Medical Survey Group took a representative sample of mines. They chose 260 mines in 105 counties in 22 bituminous coal producing states and set out to carefully study aspects of hospital and medical facilities, medical treatment and sanitation and housing conditions. Major attention was given to the Appalachian sections of Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee and Alabama, where about 80 percent of the soft coal miners lived. Each team was assigned to one of five areas representing different regions. As the teams travelled across the United States, the headquarters staff headed by Boone made brief inspection trips and to meet with management and labor groups to explain the process of the survey and to elicit their support for it.⁹

Ostensibly, as Boone was the face of the survey group, these trips could be seen as public relation missions. He would conduct local interviews

COAL MEDICAL SURVEY FIELD TEAMS

Medical and Recreation Team 1

CDR Frank R. Philbrook, MC, USN
Edward T. King, USNR
Ralph L. Wright, USNR
LT William H. McCochran, USNR
YNC Alfred Haskell¹

Medical and Recreation Team 2

CDR Karl J. Palmberg, MC, USN²
CDR Daniel R. Dorsey, CEC, USNR³
LT Arthur B. Lyon, USNR
YNC Herbert W. McKague, USN

Medical and Recreation Team 3

CDR John F. Shrouts, MC, USNR⁴
LCDR Glenn S. Buie, CEC, USNR
LCDR Charles J. O'Neill, USNR
YNC Charles B. Cook, USN

Medical and Recreation Team 4

CDR William J. Dougherty, MC, USN
CDR John M. van Hulsteyn, CEC, USNR
LCDR James P. Farrell, USNR
YNC R.A. Philbert, USN

Medical and Recreation Team 5

CDR John R. Gateley, MC, USN⁵
LCDR Euel F. Philpott, CEC, USNR
LT Carl A. Nastri, USNR
YNC Alfred E. Stringer, USN

¹ Replaced by YNC S. T. Zagorski, USN on 16 September 1946

² Detached on 14 September 1946

³ Replaced by LCDR Paul D. Blyer, CEC in August 1946

⁴ Replaced by CDR Julius Amberson in September 1946

⁵ Detached on 16 December 1946

and explain the role of the survey to coal operators and labor leaders. And more than once, Boone would be subject of photographic opportunities on site. But Boone was anything but cool to the hardships of the coal miners, in fact he was often an active observer on his visits. Boone often donned the overalls and went down the mine shafts to investigate first hand. On one such trip Boone was accompanied by a local union leader in his walk to the mine. As they stood in front of a cage to descend into the mine, the union leader became very adamant in his criticism of the mine's condition. As Boone recalled, "When I asked him when was the last time he was down that mine, he said, 'Oh me? I have

never been down a mine. I certainly have never been down this mine.'"

Boone was appalled. If he had never been in the mine there was no way he could know so much about it. Boone found a pair of dungarees and threw them into the man's chest and told him he was going to accompany him into the mine right then and there. When the local leader protested, Boone threatened to report him to John L. Lewis. In the end, he looked stunned, but went down. As it turned out, the conditions in that mine were just the reverse of what he had reported to Boone. Boone remembered, "It was a very clean, well manicured mine, as it were, well rock dusted, lot of safety precautions. Ventilation was



very good. There were Sally Ports, as it were, dug into the side of the mine with enclosures or doors where the man could rest. Then they had other well planned areas to take care of wounded men. It was really almost a model mine down in the bowels of the earth."¹⁰

THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Medical Survey Group completed the tours of mining areas by the spring 1947 and teams submitted their data and photographs to headquarters personnel for processing. The final report entitled *A Medical Survey of the Bituminous-Coal Industry* was submitted to the Department of the Interior in March

1947 and 13,000 copies of the report were printed and distributed on 18 April 1947.

The 244-page report was broken into seven sections: general medical services, hospitalization, hospital facilities, housing and sanitary facilities, industrial medicine, and off-the-job living, public health. The report included six pages of recommendations to improve conditions in each of the seven aspects identified and then concluded with a supplement, *The Coal Miner and His Family* that featured photographs and stories by Russell and Jean Lee.¹¹

Among the many recommendations made in the report were that the coal industry adopt a broad and comprehensive system of prepaid medical and dental care and hospitalization; improve size and quality of hospital care; develop better sanitation at mining areas; and have mine operators build and maintain wash and change houses for their employees.

In his final assessment of the medical conditions of the coal mining areas of the United States, Admiral Boone pointed out that industrial health has not received the attention or kept pace with industrial progress.

“In a short-sighted rush of speed to create and develop machines in the interest of wealth and greater comfort, the health of the people who operate those machines has been neglected or given too limited attention. With the advancement of mechanization, obviously there is a greater exaction on physical well-being and mental acuity. Health is not only man’s most valuable possession but a necessary requisite to the progress of a mechanized age.”¹²

The report received praise from the American Medical Association,

Distribution of mines selected as sample for the medical survey of the bituminous coal industry, with employees and annual production

AREA I

District 1: Central Pennsylvania

District 2: Western Pennsylvania

District 3: Ohio

District 4: Panhandle West Virginia

AREA II

District 7: SE West Virginia & parts of Virginia

District 8: SW West Virginia, eastern Kentucky, northern Tennessee, and part of Virginia

District 9: Western Kentucky

District 13: Alabama and southern Tennessee

AREA III

District 5: Michigan

District 10: Illinois

District 11: Indiana

District 12: Iowa

AREA IV

District 14: Arkansas, Oklahoma

District 15: Kansas, Missouri, and part of Oklahoma

AREA V

District 16: Northern Colorado

District 17: Southern Colorado

District 18: New Mexico

District 19: Wyoming

District 20: Utah

District 22: Montana

District 23: Washington

Area and district

Secretary of Defense James Forrestal, and even John L. Lewis. After its initial publication, Lewis invited Boone to lunch to discuss the report’s findings. To Boone’s surprise the labor leader told him that the report was superb and that he ordered an additional 25,000 copies. Boone later recalled, “Lewis said that he felt justified in making a large investment in the Report, due to the fact that it would be used as a foundation for them for some years to

come. I told him while I was gratified with his comments I was rather surprised because we had castigated the Union for its failures. He said he did not mind “since we had expressed the situation to the public stage.”¹³

In the end, the report is credited for the construction of 13 modern hospitals in the southern Appalachians, the installations of wash houses, and overall improvements in mine safety and first aid.

POSTSCRIPT

The Bituminous Coal Mines were returned to private ownership in June 1947 under the condition that the owners continue to abide by the provisions of the Krug-Lewis Agreement. With the report published, and associated fanfare coming to a

close by June, Admiral Boone returned to duty as Medical Inspector. Despite receiving recommendations from four-star admirals Ben Moreell, J.O. Richardson, and John Towers, Boone would not be selected as Navy Surgeon General. In his stead, a Navy ophthalmologist and

former physician to the Chief of Naval Operations, Clifford A. Swanson was chosen to steer Navy Medical Department into the 1950s.¹⁴ Boone continued to serve in the Navy until 1 December 1951, when he was placed on the retired list. *By ABS*

ENDNOTES

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