

Dilys Lloyd Ashley of New Brighton, Mold
Rhydymwyn

Say your name, please.

Dilys, shall I put my maiden name?

No, you carry on.

Dilys Lloyd Davies. It was my maiden name. I was twenty years of age and I walked three miles to the works and when you got to the gate you had to give an identification card and my number was 118. Then, after that, your bag was searched. You weren't allowed to smoke or nothing, so your cigarettes was taken off you if you smoked.

You worked in the production side?

Yes, and then other things that you had in your bag, you know, if there was tins or anything like that, 'cause I took sandwiches and they were all wrapped in paper etc. And then we went through from there. We had to go through another department, where we had to strip all our outer clothing, the whole lot. The outer clothing was stripped and we put them in a cubicle. We had about ten or twelve cubicles in one area, specific cubicle with your number 118 on. All your clothes were taken off completely then you had a bath towel round you, to walk to the other department, where you put the work's clothing on. Now, the work's clothing were long johns and a vest, a thermal vest and long johns, thin cotton trousers, which was like a khaki colour and a top, a blue band round the top here, a blue band round the wrist, a blue band round your trousers, thick grey socks and Wellington boots with double yellow lines, which was a toxic line. On top of that we had camouflage oilskins, like the troops, with a crossways button that way, trousers and top, the same and rubber gloves, rubber peak hat and goggles. That was the start of our day.

And how long did that take to get ready?

Oh, well, we had about ten minutes, at the most, to do it. Then we walked through into our department. When I first went there, I was just in a department where they were just putting the boxes together, which was a big tin, like say about two foot, tipped over. We were putting in one side and then they were putting the bombs inside them, at the same time. I was there for a while and then I was on a cubicle where we had to stamp everything that came through a conveyer belt to one end. There was a lady the other end who put them into these boxes. We had to stamp every one of them before they left. They were put in these boxes and they were taken away to another department, where they were loaded up. Now, I was doing that for about a year and a half, then my boss said, "Miss Davies," he said, "Would you like to go a little bit further in this secrecy?" For a minute, it kidded me, this secrecy, because you didn't think when you were working there. I said, "Well, I suppose so. It was nice of you to think of me, you know." I had to go to a special room where they had a big film, showing the aircraft etc and what would happen if they ever had to take them by aircraft and all that sort of thing and what the gas was and what they were. They were only little containers, say about an inch container, which the gas went in. We were shown all that. Then, after that training, there was about a weeks training at that, I had to go to the other department, which is called A5. Now, that was the secretive part of it, because that is when they were bringing the gas into the works for a start. When I was on night duty, they were bringing it in at night time.

TWO

Where did they bring it from?

Well, I was told....I'd been trying to find out about that. There was a small factory, you know, where the horticultural shop place is in Northop Hall....

You mean Woodside? Was it called Woodside? There's an agricultural establishment up there isn't there, a college?

Yes, well, where the agricultural college is now, I believe there was a small building there, where it was delivered from somewhere else to there, and then it was delivered to Rhydymwyn. But, the part of it is, I had to go with the security guard on the gate, to make sure of it. The depths, now, was at least two feet under ground.

Where was this, at Northop or on the site?

No, this was on the site itself, in Rhydymwyn, right underneath. Once it came through the gate, it was down right underneath, but, you see, it was so far down underneath the ground, it was piped up to these cubicles, where they were coming through the piping and they were going into these little containers

So, you filled the containers?

Yes, we were filling the containers. You see, I was on what they called Aeronautical Inspection Department, which I came then under the Air Force really, more than under the....because it was ICI that owned Rhydymwyn, you see, and I came under the Aeronautical Department. When I had time off, my first husband was in the War in the Army, and I asked for leave and I was a day late going back and my boss called me into the office. I was in trouble. "You're a day over leave, so you'll get one less days pay." I was always treated that way. But, the part of it is, where they put this gas in, after they were put in there, before they were put into the bombs, there's a secretive part there, they were going through a special building and a huge, big container, about two feet high, in this special building, where they were sort of semi heated. You had to go in there every two hours, at least, on night duty. It was all done at night, that part, to check and check that they were okay.

What did they heat them for?

I mean to say, it was, what you know....that you even had your mask on, to go in that department.

Do you know why they heated them?

They heated them up, to make sure that the gas was really secure enough to be put into the bomb.

What it sounds like, from reading the history of the plant, is ...

Have you read the X file book?

I've read the official Government history and my understanding from that is, that they brought in pyro-mustard from the ICI works, elsewhere.

That's right, yes.

But pyro was an unstable form of mustard and they found that by heat treating it, in the manner which you have described, they could make it stable and they could keep it for long term storage in the bombs and the shells, and I believe that the building they did that in, was building P5.

Yes.

Was that one of the big sheds, closest to the station?

That's right, yes. Well, I as I say, once they were put in there, they were cooled down, etc, the morning shift would be putting them into the shells and then they were packed up in these big containers. There was big 'stillages', as we called them, and they were stacked up with at least thirty on them, and then they had to wheel them out. Now, they were wheeled through a tunnel. There was a big tunnel there, where the railway line was, the station that was... There was a big tunnel. They had to be taken through the tunnel and there was a special department, where they were kept there, until they were loaded up onto the trains. The train used to come there and take them on to Runcorn. That was done at night time again, and a lot of the ladies with me didn't like going down this tunnel because it was dark. There wasn't much light. We weren't allowed to have much light.

Three

Where was the tunnel?

