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**THE WORLD WAR II  
ORDNANCE DEPARTMENT'S  
GOVERNMENT-OWNED  
CONTRACTOR-OPERATED  
(GOCO) INDUSTRIAL FACILITIES:  
TWIN CITIES ORDNANCE PLANT  
TRANSCRIPTS OF ORAL HISTORY  
INTERVIEWS**

**DTIC QUALITY INSPECTED 4**

**DECLASSIFICATION STATEMENT A**

**Approved for public release  
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*interviews conducted by*  
**Deborah L. Crown**  
*of*

**BEAR CREEK ARCHEOLOGY, INC.**

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**U.S. ARMY MATERIEL COMMAND HISTORIC CONTEXT SERIES  
REPORT OF INVESTIGATIONS  
NUMBER 8C**



**GEO-MARINE, INC.**



**US Army Corps  
of Engineers  
Fort Worth District**

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**THE WORLD WAR II ORDNANCE DEPARTMENT'S  
GOVERNMENT-OWNED CONTRACTOR-OPERATED  
(GOCO) INDUSTRIAL FACILITIES:**

**TWIN CITIES ORDNANCE PLANT  
TRANSCRIPTS OF  
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS**

*interviews conducted by*  
Deborah L. Crown  
BEAR CREEK ARCHEOLOGY, INC.  
Cresco, Iowa  
*Subcontractor for Geo-Marine, Inc.*

Principal Investigator  
Duane E. Peter  
Geo-Marine, Inc.

*under*  
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550 East 15th Street  
Plano, Texas 75074

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## MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

This report contains transcripts of oral history interviews conducted as part of a project to document the World War II-era construction and operations of the Twin Cities Army Ammunition Plant (TCAAP), New Brighton, Minnesota. The interviews were conducted under United States Army Corps of Engineers Contract No. DACA63-93-D-0014, Delivery Order No. 014; the transcriptions of these interviews were completed under United States Army Corps of Engineers Contract No. DACA63-93-D-0014, Delivery Order No. 89. Both these projects were undertaken as part of a larger Legacy Resource Program demonstration project to assist small installations and to aid in the completion of mitigation efforts set up in a 1993 Programmatic Agreement among the Army Materiel Command, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and Multiple State Historic Preservation Officers concerning a program to cease maintenance, excess, and dispose of particular properties. As part of the larger project to develop the national historic context of seven sample installations on a state and local level, the major focus of the project at TCAAP was to document the impacts that the facility had on the state and local environments during the World War II period.

All the interviews were conducted by Bear Creek Archeology, Inc. (BCA), under subcontract to Geo-Marine, Inc., during February 1995, and the tapes of these interviews were transcribed by the personnel at Professional Transcription Service, Dallas, Texas. Duane Peter, Senior Archeologist at Geo-Marine, Inc., served as Principal Investigator.

Deborah L. Crown, of BCA, conducted a total of six oral history interviews in September 1994, all of which took place in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area. Three men and two women who were former employees of the Twin Cities Ordnance Plant (TCOP), which is what TCAAP was called during World War II, took part in interviews of approximately 90 minutes each, all recorded using a high quality tape recorder. These persons were Mr. Carl Holmberg, Ms. Julia Kohler, Mr. Everett Needles, Mrs. Laura Peterson, and Mr. Ted Seth. An additional interview was conducted with Mr. Harold Stassen, Governor of Minnesota from 1938 to 1943.

Mr. Carl Holmberg had, at the time of the interview, lived in the region about 70 years. During World War II he worked at TCOP as an ambulance driver. Ms. Julia Kohler had also spent most of her life in the area; she worked in the primer loading section of TCOP during the war. Mr. Needles worked as a powder handler from late 1942 until late 1944. Mrs. Laura Peterson worked at the plant as a telephone operator during World War II, while her husband was in the service. Mr. Ted Seth worked at the plant as a metallurgist during the war.

The contributions provided by these individuals have been invaluable. The time and effort they took to participate in the project is greatly appreciated.

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**CARL HOLMBERG**  
**September 19, 1994**  
**Maplewood, Minnesota**  
**Deborah L. Crown, Interviewer**

*Today is Monday, September 19, and I'm interviewing Carl Holmberg. He was an ambulance driver here at the plant during World War II.*

*I'll start out with some preliminary questions. This is just a background to begin with. Where were you living when you heard the plant was going to be built?*

My parents bought ten acres of ground, and the closest direction I can give you is at Rice and Highway 96. It's about four miles away from here. And my father bought that in 1919. We moved on it in 1920. And up to about a month ago, that's where I've lived all my life. So, it's over seventy years.

*So right about the time before you heard the plant was going to be here, what were you doing?*

I was working part-time at an ambulance company at St. Paul. They had a complete service. They had ambulances, they had hearses, they had limousines and the whole business, and I was working for them when I heard the plant was coming through.

*What did this area look like before it was built?*

This area was a collection . . . I guess the best description you can give of it was ma and pa farms. And, of course, there were several farms that were owned by people of the same family name, aunts and uncle, cousins, and while there was some good land, this big marsh and lake took up a portion of the area, and that never was farmable, and then there was a big gravel pit was found on this property, and there was probably, oh, probably two to three square miles was involved in this gravel pit. And so that was marginal. But these people were hard working, and they farmed, they had some dairy cattle, they fed some cattle for beef purposes, and then some of the families had numbers that got jobs working. There used to be a big pole yard [that] handled telephone poles and electric poles for the power companies, and there were post treating plants over here at New Brighton. And that employed some people. And then there were some of them that drove all the way to either Minneapolis or St. Paul for employment.

*How did a lot of those people react when they heard that the government was going to buy the land?*

Well, I think inasmuch that the wars with the accompanying atrocities and everything that went with it, it more or less geared the people to the fact, 'well, if we can do something, we will.' And basically, there was very few objections heard around. Well, you see, they drafted a lot of the young men to go in the services, and I was a single man taking care of my mother and my draft number came up after I was employed by the arsenal, and so I went and did my stint in the services for three years and then came back here. And generally speaking, some of the people, well, they lost members of their families and some of the people got better jobs at other plants, rather than working here. But there was quite a number of ladies that lost their husbands to the services that came out here and worked at the plant, and some of the neighbor gals worked over here, too. It was an employment opportunity for some people. But all in all, I think most of the people realized that we had to do something to support our military forces, and that seemed to be the attitude all the way through. If we can do it, let's do it. And I think that's what the general attitude was.

*Did your family own any of the land?*

No.

*Do you know if land prices in the area surrounding the plant rose or fell as a result of the government acquisition?*

I never got involved in thinking about that aspect of it at all, I mean, because our home was not affected by it, and like if there was small businesses in the incorporated area of New Brighton and that was one of the few existing little towns,--Centerville, Minnesota, is over about five, six miles east of here, and Columbia Heights was just about eight, nine miles over, and they were just getting started at that time, and whether their businesses were affected by it, I don't know. I didn't get involved in it and I really don't know.

*How about the construction of the plant? What were the conditions like on the construction site?*

Whee! (Laughs) Well, when you have earth-moving machinery leveling off property, you've got to look out for them, because they can't look out for you. And they moved thousands and thousands and thousands of yards of ground to make the roads, make the parking lots, make the building sites. This all had to be coordinated and I guess that's why they needed an ambulance out here, because there's sometimes somebody didn't look out (chuckles). We had a number of men that were pretty badly mutilated by tractors and different things like that. But it couldn't help but happen, because from carpenters that were driving nails to masons that were cementing bricks and cement blocks and from steel workers putting up iron, there was 18,000 construction workers scattered all over this four square miles. (Laughs). You could go up on top of the hill up there, where the water tower was, and there used to be a guard coup up there, and you'd go up there and look down, and there was literally looking like ants working around the yard someplace. They had tractors going this way and tractors going that-a-way, and one day I went out this Mound's View Road, and it had been raining heavily, and the caterpillars are grinding up the road, and one of the gentlemen stopped up there at the first aid station--he was in managerial position with the company--and they were working on this tracer manufacturing area, and that's 1-35, out there, and someone required help with an ambulance. So he rode with me. Our old first aid station was out here on Highway 96. And so we had to come up here and get on the road and go out Mound's View Road, and the only way those tractors made so much noise they couldn't hear the siren, and the only way you could get attention is if you were meeting a tractor, and it was following this one and you were meeting that one. You'd flash your headlights to signal this guy to stop, and when he'd stop, then you'd wind your way through it.