It was, you know where the Antelope Hotel is now, well the railway was across that, at the back of there like that, and the tunnel was as you go through the gate, it was about two or three feet onto the right. There was a big tunnel there and there was a big storage at the end of it.

When you say tunnel, do you mean an enclosed walk way?

Yes, enclosed tunnel.

Not underground? It was just an enclosed walk way?

No, it was just an enclosed tunnel on the ground. It wasn't underground. It was over onto the ground that one was, but a lot of them, they didn't like to go down this tunnel, you see, because it was dark, as there was not many lights down there. Not only that, you see, it was a big loading bay. The trucks were open. Railway trucks were there and there was a ramp going up. Now, every one of them, again, had to be stamped. The containers for the bombs had to be stamped and they all had different numbers from one, two, three or so. I used to have a new sheet, a big sheet like this, and stamp every one of them as they were loading them in. One particular time, I hadn't got enough sheets. I said, "I have to go back in the office." Well, you must have heard the rampage, because they were on piecework, you see, and I was holding them back. I was called a Welsh bitch and God knows what. Believe me, when you're working in a place like that, any works, I suppose, during the War, you had to be used to all sorts of language. You had to take up with it. My boss, when I went to the office, said, "You'd better run back quick or you're going to be in trouble." I said, "I won't lose my job, will I?" That's one thing, you wouldn't lose your job, you know. But, the experience was really...because there's one instance, where we were in one cubicle and there was only one working at that particular time and this gentleman, he was 'what do you call it-ing' and all of a sudden the lights go out in the massive, big building, A5 as we

called it, the lights go out. The fans go out, don't they? Then you could smell the gas. I quickly got out, because we had to carry...

A mask?

...No, we had a civilian gas mask to go in, but we had the same troops mask, masks the same as the troops and we had to carry them round, all through every shift. Well, I jumped out to put his on and I managed to put mine on as well, afterwards, but he caught his leg on the 'what do you call it' and he fell. I dragged him out of the building, along these stillages, dragged him outside, ran to the first aid and they came. He was okay, but he had bruises on his leg. His wife wrote me a letter, wanting to know what I'd done to her husband, but it was a nice letter and on the bottom she was thanking me very much for saving his life, because he'd tripped and fallen, you see. You see, this is where the danger was there. Only for them gas masks putting on, you know, we could have been gassed.

Did the lights go out very often?

Not very often. I think it was only about twice or three times it ever happened, but it did happen that particular night, when I were on duty. I often wonder if he were still alive, because he lived in Rhosesmor and his name was Frank Williams. I can always remember his name, because his wife wrote a lovely letter to me. But, the part of it was really, what you call it, because for a start, as I say, when you go in, what you got to wear and everything. We had civilian gas masks to go down to the works and then, of course, we had the Army gas masks, as we called them, and we had to carry them through every shift.

So, whatever you were doing, you had to have the mask?

Always had to have the gas mask.

Because...?

Because, in case. You always had to have that with you. That's why I don't like wearing anything on my shoulder, because I had to wear a civilian one to go to work and I had to wear that to work, so I never liked anything on my shoulder since.

Four

Were there many spillages or problems?

Yes, they had quite a few problems at odd times. There was one instance where one of the ...when they were filling into these bombs, one of the stillages cracked up a bit. Down it goes. Well, there was a big 'what do you call it' then, at the time. Fortunately, because we got the light and we got the fans going, but some of the men that came out after that, they were more

covered up than we were, to clear all the things out, because we were evacuated immediately.

So, it sort of split and fell over and covered the floor with stuff?

Yes, so we were evacuated immediately, straight away. Then, of course, these poor gentlemen, they had to what do 'what you call it', do what they can. It was closed, that particular building. That ban was during a day shift. That particular building was closed for about two days. They had to clear it up for us to go back into it.

Was that P5 again?

Yes. Some big inspectors came, I take it from the Runcorn area, came there and we all got interviewed on the shift, in case we'd done anything to cause it, or anything like that. There was one particular bomb that they made there, it was about three foot at least, because it was on two stillages. They only made the one like that. The end of it was solid gold, the disk on the end, a solid gold disk. I know as I went up against it. They had it right across like that and we were told if that ever got used, it would be carried underneath a plane, not in the plane, it would be carried underneath it. If that had ever been dropped or ever made again, (that's the only one they made, but I don't know about when they went down to Runcorn. I would not know about that.), the whole place would be a goner, you know. It would have covered miles, all Mold and the area. Once that had been dropped that would have been it. But that was a test one, because I caught my foot up against the stillage and they rushed me straight to first aid. I said, "I've not done nothing. I haven't hurt myself." Of course, they just thought in case. I can see it now, just standing across like that. That was a special one, it would have been, if that had been used, even if the gas bombs had been used. We were making smoke bombs as well, you know. They were used, of course, weren't they?

So, you were involved in not just the mustard bombs, but the other bombs as well?

Yes, but that was the only big one made there and that was a test. I can see it now, still on a stillage, right across the floor and everybody was going round it. When you think of a solid gold disk and the money that must have been spent, because I was only earning 12 and 6 a week in Chester and my first week's wages was £104.

At the factory?

Yes. I thought I was a millionaire. We were paid so much an hour 'danger money'. When I look back it, it was really scary. You don't think at the time, when you're working there, but it was really scary.

It was dangerous was it?

Yes, really scary really, because to think what you had to wear, all day long, thick grey socks, Wellington boots....

What happened when you went to the loo or went to the canteen, did you change again?

Oh, no. When we went to the canteen we had to take our Wellington boots off. That's the only time that we ever took them off. I left them outside.

Rest of your clothing...?

The rest of your clothing you had to leave on. Gloves we had to take off, of course, naturally, for eating food and that. I used to take my own sandwiches. I was in another department where we were allowed to go in there, just to eat your sandwiches. When you think, after we finished, we had to strip off again and the clothing we wore that particular shift went into a big toxic bin. Now, we didn't wear them the next day.

You didn't?

No, we had clean oils every day.

So what happened to the ones in the toxic bin?

They were taken from there and they were taken to some very secret laundry place that did wash them, because they couldn't afford to throw them away.

There weren't laundries on the site, so, at the time I was first looking into all the building, it struck me that there were an awful lot of clothing stores, changing rooms and laundry rooms, and I understand now more, why that was. So, when you worked on the site, was it in the production building P5 where they heat treaded it, or was it in the filling shed K5, where they filled the munitions, or was it both that you worked in?

Both I worked in. Most of the departments you just start off with, but the part that hit me was, when I was made Aeronautical inspection Unit, where that gas fluid was coming in and the depth it was going underneath that ground. I have been to a meeting in Rhydymwyn over that ground, because I was called all sorts of names by some of the committee, because they never worked there and knew nothing. I said they'd never be able to clear it away completely.

So, when you say that the mustard was in, are we in P5 now, the production building? There was a pipeline that was at the side of the road, in a trench...

That's right, yes.

Is that the pipeline you're describing, that was two foot down?

Yes.

Did you know that there were problems with the pipeline then, with it leaking or...?

Well, let us say, one time we did have a bit of a leakage and it leaked into the building.

In P5 is this, or K5?

P5.

In P5?

In P5, yes. It leaked into the building itself and that's when the trouble started that particular time and then another instance, I said, when one of the stillages had a bit of leaking on there.

Was that K5 or P5?

No, K5.

On K5, right. Because a lot of people.....

My Dad worked there, but he was a fitter and my Dad just went to the works like you would anybody else, you see. He was in a different 'what do you call it' to us. I was on mornings, because we worked three shifts and my Dad was on days. I'd never see him.

FIVE

Did you change your shifts or once you were on a certain shift did you stay on it?

Oh, no, I was on a shift, morning shift, six to two...

And you stayed on that?

Oh, no, the next week two till ten and so on. We had one weekend off in seven weeks. We had a day off, but we only had one complete weekend off in seven weeks. And when we were on duty, we used to say how many more nights have we got, because the night shift seemed to be much longer, you see. We were working twelve hours on nights, eight afternoons and six mornings. I lived in Pantymwyn and I had to walk three and a half miles home, at that particular time.

They didn't put a bus on for you?

No, there was no buses to go that way. I got married in 1942 and I took a furnished cottage in Gwernymynydd and then there was buses. I got a bus

going to there into the works. I was better off, at that particular time. Well, it's so funny, when it completely finished, ended; I was supposed to be on a night shift. I was in bed and somebody knocked on the door at six o'clock in the morning and I thought, 'Oh my God. What's going on?' Somebody shouted, 'You've no need to get up or go out, because the War is over.' Of course, you didn't think that because the War was over you were finished, because we weren't really. We still had to go back, for a month or so.

And just ran the place down?

And just ran the place down as the place was closing down. When you think, all them gas bombs that I'd have made, I was told they were taken and thrown into the sea.

Well, you surprise me.

Yes, they were thrown into the sea, but the smoke bombs were used. I often wonder what happened to that massive, big one, you know. I never seemed to hear much, because that was a test you see. If War did come that bad it had to be used, then God help anywhere.

Did it have a particular name? Was it a flying cow or a smoke curtain?

It was called the Shepherd's Friend. Why it was called that, the Shepherd's Friend... One of the bosses, Mr Farmer, he was from Liverpool and he said, 'Well, we're having a discussion. I'm very interested in why they're putting a gold disk across it,' he said. 'A Shepherd's Friend.' I must have been all dumb, because none of us ever went and said why do you call it shepherd's friend, you know. It was a queer name to give it, when you think of it.

Weird.

Weird, isn't it?

You mentioned you were in your twenties and you were sort of in the secret bit, having danger money, were the people all a similar age to you, or were there much older people working?

There was some. There wasn't many of my age, say about fifty to one hundred at least of my age group. They were older.

So, some of them were conscripted in as the War...

Actually, there was quite a lot of us women there. Naturally, there was more men than women, you know. As I say, we were all dressed the same. But, another part of it is, in 1943 I was on an afternoon shift and my boss said to me, I was on the inspection, (and I was a Mrs Roberts then. I'm a Mrs Ashley now) 'Mrs Roberts,' he said, 'There are twelve men coming from the American Forces here. They are staying at the Antelope Hotel. 'I couldn't make out why the Forces were allowed to come into a factory like that. It's another thing I've

queried about. Of course, we had to take these Yanks around with us. A particular Yank I was taking round, showing him what do you call it and that, and I couldn't make out why at the time. I happened to say to him, you know, do you like coming into Britain. He said, 'Britain's alright, but the women are cheap.' So, I've never liked the yanks since. That's what he said. (laughter) But, you see, a lot of the women there, although a lot of them were married, I was single at one time and a lot of them were married before me and, of course, they were Yanks and they've got the money and they'd buy drinks for them at the Antelope wouldn't they? I tried to fathom out why they were allowed to come in, because it was a secretive factory. Anyway, I asked one of the bosses, 'Why were they allowed to come in?' Our own troops, because I was bitter after what he'd said, our own troops are not allowed to come in, our own people were not allowed in, why were they allowed in? He said they were in an Army Secrecy Confinement, American Secrecy Army.