*But they couldn't hear you coming at all?*

No. No, the tractor made too dang much noise. And some of those wheels on the tractors were four-and-a-half and five feet high. I mean they were darn near as high as the equipment that was passing them.

*Do you know if most of the construction workers lived in the town or if they lived right out here?*

Oh, they came from 25, 30 mile distances. I mean there was no way they could find 18,000 construction workers out here. They came from South Minneapolis, South St. Paul, and the city proper, and Onnoka, and Forest Lake.

*Did they set up any temporary housing here while they were working?*

No.



*No, they just came from all over?*

They'd just work their shift and go home. There were some homes around the area, now, like up the west drive here. There were some real nice residences up there, and they were refurbished to accommodate like the commanding officer and the chief engineers and different ones that were brought in that didn't have a home over here, and some of these farm houses were jockeyed around so that they would have some place to live or use as a temporary office. That was the main object of it. They'd have a temporary office that could be heated, and of course, in those days, there was no sanitary sewer. They built a septic tank and a drain field to get rid of the waste water and it was quite a proposition.

*So were most of the people that worked on the construction site, were they local people or were they from elsewhere? Would you consider them local people?*

Well, Minneapolis and St. Paul have had wonderful--the building trades and the workers, the machinists, there have been some big factories in both Minneapolis and St. Paul that had a lot of stable people and they were around here, and there were well established labor unions, like for the carpenters and the brick layers and different things. And so there were some people that were local residents, but then of course as the work progressed and they needed more, they could get permits from the union to shift from one area to the other if they needed them. So there were some fellows that came from . . . well, New Richmond, Wisconsin was about 38, 40 miles away from here, and if they were a bricklayer or something and a member of the union, why you'd have to get up at 5:00 in the morning to be there at 7:00 or 8:00 and go to work, and then work a ten-hour day and go home. And it [would be] awfully difficult to try to pinpoint just how many were locals and how many were imports, but there was, like I say, the work trades were well established. See, the ambulance drivers had to belong to Truck Drivers Union 120. It didn't make any difference if you drove for a funeral parlor if you drove for the arson. You were a member of the Truck Drivers Union 120. (Laughs) And the same with the carpenters and the carpenters helpers and the bricklayers and the plumbers and electricians. Minnesota has always been quite a well labor oriented and labor unions protected their people or looked out for their welfare. And so I mean it continued right on. It worked out pretty good.

*How did the workers seem to get along with each other?*

Well, the only thing that I can honestly say is we got the job done. And from my point of view, sitting in an emergency, next to a telephone or a radio, waiting for something to happen, and then going doing it, I didn't have that much contact with the various groups, how they felt about what was going on or anything. In the first calendar year, I started working out here in August of 1941, and in the first calendar year, counting band-aids and splints, picking splinters out of guys' hands and this, that and the other thing, I personally handled 10,238 people. And we used to have two Ford Station Wagons and a Panel Truck for our field ambulances out here in the construction, and in the first calendar year, I put 72,000 miles on those three rigs . . . just handling people. Now, you see, they got splinters in their hands and they stumbled on things, and when they were working with chemicals and different things, they had to come in to have that taken care of. That was a state law in Minnesota. It has been for years. And there was no if, ands and buts about it. I mean you just . . . and they had to be transported, because that many guys can't get off the job and walk back to their car and then drive up to the . . . and you couldn't get through the way we could get through. I mean it wasn't always red lights and sirens. And then after the buildings were constructed, each one of these production buildings, or production areas, had a nurse and a first aid station, and that was operated 24 hours a day, but what she couldn't handle, we'd have to come up here for X-rays or for doctor's review, and if he didn't have to lose time, why go right back to work again.

*So that was when the plant was in operation during construction? There was only one place?*

The one first aid station up there in the middle in Old School District 15, and then over here on Highway 96 and Hamlin Avenue, we had . . . John Goodnosky had built a new home and never had a chance to move

in it. It was there and the government took it over, and that was turned into the hospital facility. And the doctors all stayed there, because it was just too dirty and filthy out here in the work area to set up anything like that. There was mud eyeball deep to a giraffe sometimes. (Chuckles)

*Were there any non-White people working in construction that you recall seeing?*

Oh, sure. Minnesota has always had quite a liberal work force in that facet, and if there were openings for what the trades call common laborers, there were a lot of orientals and there were Black people hired, and they were paid the same wages a White person, because he was doing the same work. Or she was doing the same work.

*Did you notice any tension between the races that you can remember?*

I never got involved in it if there was anything like that going on, I mean because in emergency services, you don't look at a person, regardless of race, creed or color. You got three things to do: You look at him, if he's bleeding, you stop the bleeding. If he's not breathing, you help him start to breathe. You give him artificial respiration. And the least you do for anybody is try to cover him with a dry, warm blanket to keep him warm. And you don't ask him are you two-thirds Black, are you two-thirds Yellow? It's a human being that needs specific attention, and that's what he gets. And male or female. And I guess this one that I showed you, that one note that we made about this Murry, there was no time lost. She moved and got to the hospital. And there's never been a time in my life, and when I backed off of the emergency services a few years back, after 43 years of it, I had 70,000 incidents, and I've never asked anybody are you going to pay me for this or what color are you, gee, if you're Black, I can't do nothing for you, or if you're an Indian, well, holler with your tomahawk and everything will be all right. It never entered your mind. And the same way when I was in the services, and I had lots of crazy experiences in the service.

*How did the area of New Brighton change during the construction period?*

(Laughs) Well, it finally got run off the map with the amount of traffic that went through. (Laughs) All the day, the traffic congestion used to be humongous. I mean it just defies description.

*Worse than just a rush hour?*

Oh, gosh.

*What was it like?*

Well, you see now, everything went at once. There used to be what they call The Minnesota -- well, they still call it The Minnesota Railroad, a railway transfer. It's in the midway of St. Paul, so those lines reached out here to New Brighton to these pole yards and the lumber yards out here, and then after the plant decided to get built here, then they brought in tracks into here, and they built this railroad all over the area. And I mean that was a project all of its own. And then the highways weren't meant to handle all this traffic. (Laughs)

*What was the traffic mostly from, just the workers?*

Well, from about 6:00 in the morning until . . . and then you see, they start running into the second and third shifts, why this was around the clock traffic. I mean it was just fantastic. And the deputy sheriffs and the highway patrol, they did a super job. Oh, we had pile-ups, yes. And then you see part of the hazardous chemical works of this place, the powder mixing, and a lot of it was done at the Onnoka facility, and they would make up a batch and put it in the truck and bring it down, and if the truck was properly marked, they

had warning signals. But every once in a while, somebody would smack one of those powder trucks and scare the daylights out of people.

*What would happen? Did it just blow up?*

Well, we didn't have any blow-ups, but we had a number of crashes, and of course, the powder is packed in isolated compartments and in very cold compartments--they keep it at a very low temperature--and if the powder truck stops along the road and the temperature starts to rise, that's when you could create problems. So from the time the truck stops until you get the message, and you pick that stuff up and get it back to where it can get controlled, you move. You don't waste any time. And there was three different times after the plant went production where these powder trucks hauling this powder mix were disabled out on the highway. And, of course, they were equipped with what they call static chains and all the . . . static electricity would be involved in setting off a blast, but as time was winding up, they recruited the ambulance, and we put this powder in the ambulance. And that didn't have drag chains, you didn't have naught. All we could do was move. So we put this powder keg in the ambulance and bring it to the arsenal and put it where it belongs. (Laughs)

*Oh, really? If the truck stalled out on the . . . they'd call you?*

Sure.