They had a lot of gas stored on their site as well, which they produced.

It was only about twelve of them that came.

And was it the gas that they were interested in or was it to do with the project X?

I think it was more to do with the Project X, as you say.

It was later on was it?

Yes, 1943 they came.

Oh, it was a little bit early for that?

Possibly. There were discussions with the Americans at the end, but they would of presumably just been going to that building if that was what they were involved with.

You see, I said the bombs are made here, the gas is made there and I had to take them round, you know. But I was a bit....well, you know, my job was my job. You never said you didn't want your job in them days that was it.

Six

Was there much socialising going on in the factory?

Oh., yes, we were all very sociable with each other, because we were all in the same danger weren't we. We were all together.

And, I presume the canteen you went to, the people down the admin end wouldn't be allowed to go to?

No. I mean to say, if you think of it, you couldn't take photographs and nothing like that. There was about five...my Dad was at one of the buildings...there must have been five or six buildings there at that time, with all the different departments, you see.

Coming back to the canteen, because it intrigues me a bit, you and all your mates go in there with all your kit on, which is effectively dirty, because it's been contaminated hasn't it, did the canteen people wear protective clothing?

Yes.

Oh, they did as well.

Yes, they had to do as well.

So, how did they clean the canteen area, because effectively that was a dirty area wasn't it?

Oh, yes it was. They had special equipment to clean all that area. It was cleaned every so often. I didn't go much into the canteen because there was another special room you went to if you had your own food, you see and that had to be cleaned out as well, you see.

I wonder how they stopped the food getting contaminated.

Ah, well that's it isn't it.

I did wonder.

Well, they must have done somehow because we're still alive. The majority of us were. They were very careful because they had special gloves to handle them, you see. We had the rubber gloves for the works but they had special gloves as well, plastic.

So, they were kitted out just like you?

Oh, they were kitted out just like us, exactly the same only they had a white hat, like a big hat and we had black ones. When you think we had black peaked caps, goggles as well, rubber gloves...

And you wore that when you went to the canteen or did you take them ...you couldn't take it off could you?

I took the goggles off.

You took the goggles off. Coming back to where you filled the container, how did you fill it?

The bombs, you mean?

Where you filled the gas into the container.

Oh, the little things, well there was like a big piping coming down and the gas was coming up from the ground that way and the gas would come down this pipe like this and there was a a special cubicle, where this gentleman would be in and then it would be a little container there.

But did you, or did the person, just open a tap and close a tap...

You had to open a tap, had to make sure he knew how far to go.

How did he know-how far to go?

Oh, well, you see, they were shown how to do it, they were taught how to do it. If you went to this other department you were taught how to do it.

Were you shown how to do it?

Yes, I had to show them how to do it, when I'd passed all that.

So, if you could explain how you did?

Well, I could show you how to do it, because they had to come through a pipe and then there was like a dormy water tap attached to it and when they got it to there...you watched.

So, you just looked and as it filled up, you turned the tap off?

They had to do that, they had to turn the tap. I was just the inspector to make sure they did it.

Yes. What happened if they didn't turn the tap off, because it must have....

Oh, it would leak. They did have a special container underneath, if anything did leak a bit.

Because, I would have thought over the period of the factory, there must have been many leaks.

Oh, there was a little bit of a leak at the time but this special container was there. It was taken out immediately if there was any leak.

So, you filled them one at a time?

Oh, yes. One at a time. That was done right through the shift, for every shift you were one, that was what you were doing.

Where they on piece work?

They were on piece work. I wasn't on piece work.

So, to a point, they were rushing?

The men were on piece work, especially when they were loading, in the loading bay. They were more on piece work than the others were really.

If I can bring you back to the filling cubicle. Now, the stuff came in the pipe with a tap and you had a little container....

That's right.

....And then you opened the tap and as you saw it coming up, you turned it off?

That's right, turned it off then.

And the person just sat there with all the kit on

Well, he was standing up.

....allright, standing up. I take it there was an extract to take the fumes away?

Oh, yes, there was. I say, that was the cubicle when it was just this gentleman and I together at the time when all the lights and everything had gone. This is where we could smell the gas, you see. This is why I jumped straight away, put his gas mask on before my own, jumped to get me own out and as they said in the first aid room, I could have been in more danger than him. She said, 'You were the last to put your gas mask on.' Of course, he tripped over on the what do you call it and I pulled him out along these stillages. Of course, it was in the darkness, you see. You had to fling the door open and I put him on the floor and I run to the first aid room. They got the ambulance in to fetch him and take him in and check him all over.

Was there a first aid room in every building, or was there just one big first aid room?

Oh, there was only one big first aid room.....

Seven

Coming back again to the filling....

...and that was near the entrance, actually, as you went in.

So you had quite a way to go. Bringing you back to the filling, was there always an inspector watching the person doing the filling?

Yes.

So there was always two people?

Always two people, yes.

So, what was the idea of the inspector, just to make sure it was filled up?

Yes, just to help us make sure it was filled and it was okay, checking on it. You see, not only that, but once it comes through the stillages, I had to stamp it. We had a rubber stamp and everything was stamped.

So, when it was filled, how was the lid put on it?

That was another machine again.

In the same cubicle?

In the same cubicle. It came over and it was put in this other machine, bent over and clipped it down.

And then you stamped it?

Yes and when it came through on a conveyer....

Like a conveyer belt was it?

On a conveyer belt to me and then I was stamping it on the other side. Actually the man in the room there, on that particular night, this is where the mistake was, they were supposed to wear his gas mask. He was supposed to have had his gas mask on and so was I really, but that particular night we didn't and we had to put them on afterwards.

Oh, so you were always working with your gas mask on?

Yes, on...

Not just carried around?

No, we had to put them on.

Because you were working so closely with the stuff?

Yes, this is it. Only one department you could say, where I said I went into the tunnels, I carried my gas mask with me but of course they were all loaded up into these steel containers and belted over. Believe me they were strapped over. They were all loaded up, you see, so there was no fear of...and when they were loading them onto the trucks, I didn't have to wear my gas mask either at that particular time. That was the only big time. We were more in the open really, but it was done at night time. Everything was done at night time in that way. I can tell you that one night two of the members of the workmen of ICI, went to Runcorn and they delivered them there and there was an incidence where they were supposed to have a train to come back, but they must have missed the train somewhere round about that way and they were standing on the platform. You can just imagine them two standing on the platform and I believe someone was going to book them as German Prisoners of War, because they were in their uniform, you see, waiting for a lift to get back. I remember them telling us about it, you know, because they were all dressed up like we are. The troops weren't, but they had their black hats, gloves and they even had their goggles on in the station. They didn't have their gas masks on. They had them on their shoulder.

So, they would stand out a bit wouldn't they?

They would do especially on a platform. I remember them coming back. They had a special lift to fetch them back because this train had missed them one way or another and they said the experience that they had, they didn't realise how outstanding it was to other people. There again, there was a bit angry because they didn't want to know where they come from and what they were doing, you see. There was security round that area as well.

So, the loading bay was between the filling shed and the tunnels?

Yes, it was, yes. There was a huge big tunnel like that. Of course, when you went down the tunnel there was a big bay there on the left hand side, I can see it now, it was all loaded up with them ready for going. They were taken from the stillages and there was a ramp, conveyer belt going onto the trucks and that's when I had to stamp very one of them. As they were putting them on, I had to stamp them. They all had numbers. I had sheets and sheets like this, you see, and this is when I had one sheet short. I dais,' I'll have to go to the office,' and this is when I was called all the names in creation. They were on piece work and the quicker they did it, the more money they had, you see and I held them back didn't I.

Were there many times when the canisters being filled got knocked over or broken?

Not really, no. They was very secure there but that happened a couple of times .

So, the biggest thing was over filling the canisters?

You had to make sure, you see, that them canisters and them conveyer belts...they had to be the safest. You can imagine that....that's what happened one of the cables....I think one of the screws or bolts must have fell out or something. Of course, they had to have the security on there again to make sure everything was okay again on that, before they started up again. You just didn't know if it was secure or not. You just had to make it secure. But, I'm not being big headed now, but after all that happened and I went on the security business, I said, 'Now look, before I go near that cubicle, before any gentleman goes near that cubicle to work, I'm making sure that conveyer belt is working properly. I wasn't very well liked in that field, as you can imagine, at the time, but security was security wasn't it. You had to make sure everybody was safe. I didn't want the incident that happened. That incident that happened was a failure of electricity, but I was making sure it wasn't on the conveyer belt. One gentleman, his name was Williams, he was one of the bosses, one of the head bosses there, he said to me, 'I don't know,' he said, 'These men, they're working on piece work.' 'Piece work or not,' I said, 'security is security.' I was called names like Big I am, you. 'Hey ID,' he said. That was short for ID, Inspection Department.' 'Well,' I said, 'I'm on Inspection Department and I've got to make sure that everything is okay.' My Dad used to say, when I came home from work, because some of the men would be talking to me Dad and they said, 'Oh God, your daughter...If we've got to work with your daughter, God help us.' Your job was your job. You couldn't go and say, well I don't want it, I don't like it. I took the job on and I took the interest in the works, you know. As I say, ever since then, I've been interested in the place, because I'll say it and I'll say it again, you'll not be able to clear it completely. No way.

Coming back again to the filling, as it's the area that interests me, you filled the container...

Yes.

...you put the lid on, you've stamped it, you put it on the conveyer belt....

That's right.

Then what happened to it?

They conveyer belt comes down and then it goes into the bomb.

So, someone else picked it off the conveyer belt and put it in a store?

Wait a minute, it comes down the conveyer belt, I stamp it at the end and there's another part at the back of me, where it goes into the shell.

So it was all done in that one cubicle?

Yes, all in one place. So you could say there was three of us really.

Seven-charging

So, the bomb went somewhere else to have its explosive charge put in?

Yes, the bomb went somewhere else. It went in another department where they were loaded up.

Is that where they used to store them, to make sure there was no leaks?

Well, my understanding is that behind the cubicle was what they called the bonding area, where they checked them for leakers and there'd be K4a as well and it would be the third of the sheds that was taller than the other two, which was used for that, and then when they were....they had indicator paint didn't they, put round the seal and when they were shown not to be leaking, they were taken into the tunnels for storage, or taken down the southern end of the DA, the explosives end to have the explosive charge put in and then packaged up ready for transport.

...packaged up for transport. They were stacked up, you see, and there was big stillages where they were stacked up and that was in one particular department again. They way they were loaded up....some of the women with these stillages were pushing them as well as the men, and it's a lot of weight that they were pushing if you think of it. Then they were loaded after they was just the bombs themselves, then they were loaded into these containers and they were a weight. They were fastened up and strapped up, you know in steel containers, old steel strapped up about this big like that.

Were you aware of the different types of gas that was being filled into containers, or were you only aware of mustard?