*But what of that? There was no way to control static or anything. So was that dangerous?*

Well, (laughing) I survived a couple of runs without any problem. We had a safety engineer that used to work out here. His name was John Funk. He was the insurance company Safety Engineer that insured the whole business, and John was quite a guy. He said, "It looks like we're going for a ride." Say, "Okay, John. Let's go."

*How did you find out about the job here and how did you go about getting your job here?*

Well, there was an ad in the paper that they were looking for . . . and, of course, you had to take a physical examination.

*Where did you take that physical?*

They had, like I said, they had off the area places where you could go for your physical examination at the time, because they were building the facility. And I was a licensed ambulance driver and I was a first aid instructor and had been around a lot of this [*inaudible*] business.

*Why did you want to work here instead of like for a hospital, you know, like a big hospital in the city or whatever? What was it about this place that was attractive?*

Well, I guess the challenge was more than anything, because if I had been an ambulance driver out of a hospital, I would have got the same wages that I got out here. However, this was only four miles from home. So then when they found that out, and I got on the payroll, they had a driver for each shift, and I lived so close by, the insurance company put emergency equipment on my personal car, red lights and sirens. So if I had worked an eight-hour day and I was home supposedly sleeping for the next shift, my 16-hours off was interrupted to come and help if they needed the extra. I could make it over here in four minutes from the time I was called. If I worked a 16-hour day, I was on call eight, and if I worked an eight-hour day, I was on call 16. And it worked out real well [*inaudible*].

*Did that ever happen, where they had to call you?*

Oh, yeah.

*Before you started working here, like a couple of days before you found out, how did you find out you got the job? Did they hire you on the spot?*

Well, I made my application and took my physical and then you'd just have to wait.

*Before you started actually working here, what did you think it would be like?*

Well, I had been around it long enough so I knew it was going to be a mess. And that's all you could call it, would be a mess, because it's organized confusion.

*Are you talking about the construction?*

The whole picture. Because, you see, you have to learn to adjust, not only from one shift to the next, but once you're geared for an eight-hour shift, (chuckling) you make adjustments in that eight hours, and without losing any sleep over it or without getting excited. Because it's just one of those things that happens in emergency service. Well, the firemen are the same way. I mean they sit there in their station, and if the bell rings, they go. And the ambulance driver is a little bit on the same order, and there is never two incidents that are exactly the same, no matter how many jobs you're on or how many people you got working. Somebody will say, well I got a finger that's cut off, well the next guy gets a finger cut off, it might not be his thumb, it might be the middle finger (chuckles). But you've got to be prepared for anything. And, like I say, I had been in enough rhu-barbs before this plant started . . . that was just about . . . well it was the worst things I've ever seen in my life [*inaudible*]. Like I say, it was organized confusion. The construction managers were just fantastic. I mean how they could keep track of the number of people they had on the job and what material was going to what part of the job, this was really, oh, it was just simply magnificent, the way they handled it. Considering that it was splattered all over the landscape, why it was . . . and there was different kinds of soil condition and there was swampy areas and there was hard clay and just a few rocks and construction problems, and that's when there's accidents.

*You just said there are no two situations that are the same, but what was an average day like for you, from beginning to end? What shift did you normally work? How was that set up?*

Well, the shifts ran from 7:00 in the morning to 3:00 in the afternoon, [and it] was what they called the A Shift. The B Shift was from 3:00 in the afternoon to 11:00, and C Shift was from 11:00 to 7:00, and as crazy as it sounds, what happened on the C Shift and what happened on the A Shift, I mean, yeah, sure the guy just sawed into his hand or something like that, but I mean the circumstances were different because it was dark and they were working on a different level. Maybe on the A Shift they're climbing around up on the second story, and on the night shift they've probably got something to do at a lower level because the scaffolding wasn't ready for them or something, so they'd find something else for them to do. So you never knew what you were going to get into.

*Was that the same when the plant was in operation? Were there different accidents at night?*

Oh, sure.

*Because of what?*

Well, you see, there are some people that they would work, say, the night shift. They'd work from 11:00 at night till 7:00 in the morning. All right. So they left here at 7:00. They were able and hearty, but

sometimes they were involved in automobile accidents on the way home. Sometimes when they got home, some of their kids or some of their family is involved in something, so their sleep was disrupted, so when they came back, 11:00 the next night, they were tired out, grumpy and growly, and they were not quite as alert as they could have been, and so, I mean, circumstances alter cases. You're not finding fault with the people that are on nights; it's just that you have to recognize their lifestyle is different and the problems they face are different than the guy that has an 8:00 to 5:00 job or a 7:00 to 3:00 job. And 7:00 to 3:00 and 8:00 to 5:00 are two horses of two different colors. I mean they're just as different as night and day. And there are stressful jobs in construction. And, of course, in those days, when they built this plant, they didn't have the sophisticated mechanical creatures to help you with your work like they have now. I mean, they've got equipment now . . . (chuckles). It's just a whole different world.

*What was an average day for you like here?*

Oh, it would all depend on what was going on.

*Where did you report to work?*

Well, when we were in construction, I reported to that hospital building on Highway 96, and as soon as I reported in there, the ambulance and the nurse that were stationed out here in the middle of the lot, they would come down here and I would bring them, the nurse that was going to take her place out there, and then sometime hang around out there in the area, or else, if there was something going on someplace else, I'd have to . . . And we, the boys on the ambulance, had to use their own judgment. If we had to go out in the area and pick up someone that was injured, you got pretty well able to determine whether this is something [inaudible] the nurse could handle or if it was to go in for immediate x-rays, if the arm is twisted or disfigured or your legs are sticking out the opposite direction or something, well, you know they can't do anything in first aid station about it, so you take them to the hospital. I mean that was one of the judgments you had to make.

*If there was an accident somewhere, did they call you first or did they call the nurse?*

Well, they had a central number. They had a barn,--it was a big garage--but the northwest corner of 105 here was the communication center for the whole darn thing when it finally got in operation. And they had 35, 40, 50 telephone operators working in there to handle all that incoming/outgoing calls and all. And then, of course, it was all dial phones after it once got established. And that's another thing we had to learn. Each one of these buildings had a tool shed and a time shed assigned to it, and the guys that come in with their daily work card punched the clock, and then report to the tool shed. Now, the time office and the tool clerk each had a telephone. Each building had a serial number on it, for identification for inventory purposes and for identification purposes. If somebody would come to the time shed and say, "Hey, a guy got hit by a car," "Where you located?" "This is time shack number 11." You didn't know what the telephone number was or anything. He says, "I'm in time shack number 11. Come and get a guy." "Sure, we'll get there." So we had to know the difference between the time shed and the tool shed, because they each had different numbers. We didn't have to memorize the telephone number, but if he said that's where he was, that's where we would go. And each project had that. Then, as the work progressed, after the foundations was poured and the wall [inaudible] coming out, then the pipe trades came in to put all these G-dang pipes through. Each one of these pipe contractors had their own building number and their own telephone.

*So did the numbers changed?*

Just added it to the list. (Laughs) Pipe trades would have a different number than the carpenters.

*What about when the plant was in operation? What if somebody in building 503 was injured doing something?*

Whoever got injured in those production buildings, once after they once were organized, they would holler for the nurse.

*So would somebody stop the line?*

Yeah. There'd be a foreman or somebody. Each operation had their own core of management, minor managers, you might say, or unit managers. And there was enough people so that they would notify the nurse, and of course, if they hollered emergency, by the time they got the patient from the assembly line or whatever they were doing, by the time they got to the nurse's station, we were there. And the telephone operators were just fantastic. When emergency calls would come in, they'd say "Tah, tah, tah." "Don't get excited. Just tell me what extension are you calling from. What does it say on the phone?" "Five-thirty-seven." "That's all I need to know. Thank you. Just stay there." And he would call the ambulance and say, "Go to extension phone number 537." (Laughs)

*And so you had to know what building that was in?*

Right. Whether it was a tool shed or a . . .

*Did you look that up?*

Heck no.