Well, we were told it was mustard gas, but in my view, according to what a few of us got.....when I had this course in the inspection department, now they didn't reveal that it was mustard gas. It was another type of gas. But, our view was that it was sort of a mixture, mustard and another gas.

But it came out as a syrupy mixture in the containers?

Oh, yes, it was liquid in the container. When you think, when they put them in the container, I'm going now with just the containers to start with, before they fill the bombs where they had to go into this massive, big compartment, a big square container like that, and overnight we had to go and inspect every two hours. We did have to make sure you had your gas mask on to go in there, because it's where all the gas was.

Because, I believe as well as mustard, and there's various types of mustard think, that's maybe the way the mixtures came, you had some

with benzene added to keep it from freezing. I think benzene was very flammable.

That's right, it was.....freezing up, you had to make sure....Then, you see, you take it when heat...I know we had fans in the buildings but look at the heat we've had a couple of days this week, terrific heat, they couldn't keep the outer doors open. They had to be closed up, so they did have a certain, what we would call it, ice freezer....I said a freezer. It's a type of a freezer but it's not a modern freezer that we have now. That was another department again, along across one building like that. We often used to wonder what it was for, but we realised then, if it was really, really hot that would keep the building cool. It wouldn't keep the bomb, just the building cool where we were working. The clothes that we had on, naturally, we needed a building to be cool. If it was really red hot...

In the winter it must have got really cold?

Oh, it was cold in the winter. You were in these thick grey socks, Wellington boots with double yellow lines, once they put these yellow lines on it came back to me that they were toxic lines, you know, and your number. My number was 118, that was on my boots. My identity card was 118. I often think, I am troubles a bit with my legs now, I often think perhaps that was why because you had to stand in them all day, all through your shift, winter and summer, whatever weather it was. I was never more glad, than to chuck them out and put your shoes on top go home in.

So, can you remember any big or major accidents that happened there?

Well, as I say, the only one I can remember is the one I said about. No, I can't remember any other major accidents.

Pipes breaking or leaking?

Wait a minute, there was one department, as you went in, where a thermometer was all there and the men, there was only about three or four men in there, they had to check the what do you call it, over the gas before it came through to the other building. They had to check this thermometer through this piping and there was one instance, one night, where I can remember the three of them ran out of the building, jammed the door up and we all wondered what was wrong. Actually, what it was is that the thermometer wasn't quite correct to what it should be, and they got frightened, you know. I believe they got one of the main engineers over, that was there, to go in there. Whatever he did, I don't know. That's the only crisis I can remember.

So, really, given that it was a dangerous thing that you did....

Oh, most definitely.

...There wasn't that many instances of problems?

No, there wasn't. It was up to you yourself to keep yourself dressed the way you had to be. If you removed your gloves and put your hand to your face, well you could have had anything. But there was a couple, one or two that weren't in the actual danger part of the building, but they caught their fingers and they'd be sent to the first aid room. Now if you met them in Mold, and you'd hurt your hand, I'd know very well where you'd done it. You know why? There was a certain smell on that dressing. Whatever they put on it, I don't know, but there was a certain smell on the dressing and you'd be able to smell it.

Really?

Yes, yes. That's one instance that I can remember. I think mostly it was happening to the men on the loading bay. I can remember being on Mold on a Wednesday and one of the chaps had got his hand bandaged up and I said, 'Oh my God.' I didn't know who he was or nothing and I thought, he's working in Rhydymwyn. What they used I don't know, but there was always a certain smell, like a medical smell, just a certain thing that they must have used special.

Was there much resentment from the older people that got conscripted in to the factory that they were working there?

Not really, no. They were all very...personally myself, I'd say the majority of us who worked there took it seriously and our job was our job. We all used to wish and hope that it'd never be used and thank god it wasn't. But had it been used, well....

Everybody took the secrecy seriously as well?

Oh, yes they did. They did take it seriously. Once you went home from work that was it, your job. You liked to talk about something else, not about your job at all. I never went much into a pub or anything like that, but some of them would go into a pub for a drink or something like that. I did go one time when we had a party in the Antelope, at a Christmas time but not one of us discussed anything like that, no way. We were free and that was it. It was our free time. I can remember I did that particular time have a few drinks. I wasn't used to drinking and I had to walk home from Rhydymwyn to Pantymwyn and I thought thank goodness it's marvellous walking. You see, it was uphill but if you had a few drinks you could go quickly or you didn't feel it. My Dad never drunk at all and I said, 'Well, I'm going to have a drink every shift, I'm going to the Antelope before I come away, and I'll get home a bit quicker. It'll be easier walking.'

The Antelope Pub, or the Antelope Hotel, was there when the factory was operational and it lets rooms out. Didn't the people that went into the hotel start to wonder what the place was about?

Well, I don't know. I often wonder about that. I think there was more of us factory workers that went in there than anybody. Of course, it was War time and there wasn't many people would be coming anywhere out of the area, would they?

No.

Not to a place like that. Now if would be different, like say the Beaufort Palace Hotel, well I mean to say that was it. You come here and you're from away, I think in them days you were just, more or less, local people.

I suppose, because the railway line went past as well.

The railway, yes.

So the place was on view?

Oh, yes, the railway line was on view and yet, as I say, it was in darkness when they were all loaded up.

There weren't many lights at night?

No.

So it was quiet?

You had to make sure it was quiet and that, you see. That tunnel was there and the loading bay and a line was across like that and I'd have to go and check each one that was going up the stillages and the way they loaded them up.

It's just so hard to keep a secret....

One time, an instance I was on at one time, these two fellas got what do you call it and they walked away. What does Dily's do, she got hold of them and shoves them on the stillages, gets into the truck, climbs into the truck and pulls them into the truck. I did about four before they decided to come back. I think I must have made them realise. I can remember that instance. They were only walking away because they were on piecework and they thought that...they were the two that I had to walk before to the office and they thought the same thing was going to happen to them. We used to be called all sorts of names.

Eight The Tunnels

Did you ever go in the big tunnel, you know, the ones in the cliff?

Yes.

What was that like?

Oh, that was really horrifying that was. It really was.

Smelly and dark?

It was dark and a bit smelly, but not too bad, because you had to make sure that you had your gas masks on again.

Gas masks had to be on?

Oh, yes, definitely. It wasa lot refused to go, but our job was our job. A lot of the women refused to go.

What did you do in the big tunnels?

More or less you were loading the bombs and that sort of thing, in the tunnels. Mostly it was undercover what was being done in the factory itself.

But, you didn't feel the mustard in there did you?

No, not in the tunnels. Nothing.

But your little things were put in bombs in there were they?

Yes. The bombs were put in there because they were out of sight wasn't it, for secrecy. Nobody could get to them, sort of thing, put it that way. They were in the tunnels out of sight.

So, quite a few people worked in those tunnels?

Oh, yes, quite a number of people worked in the tunnel. A lot didn't like them but this one I went into the loading bay where the trucks were, but the other tunnels were rather scary.

I don't mean the covered tunnels....

They were scary, although they were loaded up. They were more scary because they were smaller because they were underground and smaller.

I'm talking about the tunnels in the cliff.

Yes, as I say, they were scary there, more scary there than anywhere really. I mean, there was quite a number that tried to get out of going in there, but your job was your job and you had to go. That was only like a storage place really.

Yes, that's what I thought too.

It's only like a storage place, but it was just because it was so dark-ish. Claustrophobia was it, once you went in there.

So, not that many people worked in the tunnels?

No, mostly the men. More men than women would be in the tunnels really. It was not very often that we had to go. Of course, when I went in the ID and I was on inspection, I had to go to different departments, but I didn't have to go much in the cliffs. It was much more the loading bay tunnels I was in, making sure they was going out from there. It's surprising how you coped, when you think of all the clothing that you'd got on and the gas masks.

And the goggles?

Funny thing is, I've had three eye operations. I can't see with this one and one specialist said in Wrexham one time, he said 'W should go into all this.' I thought, what's he on about and he said, 'I believe that you worked in a gas factory during the War years.' 'Yes,' I said, 'what's that got to do with my eyes,' not thinking. He said, 'you never know as it could have affected you.' 'Yes,' I said, 'But, I had my eyes covered with goggles.' 'Well, 'he said, 'it could affect it. 'But, you can't do nothing about it, you see. I couldn't go and say now I worked at Rhydymwyn and I lost my sight to that. You can't say that really. In a round about way it could have affected me. I don't know. A lot of people say they work at such a place and because I worked at the factory, but no such thing, because we were protected. As I say, once we had to put the gas masks over again, that was it. We did look a picture, believe me.

Anything else on your list that we haven't touched on?

Well, I was only putting where I was living and I don't think so. I got one week off in seven weeks and my number.....clothes...no...

Did you come across chloric sulphuric acid or phosgene or BBC, other types of material?

The fluoride one, yes.

Was that the chloride sulphuric acid?

Yes.

Did that handle differently than the mustard?

Yes, that was handled differently than the mustard. It wasn't put in a department to heat up like the mustard gas was. The mustard gas was mixed with something else, it wasn't actually mustard gas on its own. But that was in another department.

Did it go in the same containers?

Yes, the same type of containers. I often think, I don't know, you often think whether the bombs were actually filled with the same type of gas. Some were filled with that and some were filled with this, well it wasn't pure mustard gas, it was mixed up. I often think about that.

Because, looking at the inventories, most of munitions filled seem to be the 25lb artillery shells...

That's right.

And there were lots of different types of air bombs...

I often think of that one big one that I was talking about, with the gold. What was that filled with? They only made the one. I can still see it now, right across the floor.

Because they did experiment with some phosgene munitions I believe?

....I mean to think that they put a solid gold disk on the end of it. This is what we were told, if, at any time, it was ever used, it would be rammed underneath the plane and if it had been dropped anywhere well, all this area, they said forty to fifty odd miles it would cover. So, whatever was in that....

Maybe it was phosgene?

As I say I only know about the size of it. They only made the one that I know of. That's the only one that I seen there.

Eight

The Filling Sheds

In the filling sheds, you had lines of cubicles with the different munitions being filled, but at the end most you had a big, very heavily concreted room, was it in Corporation Plant? Can you explain about how that building worked?

That big concrete building? Oh well that was just for keeping storage more than anything.

Because there seemed to be quite elaborate arrangements there for it's protection.

More like a storage building it was.

There were big tanks in there?

Yes, big tanks in there.

What was in the tanks, do you know?

As far as I know, it was smoke bombs, for making smoke bombs. We made smoke bombs there as well.

Did it go underground much there that you can remember?

Yes, we did go underground. Most of the stuff was coming from underground, really, up into the building in pipes.

Did you get involved much as the site ran down and closed or were you just paid off?

Oh, we were paid off.

So, you were never there when they started the clean or the decommissioning?

Afterwards, no, we were told that the War had ended and we had to go back into work for one or two months after and then we were just paid off and that was it. Of course, those buildings were up quite a number of years, you know, before they actually brought them down. I see the other building that was up as temporary storage buildings, are there at the moment, unless they've taken them down.