*You just knew them all? How many were there?*

Well, there was about 1500 at one time, and had everybody going out here.

*And you knew them all?*

I missed two calls . . . on night shifts.

*How did you memorize all that?*

That's part of your business. I used to know over 20,000 addresses in St. Paul, Minneapolis.

*What did you do for lunch?*

Well, if we had the chance to eat the lunch we brought with us, we would eat it. There again, when the buildings got into production and were built, each of these buildings had a cafeteria facility to feed the personnel working in it. And the ambulance entrance and the nurses station in each building was not too far from the cafeteria. And some of the cafeterias had outside exits, so if we were going to eat at 101 or 103, whatever it might be, we would back the ambulance down the walkway and go in and eat. And if we got called, why we just . . .

*Just drive right off.*

Sure.

*And then did you have other specific things that you had to do during the day, like any paper work or reports? What else did you do besides drive the ambulance? Now, I saw that you'd take notes. What else would you do? Let's say I called in, and I'm at this extension, and you'd come and get me, or whoever is injured, what do you do from there?*

Well, you'd have to push the button to open the garage door is the first thing, and get in the car and away you'd go. And you note the time that you got called, and then, of course, in a lot of these things, if area people called in to the central switchboard and reported, then the switchboard took care of all the time that the call came in and the time they notified us and the time we reported back we had taken care of the situation, so we were back in service again. And sometimes the ambulance got messed up. I mean there was mud and dirt, and sometimes there was scratches that were bleeding pretty badly and they'd gunk up the [inaudible], and you'd have to clean it up and get it ready for the next one.

*So you spent some time cleaning the . . . ?*

Yeah, and if it was real bad, why then we would put the ambulance out of service and take it to the main garage, and then the crew down there would wash it up real fast and clean it up. When we'd get through washing, we'd go back up to our own garage and put clean linens on the stretchers and fresh pillows and get everything all set.

*Did you do any paperwork?*

Well, we had a daily report.

*Did you have to report every accident?*

No, well, every time we made a run we had to [inaudible]. But the nurses took care of the report work at their station, and our reports would have to coincide with theirs. And the time she called the hospital and sent the patient to the hospital on the grounds here, we transported it. So that was a pretty accurate story of how much time it took to take care of the people.

*Was your job union? Yes, it was. You said it was earlier. I don't know if our tape was running at that time. Could you describe that again, the union that you had to be in. What was that again?*

That was General Drivers 120. It was part of the Truck Drivers Union.

*What kind of working conditions do you think that you had? What kind of working conditions were you working under?*

Well, I would say under the circumstances, they did a fantastic job. I mean sure the ideal thing is that there's not going to be any injuries because when them people are injured, that causes them loss of time, and time lost is loss of money, income. If they're injured so they're laid up for any length of time, I mean there's no injury that pays off. There's no insurance that pays off enough for loss of time, and then the agony you go through. But, I mean, I never heard too much complaint about what we did out here, and of course, it didn't bother me none, because I never got in on any of those hearings because it just . . . we were the emergency end of it, and you don't expect the world to come to you on a silver platter and bouquet of roses (laughs) every time you go out.

(End of Side 1; Beginning of Side 2)

. . . It was like coming to a second home. If I was home for a weekend, sometimes I'd sneak away if I didn't have anything else to do.

*Just to visit?*

Yeah. And the one great thing about it is this job out here gave me a clearance status and classification that when I showed the identification card, I could get into any military facility anywhere in the country. I had no problems whatsoever. I mean we'd stop at the gate and tell them, "Is there any chance of visiting?" If they'd say, "Just a minute. We'll see if they're busy." And by golly, ten, 15 minutes, somebody would come out and they'd go right around in a plant like this somewhere else.

*So you saw other plants like this?*

Oh, sure.

*Where?*

Oh, in Indiana and down in Oklahoma and in New Mexico.

*What was it like to visit the other ones? How did they compare to this one?*

This was just a little plant. And what they did in other plants, they had higher explosives and they had more fire power. No, this was not the largest plant, but oh, what a contribution it made to the armed forces and to the general victory of the country. Because this was what they call small arms ammunition. Thirty and 50 caliber, that's nothing compared to 6 and 8 and 10 and 12, 15 inch. You had the shells that fired.

*It was small ammunition?*

Small arms ammunition is what it [was]. A very vital one. And I think that all the employees that were out here, most of them,--like I say, I didn't have enough contact with them to find out if they were disgruntled or not,--but I think they took a pride in supplying a product that was going to do the job and do it well. And I think it did. The job I went to after I got out of here--I was down in Great Lakes, Illinois, and an order came through that anybody that had been a volunteer or paid fireman should come to the personnel office. So we went in there and they said we're starting a whole new fire prevention and fire fighting program, and we need qualified people. So you chose what you wanted to do in this new program. And I put down captain of the rescue squad. And the entrance examination cut-off point was you had to pass at 90 or better. Well, I squeaked by 92. And then I was sent to a class that was run by the Milwaukee Fire Department, and we were there for 50 days. We ate, slept and worked out of the fire stations for 50 days. Never a day off. And the guy I drew down as a mentor at that particular school said, "You see those books up there? Well, when you come back from a fire, you get your nose in the books." And this old rascal had over 20 years experience and he was an Assistant Chief in the Milwaukee Fire Department. And at the 48th day, they had an examination, and when I walked out the door, I had passed the Assistant Chief's examination. So when I got back to Great Lakes, that was on my record from there, from Milwaukee. And about ten days after I got back to Great Lakes, they sent me to California, and I'd only been out to California about three or four days, and California had one of its famous whirlwind forest fires, and there was about 500 of us newly trained firemen, and they said, "Well, you boys come out here and help us fight these fires." (Laughs) So that was my baptism in into the Navy firefighting, was a forest fire. And after that was put out, I was sent to Hawaii, and I ended up . . .



*Is this through the army?*

Yeah. Well, through the Navy. I joined the Navy. And although I was considered a hospital corpsman, that was the rating I went into the Navy with, and I did all these changes of rates, ranks and serial numbers, and I still had a rating of a hospital corpsman. The Navy didn't change my pay scale or nothing. So when I got over there, they were having troubles. They had just built and commissioned the second largest naval hospital in the world, a 7,500 bed hospital, and I was a hospital corpsman, and they said, "Well we're having problems with our fire department. Looks like you've done some work with the Navy Fire Department." So I ended up I was the chief of the fire department at that hospital. And then when they got into trouble because I had rescue squad background, I ended up on a big unit--well, that truck wouldn't fit in this room. It could pump 1,500 gallons of water a minute. I could have torn this building off its foundation in about a half-an-hour with the water pressure--that sucker was that powerful. And I got assigned to that unit and I made 755 runs in two years. And there was only 35 of them that we didn't pick up a fatality, and on the other 720, the fatalities ranged from one . . . we had one bad one. It was 880 in that. We lost 22 of 110 firemen that went in on that. Three of them were never found.

*Were there many fatalities here, when the plant was in operation?*

It was surprisingly few. There was a couple during construction. I mean, considering as highly explosive as what they were working with, they had a remarkable safety record.

*What do you attribute that to? Good preparation?*

I think what happened, the insurance company had a whale of a safety engineer out here, and the safety program . . .

*Was that the person you mentioned earlier?*

John Funk. Yeah, he was the Chief Safety Engineer for this District for Aetna Insurance Company. And Aetna's boys knew what they were doing. The Aetna Insurance Company wrote the entire insurance program for 60 percent of all the ammunition plants that were built. (Laughs) And they were just fantastic. And they had a marvelous program. They had local men that had interest in fire department work, and they trained, then, on the equipment that they had here, and, of course, you see with all the sprinkler systems and everything that's integrated with all these buildings, they had surprisingly few fires. Oh, there was a few puffs here and there in the ammunition loading banks, but that was to be expected.

*Did they have safety programs for the workers?*

Oh, sure.