They've all gone.

They've all gone down. Well, I haven't been in that area because when we had a car we used to go through there. I said, I'd love to go there once they've done all the, what do you call it, but there'd still be all that gas underneath the ground. They won't get me saying no different, because I've been to a few meetings there and the one lady, she was a councillor, not Diane another one and I was with the blind club for about 23 years in Mold, I was in charge of it for about 18 years and she was on the committee with me, she said, 'You can't build houses or nothing in Rhydymwyn. You're cutting the place down.' I said, 'I'm not cutting the place down at all. If they build houses near that building, even if they put coal fires in, they'll be dangerous.'

Nine Last Thoughts

Were there any fumes around, that you were aware of on the site when they were operating the production plant? Were you aware of acid fumes?

No. I suppose with us being in it all the time, we got used to it. There wasn't much fumes at all. My Dad used to say, when he came out of the building where he was, he would come round to get in his car to go home, he used to say, 'That blooming fumes, that smell.' 'What do you mean the fumes, the smell?' 'You can smell the smoke from everywhere,' he'd say.

Because he didn't have a gas mask, did he?

No, he didn't have nothing. He was just in his normal civilian clothes wasn't he, in the workshop where he was, just inside the entrance.

Was it the toxic workshops or the big, long shed that was his workshop?

The toxic workshop was a big long shed, right along. Our dad was a builder in the toxic shed. If you flung them doors open, you'd be in trouble, once you went through. You had gone through a small door, an entrance to go in. The big doors were opened out when the bombs went out from there. When you think of the enclosure, even though they were massive, big buildings in height, the work that had been put in to put them buildings up, and all the containers...it was under the ICI I believe. I believe it was the ICI, as far as I can make out that had anything to do with it.

They built it very quickly.

I couldn't make out when they said we do an aeronautical inspection department, I was under the Air Force, the RAF then, like I was a civilian trop, put it that way. When I went to see my first husband, I was going down to Scotland and I couldn't get a train back because there was troops travelling a lot. Sometimes they wouldn't allow you to go on the same train as them. I was a day late going into work and my boss said, 'You're a day late coming to work, you're on leave, you're a day over your leave.' I lost a days pay. It's what they called leave time and if I wanted any time off after that, I had to give notice, because there was no holidays in a place like that. You had all the year round work, all day and all night.

Did it change much during the time you worked there?

Not really.

It was similar from start to finish?

Very similar, yes. Towards the finishing end we were all getting used to all the routine of the thing. It was so funny when they gave us a ring and said, 'You don't have to go to work no more.' I did have to go to work but the War had

finished. I did say that although the War had finished, we didn't finish straight away.

It was quite intriguing as the factory was making all this stuff and they never used it? It's odd where it all went really.

The smoke bombs were made you see, and they were used.

The smoke bombs were but all this mustard stuff was being produced....

When you think of the thousands and millions of money that had gone to make them and to look at the wages that they were paying out. I say, I was getting £104, getting danger money. We were all getting danger money. The men on piece work were getting danger money.

For that time that was a fortune wasn't it, £100 a week?

A week, yes. You just think, from 12 and 6 a week, which I thought was quite a good wage, that I was getting in Chester, I was getting ten shillings to work in West Kirby, and I went to Chester and I was getting 12 and 6 on my first weeks wages and I paid tax on that as well. We were having so much an hour danger money.

But even so, that was a fortune.

It was a fortune. My Dad was getting £98.

So the factory people were well paid?

Oh, yes, well paid.

Very well paid.

I mean to say, you were in danger, but you were getting the money for it.

I didn't realise.

Getting danger money. So much an hour was danger money. We wouldn't have got that much money in the other factories that were working in different places. All the aircraft factories, they weren't getting the money like we were getting, nothing like the money we were getting. I can remember carrying that package home, walking up thinking, 'Crikey Moses. I'm sure they've made a mistake this week,' and running into the house to say, 'Mum, I've got £104.' You take it now, say you earn about 4-500 now and you were getting over a thousand odd pound.

Oh, no, it was a remarkable amount of money for the time.

It was, yes. When you think back, we deserved it, put it that way. I think so personally myself, yes. When you think back of the danger we were in, you

don't think at the time you were working there, when you look back at the danger we were in all the time.

You are back to this thing that there was a War on and it was just as dangerous as being on the front line.

Yes. I remember one young soldier who was friendly with my first husband and his wife was working with me and he said, 'you're just as in danger as we are.'

'Don't talk so daft,' I said.

'I honestly think you're in more danger,' he said.

'You can't,' I said, 'You don't know what we're doing,' because she didn't say what we were making, you see. He knew we were in a gas factory, but he didn't know the ins and outs that we do now. None of us spoke about it. Once we left the works that was it. Of course, we were sworn to secrecy as well. We had a special card to go in. We had an identification card. We had identification during the War years, everybody, every civilian. That was shown and then the other was shown after. Everything was taken away from you. If you had any cigarettes, you'd had it. You can imagine that nobody would be allowed to smoke in a place like that, would they? It's understandable, you know. But anything in tins or clothes, they'd open up to see and all that. That was the inspections and there'd be about four on duty for each shift, the inspections as you went through. That was one department you went through...because I've said about the kit department haven't I. When you think it must have cost them millions of pounds for these bath towels.

Oh, it wasn't cheap.

We had to be wrapped up to go from one cubicle to another.

Again, very cold in the winter?

Oh, yes. You could be frozen stiff, walking down through snow and ice and that sort of thing, you know.

Are we done?

That's pretty much the end of the disk....