*What were those like?*

They were indoctrinated into what they were going to be handling, the proper way to do it, the proper way to lift, the proper eyeglass protection--everybody had to wear safety glasses, and they were shatter-proof safety glasses--they had to learn where the fire extinguishers were. You worked in a department . . . they had periodic fire drills. Federal Cartridge who was the general manager here and been in the ammunition manufacturing business for years [inaudible] shotgun shells and rifle bullets and different things, and their plant was very well managed and very well run, and so that came down here. And, of course, when this was going at its full blast, I mean the people were taking pride in doing good work. Because they had friends and neighbors and relatives in services, they wanted to do good work. And secondly, if they didn't do good work, they never made the same mistake twice.

*Why is that?*

'Whew', right out door. It was very, very stringent in some areas. And that was great. That's the way it has to be. I have no argument with that whatsoever. And, of course, when they had safety meetings . . .

*How often were those?*

Oh, they had weekly safety meetings at some departments.

*Was that for the managers or for everyone?*

Everyone.

*And every shift they covered?*

Yeah.

*Who ran that? Was that Mr. Funk that ran the whole . . .*

They were the instigators and the creators of that, as it were, but then you don't run an ammunition plant, unless you do it safely. I mean, like I say, you never make the same mistake twice. And so the people that are in charge of operations understand what they were up against, and they did a fantastic job. And then, of course, once in a while, if they wanted something to spice it up, they'd bring accident reports in and sometimes we'd bring pictures along. And if we didn't have anything that was as impressive as some other ammunition plant, well, we got the . . . and this was Joe Blow, and he went to work and here is parts of Joe Blow, because he did the wrong thing.

*You showed pictures like that?*

You betcha.

*Who showed those pictures?*

Safety department.

*And were you in the safety department?*

Sure.

*What was your role in any of this?*

Well, sometimes they'd say, "Well, how do you pick these people up and take them to the hospital?" "You have a putty knife and you scrape them off the walls and catch them in a bucket or in a basket, and then you have to start . . ." Sure, I did that. In the Navy, too. When some of those aircraft carriers got struck by the Japanese and the airplane exploded, and you had to hunt [inaudible], you'd pick the teeth off the walls and the back of these pipes and stuff like that. There'd be people up there and you'd have to bring out all these parts and pieces of them and try to identify them. [Inaudible].

*So for these safety meetings, you would . . .*

You didn't get graphic unless you had to.

*What would be a case where you would have to be graphic? If there was a particular area that had had a lot of carelessness?*

If they were lackadaisical would be the indication that well you got to jack these people up a little bit. You can't afford to be . . . you can't even hardly be complacent around live ammunition. You can't take it for granted if you put it on [inaudible] it's going to purr like a cat. It might backfire (chuckles). So you'd have to be cognizant of what you're handling. And you don't rail at anybody, you don't call them any names. You lay it on the table, just like we're talking now. This could happen if you make a mistake. Hurrying is one thing. Lifting too heavy a load is another problem. Forgetting to put on your safety shoes, and different things like that. And you [inaudible] work in a place where there could be a flash, so you wear your fire resistant clothing. You don't come to--no matter how cheap you are or anything, run around in your BVD's. Why when you're supposed to go in a loading wing where there's explosives, you put all the protective clothing on, whether it's warm or whether it's cold. You put the protective clothing on so you aren't going to have all your attributes burned all to pieces and beyond recognition.

*Most people followed all the rules, though?*

Generally speaking, they were pretty darn good.

*How about first aid? Like in a building, you said there was a nurse's station, were other people trained in first aid? Were they supposed to? Were they required?*

Some of them were. I left here in October '42 to go in the services, so from August '41 till October '42, it was mostly construction. Just what went on, I have a vague idea of what went on because I attended some of those meetings before I went in the Navy. But after I got (laughs)--it was [inaudible] different color, and then when I came back and then when we had the Korean [inaudible], we had a safety director that had been the head of the highway patrol, and there were quite a number of retired highway patrol officers came in, and they were fully capable of observing, and when they had safety meetings, they would bring these points up. And like I say, they didn't preach, they didn't swear, they didn't pound on the table. They explained logically what would happen, and it seemed to have a very good affect. Truthfully, I think it's amazing. I don't remember the total number of people injured over the years, but anything could have been a heck of a lot worse. Really, it could have. I get myself in trouble now because I see something that I don't like and I don't make any bones about going to the management and telling them about it. They don't like me over where I live, because I pointed out something to them. I said, "Man alive, if I had been the building inspector on this and the fire inspector, and you'd never get away with it." It's just that simple. And you can't help it.

But then in '53,--this is not in the beginning of the plant--in '53, we had this program . . . this is a letter I got from Mr. Smith.

(Perusing letter.)

*So this letter was from November 18, 1953 from H.D. Smith, Division Manager of Plant Protection, and this is for you, and what is he saying? That you instructed 150 members of the guard department in first aid.*

Yeah. This is a picture of the graduation class. That's the officers in charge. Then in '55, they started a big refinery down at Pine Bend, Minnesota, and Leonard Olson, who was our Guard Lieutenant out here, had a son that was a teacher at St. Thomas College and the president of the refinery's son was a student of Olson's son, and Leonard Olson ended up as the Chief Guard at this big refinery down there in Pine Bend. And they were short of fire fighters and everything else down there, so I went down and talked to them and I got a job down there on the Fire Department and Safety Department. And this was the original medical director at this place, and he was Dr. Aune, and that was Dr. Kirkoff, and both these gentlemen . . .

*Were they the only two doctors here?*

Oh, no. They had about ten, fifteen on the staff. At least ten, fifteen, I'd say.

*Did they run the place?*

He did during construction.

*What's his name, now?*

Dr. Aune, A-u-n-e. And his name was Kirkoff. He was a heart specialist.

*What was this picture taken for? When was it taken?*

I don't remember what the circumstance was, but that was after I came out of the services, and that was me then and that was Tom Anderson.

*So there were two of you driving the ambulance?*

And this was Bill Bermeister. He was one of the x-ray technicians, and she was the other x-ray technician.

*Are all the rest of them nurses?*

Yes, nurses. Mrs. Berg was retained by the ordnance people to stay on after the plant closed down. I don't know where she had her office, but she was here after the plant closed down for quite a number of years. This is just some of the Red Cross stuff I used to do and a number of certificates I had for my safety engineers.

(Pause)

*Here's a letter.*

I don't know whether I'm helpful for you or not.

*Oh, yeah. It's nice to see this stuff. I've got a couple more questions for you. What do you think about your part, your overall role in the defense effort, as far as working here?*

Well, if they hadn't been confident that I could do the job, I don't think . . . I wouldn't have been here in the first place, and needless to say, when you're assigned to an emergency unit, you have to do a lot of things out in the field that isn't always . . . I won't say you're violating rules, but probably you're pushing the rules to the breaking point, and it isn't in disrespect for rules and regulations, but I mean every case is different. So you have to use . . . it's just like here on this flood disaster business, I mean just as a thought. People are fighting to get out of their homes and to save what they can, they do different things. This was me at the '52 floods here in the city, and there's another picture back in here someplace where we're rescuing livestock and all kinds of stuff. In the year I was here before I went in the services and I came back and I was here two or three years on the ambulance, I don't recall anybody inserting a reprimand in my work files or anything. Whether they agreed or disagreed, I don't know, but I never got any suspensions or reprimands. I tried all my life [*inaudible*] to disagree respectfully. Sometimes I guess I pushed that almost to the breaking point, but I didn't call anybody any names and I didn't swear at anyone. And I [*inaudible*] once in the Navy, a couple of times, because I didn't salute the right people. I had a fire hose in my hand, and I said, "The so-and-so's want me to salute them, then they can take the fire hose and go and put the fire

out, and I'll salute them till hell freezes over," and let it go at that. And it's probably not a good way to do business, (laughs) but there are some times you can't be very diplomatic.

*Do you know if there were day care facilities here?*

I don't believe so. Not during . . . because I don't recall any facilities for children.

*There were some women working here.*

Lots of women, thousands of them.

*What did they do with their children?*

Well, they hired other people to look after them, relatives or friends, but never inside the area.

*Not on the grounds. They couldn't come on here.*

Hm-m.

*Do you recall ever seeing any children in here?*

The only people that had children in here would be the officers that had residences on the area, but they were not in the plant. No way. No, what they did during the three years I was gone, I don't know. But not while in construction there were no kids running around here and not after World War II.

*When were you gone exactly?*

From October '42 until September '45.

*Do you know of any morale boosting efforts, any promotions they had here?*

Yeah, President Roosevelt came through one time and visited the plant.

*Were you here for that?*

Yeah.

*What do you remember about that?*

Well, I was supposed to come to work on the 3:00 shift, and they called me at noon. And when I got over here, the two secret service agents wanted to know which was the best of the three ambulances, and I said 33. Okay. He said, "Let's go down to the garage." So the secret service men went down to the garage and they put four new tires on it and drained the oil and filled it up. They got back here, and they didn't commit themselves. They didn't say who was coming or what was going to happen.

*Did you know?*

Not really. I mean secret service can do whatever they darn please.

*So you really had no idea?*

No forewarning.

*Did that seem unusual that they would ask that, or did it strike you as unusual or not?*

Not really. Because I had heard of a couple of incidents where they had done things similar to it. And so then at 9:00, the train pulled in and here goes the President.

*Did you see him?*

Sure. Followed the procession he went through the buildings. He went through all the production buildings, and then he drove back to his private car that was on the railroad track back there, and he invited this Dr. Aune and the night shift nurse on duty came over to his private car and I had coffee and cake with him [inaudible].

*You did?*

Sure.

*What did you talk to him about?*

He's busy. [inaudible], but the fun part of it was two years later, when I was over in Hawaii, he made one of those trips and we were coming back from a fire, and we backed in the fire station, and I saw the procession coming and he stopped, and I heard him say, "Tony, stop the car." And two secret service agents came over and said, "The President wants to meet the firemen." And when we got over there, he said, "How bad was the fire fellows? I understand you've been out a long time." Said, "Yeah, since 4:00 this morning." He said, "What happened?" So we told him. He said, "Did any of the firemen get hurt?" Said, "No." The cute thing [inaudible] happened--I haven't seen it myself, but I've heard other people that have, he shook hands with me and he was holding my hand, and he said . . . in the picture and on the talking portion of it . . . "I haven't seen you since I saw you in Minneapolis at the arsenal."

*Where's that picture?*

It's over in Pearl Harbor some place.

*Who wrote that caption?*

I don't know who did it.

*Did he really say that?*

Yes. He remembered me. And he told the six of us that got out the fire truck, he told his personal secretary, "Get the names and address of these gentlemen," and then he said, "Fellows, I can't take any mail. I wouldn't do that. But you give my secretary your home address and the name of the people there, and when we get back to Washington, we'll send them a note where we saw you." And about ten days later my ma got a letter from the White House, stating that he'd seen me at Pearl Harbor. That's the kind of guy he was.

*How was the pay at the plant as compared with the pay outside, but in the area?*

I have no idea what the production workers earned.

*What about in your profession? Was it about the same?*

About the same.

*Did men and women and minorities make the same amount of money for the same job that you know of?*

That I know of. I assume that it was pretty . . . if they could produce, they got paid. Mr. Horn, the President of the company, was very, very open-minded and he had a very dear friend--his name was Cecil Newman--that was a Black man. And Mr. Horn listened to the Black representatives very closely. I mean, sure they had . . . if they were capable of doing something, they got a chance to do it. I mean they were production workers, and they were janitors, whatever. We had a couple Black nurses and they were very good, but we didn't have any Black ambulance drivers. I don't recall a Black ambulance driver in the union, even, that far back.

*Did everyone seem to get along?*

Generally speaking, they did, yeah. [Inaudible]. I don't know what they were in the production. I couldn't tell you what went on in the production end of it, but [inaudible], because, like I say, there was only one ambulance driver on per shift, and we sat there in the office waiting for calls or you were here and you were there. During World War II, we did transport people to their hospitals. Like if they were Minneapolis citizens, then the Minneapolis ambulance came out and got them, because we couldn't leave the area [inaudible]. They wouldn't have had anything out here if we did. But then during the Korean War, they bought a good used Packard ambulance, and that used to leave the area, because the other one stayed here, and either a guard or the second man took the ambulance, and if the second man on duty knew where the hospital was or where the patient wanted to go, well, then he went [inaudible] with it. So I made quite a few runs out of town.

*How were people in the community getting along during the war?*

Well, I would say basically they did their patriotic duty and they didn't do too darn much complaining or grumbling about it. They pitched in. And there was a lot of younger fellows, and some of them didn't come back. Some of them were crippled up. It broke up a few families. Some of the guys got to wandering after they left home. (Laughs) And vice versa. I didn't get married till 1952, so I didn't have any home problems to worry about.

*What about were there any problem that you can think of that arose from there being people that were new to the area to work here and the long time residents, did they ever have any problems? Was there any resentment?*

I never got into that, because I guess I got interested in other activities when I got back. See, fo. about 25 years after--well, there was Sheriff Eddman or sheriff Gibbons, [inaudible], and I got back in the business of teaching first aid to the police officers. So by the time I got through teaching first aid, I had 12,250 students in my credit. Most of them were firemen and policemen. So my work, and like I say in 1955, when they started this Pine Bend refinery, there was guard officers from here went down there, they went to Minnesota Mining, they went to other companies and got jobs because they were experienced security people, and yeah, I've had other jobs. After I left here, I was a safety engineer for a seven-county metropolitan sewer system that went in. I was the safety man [inaudible] caboodle. Then the job I retired from, I got this job with an insurance company in North America and I have seven states. I wandered around like a lost sheep. It's been interesting. I guess one of the jobs that I had that I didn't ever get paid a dime for, I taught farm, home and highway safety to Boys and Girls 4H Club. Had 1500 club members here in Ramsey County.

*How would you say that this area changed because of this plant, or did it change at all?*

Well, physically, several changes were necessary. They had to improve on the highway systems around to accommodate the traffic, and there were new people came into the community and there were some of the

old timers left, some of the old timers passed away. There is no doubt that there was some impact on it, and I would say off-hand that I think we were better for having the place here. People got more informed on what the rest of the world was doing because it was part of an international picture. You can't have a thing this size without making an influence [*inaudible*].

*So you're saying that it influenced the way people viewed what was going on in the war, or not?*

Yeah. See, now this plant has been laying idle for many years, and in 1957, there were several communities became incorporated from villages to cities. Mounds View and New Brighton and Shore View and Arden Hills, and in my own way of thinking,--I could be wrong, but, I mean, to me it's just catching up on the gossip--see, this plant area was actually in Mounds View township of Ramsey County. And when these segments broke off and started a new community, then they gave it another name. So in 1957 Shore View was created, and that's just to the east of it. Shore View goes right up to Lexington Avenue and goes right around the back end of the plant, and this four square miles is sitting there like a sore thumb. So the community of Arden Hills got incorporated from the south borders to County Road D. They said, "Well now, lookie, here. The plant's going to close. We got railroad tracks, we got sewers, we got steam plants, all kinds . . ." So they just automatically absorbed the four square miles. So they called the arsenal property theirs.

*Who is this? Arden Hills?*

Arden Hills.

*But is that true?*

Sure.

*It's theirs?*

Well, they say it is, but the government hasn't released it to them. Haven't given them one foot of railroad track, they haven't given them one foot of fence. But they say well someday, if we wait long enough.

*Do you know if water supplies and sewer treatment were adequate here, while it was in operation? Or even during construction?*

Well, they have done a fantastic job. I don't know if you've seen this part of it. (He is showing the interviewer something.) But this gives you what TCD has done in reference to coping with the pollution problems and all. And Barb might know where there's another one of those. And naturally, with all the . . .

*So this talks about their restoration and all and how they're cooperating?*

Right. And I've never been a part of it. I understand that it's here and I understand what they've done, and whether it satisfies everybody or not, who knows?

*How did the community change after the war? How did this area change?*

Well, like I say, this hasn't been retained, and up until the '70s, they did a lot of work in this program here, coping with the pollution and everything else. And this sewage system was connected to the metropolitan sewer system. So everything in the way of sanitary sewers has been treated in that big missile plant for years. And the water, they had their own wells out here. I knew where they were and I knew when they put them in and I knew the guys that put them in, but I haven't had anything to do with it. (Chuckles) So whether they're good, bad or indifferent I don't know.



*Do you know if there were any labor shortages while the plant was working, or were there plenty of people?*

Like I say, during the war years, from '42 to '45, I don't know.

*You mentioned this place being like a--I believe you said it felt like a family, or like coming home--do you still get that sense?*

Well, the only thing that changed it is that these politicians adopted it and they think it's theirs, and that's not true.

*Whose is it?*

It still belongs to the people. It belongs to the government, as far as I'm concerned. And until the government gives them a Scott-free deed and says okay, Arden Hills, it's all yours. Now, what are you going to do with it? Well, then it still belongs to the people, as far as I'm concerned. And I think that they did a good job.

*Is there anything else, any interesting stories you want to share about your working here or anything to do with this place that I may have inadvertently left out?*

Well, a person has to be a realist. Naturally, the people that worked so hard to get it going and kept it going 50 years ago, there's none of them around that can share the aches and pains that they had in making it the institution that it is. And that's sad, because I'm going through the same thing personally. Our house that my father built 70 years ago is up for sale. So we leave everything behind and move in someplace else. And that isn't easy. And it isn't easy to see this thing . . . we knew it was a necessity. It was a privilege to be part of it that did so many things [for] the protection of this great nation. And I'll argue with that point, on that basis, till hades freezes over, because it was a good institution. I don't know what it's like now. I don't know [inaudible] cost to get it back. I mean if we were struck in the [inaudible] emergency, where would we go? They'd probably let . . . maybe this is deteriorated just like my home and it would cost millions to reinstate it. Who knows? I don't.

*What do you think about the plant closing? Do you think it's a bad idea or not?*

Well, the only thing, you have to be a professional military engineer. The airplanes are different today from what they were in the '40s. Maybe the ammunition we need . . . can this ammunition protect us? Do we need to maintain this? Is it going to serve a practical purpose some time in the near future? Who knows? But, on the other hand, if you take four square miles of property that is the basis for a pretty good start, and it has served well in the past, it doesn't make a heck of a lot of sense to junk it to have a bunch of Target stores or McDonald's hotdogs coming in here, because there's a ski held out and it might make some pretty good skiing and turn it into a resort . . .

(End of Interview)

(End of Side 2)

**JULIA KOHLER**  
**September 21, 1994**  
**St. Paul, Minnesota**  
**Deborah L. Crown, Interviewer**

*Today is September 21, 1994. This is Deborah Crown. I'm talking with Julia Kohler. I have some preliminary questions first.*

*Just tell me where you were living when you heard the plant was going to be built.*

I was living on 245 East County Road F, where I was born. I'd lived there all my life, and it's only about three, maybe four miles from the plant. So I thought this is a nice place to go to work, you don't have to go to far, and so then I put my application in and I got a call right away.

*Where did you go to apply?*

On University Avenue. I think it was the [inaudible] building or some building that had been making machinery or something, and they interviewed me there and they hired me.

*Right away, or did they call you?*

Right away. Not the same day. I mean I didn't even have a ride, so I mean I didn't have a way to get there. The lady said to me, what do you know about cars, what do you know about motors, and I didn't know about that, I should know anything about motors. So anyway, I did find a ride. And I worked in the primer department first, and there was so many of us in there, so they decided to take some of us out and put us someplace else, and I landed in the case draw department, which I just loved it there. It was nice people to work with and I liked the job and everything. So I was there quite a while in the case department. In fact, I was there the whole time until they decided we had enough of 30s made, and then I got over to 103. That was my easy job. Taper and plug, just sitting there feeding cases into a machine. And then I went to 102. That was 30 caliber, and I landed in the loading department, which meant putting powder in the shells. You worked on a unit and then some of them worked where they shook the shells and they all fell into this plate, all upward, and then another part of the unit shook the bullets, so the bullets went into another plate. Then that got shoved to me. It was another girl and I on a shift. We put the powder in. The powder come down from [inaudible]. It looked like little shots, gray shot powder, and we put that in the . . . this thing fed it across and filled all the little holes up, and then we had to put it into a thing that indicated if there was powder in each one; then you pushed it on; then the person there had put the plate of bullets on; then that went to another machine; then that punched a bullet down into the case. And some of our bullets were just plain and some of them were tracers, and the tracers, they got dipped with a red tip, and the armor piercing, that was black tip paint. The whole block, I guess 250 or what would fit in there, that went in and then the paint was there, and then they just dropped it just down enough so they get the tips painted so they knew which bullet was for what.

*What were you doing at the time that you heard about this job at the plant? Were you working or going to school?*

I had been laid off. I lived on a farm, so I worked at Brown Biggalow while they were building the plant. They were building on it when I went to Brown Biggalow, but I was staying in town by my aunt, and then I got laid off in January because it was calendars. It was the end of the year for 1942. And so then I was happy to get in the arsenal because it was close to home.

*And you were looking for a job at the time?*

M-hm.

*What was that area like at that time?*

The area where I lived?

M-hm.

Farms, mostly farms.

*And it's changed a lot since then?*

Yeah. Oh, it's not the same anymore. In fact, I relocated here six years ago. It was '68 when we sold that farm. I don't know if that's important for that. So anyway, I'm here.

*So were there a lot of people that moved to the area for work, or were a lot of people just from the area?*

I think they were from all over. In fact, the Korean time, they were further out, like Cambridge and St. Francis, Onnoka. They were from Wisconsin.

*So did they drive?*

They drove. And during the war, people that come from town, they all rode the buses. They had buses going out there just for that arsenal.

*Did the government set up any temporary housing for anybody to move to the area?*

Not the workers that I know of. But on the other end of the arsenal, they had the officers and the higher people. They lived on that area that was arsenal property.

*What was the reaction of most people in the area, when they heard that the government was going to buy that land?*

I wasn't too much into that. I mean I didn't really hear about too much of it because they didn't buy our place. I mean we were like three-and-a-half miles, maybe even four miles from where I lived. So it didn't affect us. But I mean we were close enough to hear the ballistics shooting off, you know, trying them out. We could hear their shooting. You know, it echoed.

*When they were testing?*

Yeah, testing.

*So your family didn't own any of the land that was going to be purchased?*

Oh, no. Hm-m.

*Can you describe the conditions at the construction site, when it was being constructed?*

I wasn't too much in that area, so I wasn't really into seeing it all going up and the bulldozers and their leveling it off or anything. Like I'm seeing what's happening to our farm. You see all this being moved

around. You'd never believe it anymore if you went out there where I lived. Say, okay, here is where it was. You know, they changed everything around. See, I worked there World War II and then when they opened it up for Korea, I went back, for Korea. And then when Korea was over, well then, South Asia, when they . . . I was working at American Can then and I had ten years in, and I wanted to go back. So I put my application in. They called me right away and they said come in Monday, and I was working on the night shift at American Can, and I put all my clothes out and everything, and then Monday morning come along, and I said, "No, I can't give up ten years of rights," because I was getting older, you know, and it's harder to find jobs when you get older. Because I knew when the war was over, the deal is over, boom, you're out. Like when the VJ, one of them--I don't know which one it was--one of those wars I worked there, and they just said, "It's over. Shut the lines," because I was up on case draw and that was one of the first lines that went down. So anyhow, we went back next day and turned our shoes in.

*The very next day.*

When I worked in loading, we had safety shoes that had no nails in them. They was all [*inaudible*], and eye glasses, safety glasses.

*And you had to turn them in?*

M-hm.

*That soon?*

M-hm.

*They just stopped?*

The lines we were working on, 'boom'. In fact, some of the men over there were even emptying out some of the shells, because they knew they wouldn't be making those anymore, but the people that were on the other end, gage and weigh and shipping, where they packed them,--I was laid off in April--and then my sister was working in gage and weigh, and she was there till I think almost in fall, maybe even December, by the time they got all . . . see, every line, as they shut down, they . . .

*What year was that? Was that when that was?*

I wrote down the . . . (Ms. Kohler is looking through papers) . . . Twin City Ordnance Plant, New Brighton, clock number 5401, March 23, 1942 to August 4, 1945, and then when I went back for Korean thing, it was Twin City Arsenal, New Brighton, Min, April 30, 1952 till April 9, 1955. So those are the years that I put in there, and I couldn't make up my mind to go back for the South Asian thing. Because I had ten years rights at American Can and I thought I can't give that up.

*So you wanted to go back anyway?*

Yes, I did. It was different. It was a different kind of situation all around. I don't know. When I work American Can and those places, it was all just . . . I mean it was more friendship, more got along. I don't know. It's hard to get the words. I made a lot of nice friends out there, but then down through the years, they drop off one by one; you don't hear from them anymore.

*So how did people generally get along at the plant?*

Very well.

*How about people from the area and people not from the area? Did they all get along just fine?*

It used to be different years ago. Right now, it's getting to be I have to keep my doors locked. You know, sure I've got the screen out, but I mean here, people used to let their doors unlocked. This north end is kind of (she whispers to Ms. Crown).

*What about between the races? Were there any racial problems that you know of?*

Racial. Yeah, we did.

*There were problems back then?*

We had a--do I tell this?

*Sure, yeah.*

A little short Black girl, lady. She was having problems at home with her children, and she would come to work, like it was on the bullet shaker, you know, like when it was shaking, you'd have to wear big leather gloves, and these bullets were very picky. And she would be very slow, and we had three units in the loading wing, and when we got done with our standard or whatever we had for that day, then we swept and cleaned up and everything, and then we had, you know, maybe it'd be a half-hour that we didn't, you know, and she would be slow. She would hold everybody up. There was five women and three men, I think, on the unit. And we were all working together, and this gal would slow us up. So anyhow it got so bad the whole unit just went in the office and said, "Come on and see if something . . ." She was moody, so then we had to go and [*inaudible*] the union, we went to a conference room and the union people were there and we talked it over, but then there was a Jewish man, Ed Kohn, he worked on the line, and he was a little bit different. I mean he was okay, but when we got done hashing out the little colored lady, then they were all picking on him and I don't know why, because we were in there for her, about her. I don't ever remember if she quit or whatever happened, but she was having problems at home. His little teenage daughter had a baby, a little 11-year-old son had gotten a girl in trouble. So the lady come to work [and] had this on her mind. And she was picking on Inez and Inez was a very wonderful soft-hearted lady. And she'd have her crying, you know. She would pick on her. That's the only thing that I ever come across that we had problems, but it's different now. I don't think everybody would be getting along like we did. I'm sorry to say that, but that was one incident where we had . . .

*How did this area change while the plant was being built? Did it change?*

I don't think so.

*Before you started working at the plant at all, before your very first day, what did you think it would be like to work there?*

Oh, everybody was warning me about the powder danger and stuff like that.

*Were you scared?*

No. And people would say to me don't you think it's terrible, making bullets to kill people, and I said, no, I don't like to make bullets to kill people, but if I wouldn't be doing it, somebody else would, because I was getting paid. Well, like when the Sullivans come, and I mean every once in a while, there'd be a bond drive, and we weren't making too much money, but they wanted, I think \$3.25 was the least you could take out a week, and then they felt that you should be able to give \$6.75 a week for war bonds.

*Out of your paycheck?*

Out of our pay check they took it. So I wound up with quite a few. It was a way of saving money.

*How did you originally find out that there would be jobs available at the plant? Was there a newspaper ad or did you hear it on the radio, or did you just know?*

I don't know. I guess just from word of mouth. We knew they were building it there and that they needed a lot of people. There was sad days. I'm not married. I wasn't then and I'm not now. Just the mothers suffering, to see the mothers suffering, worrying about their sons.

*The mothers that worked there?*

Yes. I worked with Nora Johnson, and she was such a wonderful person. I used to call her Ma. I had a mother at home, but I used to call her Ma, and her son was in Guadalcanal, and they suffered. When my brothers went to Korea, I was working at the arsenal and my brothers were in Korea, and I tell you it's not easy. It's hard on mothers. Terribly hard on mothers.

*So was it hard for them to do their work, then?*

No.

*With their kids away?*

Hm-m. Like I say, up till the time I retired at American Can, life was getting different, I mean working with people. People got along so wonderful years ago, everybody. Like I grew up in the depression and I mean we were all poor and nobody bothered about what you were wearing, you wore hand-me-downs or what, and now nobody wants to wear anything old anymore, everybody wants new, they want welfare, they want everything handed to them for nothing and the tax payers are just paying and paying. It's different. You people think that . . . I don't know who owes them a living or a lifestyle. I heard a man on the radio the other night, a talk show, he wants \$100,000 because . . . you know. They said well why would you want that money, he says, be paid because of what happened to his ancestors years ago, and then he said, well to get on with my life. Well, gee whiz, when my great-grandfather come from Austria, there's nobody handed him anything, and he settled on that farm out there where we have just sold. It's being developed. They worked hard. Everybody worked hard. But, you know, it's so different now. There's jobs. There was jobs years ago. People had . . . be able to go and get work. When I started at American Can, there was people all on the floor. They had people working here and people working there, and I'm a retired union steel worker, union person, but every time the contract come up, they wanted more, they got more selfish and more greedy and more greedy. It was another day off, they wanted medical, they were getting a wonderful medical and the eyeglasses and dental. We had wonderful fringe benefits, and every time the contract come up, they wanted to be ready to strike. We had jobs, and after the contract, sure we got a couple cents a year, three years, but they took one off the line here and one off the line there, till all of a sudden, you're doing three, four people's work. And I'd rather have less pay and have more people working and have more money in their pockets. And people argue with me to this day, well, we want a better lifestyle. Well, everybody wasn't getting the wages like I was getting. They had to go buy the cans in the store, the canned goods, people that were making less money than I was. You understand what I'm saying? You're asking me how different it is. It's different.

*Which facility did you work in at the plant? You said you moved, I think, from building to building?*

I worked in the line, where they manufactured the . . . would be the manufacturing part of it.

*Which buildings were you in?*

I was in 101, 102, 103.

*And can you describe an average day? What shift did you work?*

I worked mostly days, and then for the Korean thing, I had to go on the C shift, 12:00 to 7:00 in the morning. And then, of course, that summer there was a lot of storms, electrical, lightning, so the minute the lightning stopped . . . so we didn't work that shift. I mean we didn't work while the storm was going on. So that summer we had a lot of time. There was a quite a few storms. I don't remember what year that was.

*What about during World War II when there was a storm?*

I don't know what was going on in the loading department. I was out on the line.

*So what was a typical day? You'd show up and what did you do?*

Went to the machine.

*Did you have to punch in first?*

M-hm. Where we parked--I rode with people--then halfway down to the building, there was a guard standing and he opened your lunch bag and showed your lunch bag.

*Why?*

You didn't dare take any cameras in, you didn't dare take anything in that they didn't want you to have it in there, and it was just a formality; you opened up your lunch bag and on you went. You went to the locker room and they had beautiful big locker rooms and kept them all nice and clean. There were women working. The matrons would work there the whole shift. Everything was clean and nice. And we had our breaks.

*How many breaks did you have?*

I think it was about the same as American Can. Oh, no. The loading, we went off on our . . . maybe ten minutes out of the hour or something. I'm not sure. It was a long time ago for me. My mind is kind of going, too. Sometimes I reminisce about different things that went on, but right now, I don't know.

*What did you do for lunch? Did everybody bring a lunch or was there a place for . . . ?*

My mother packed my lunch. I'd say, "Ma, I don't want an orange." Every day there'd be an orange in there. We were on the farm, you know, and they didn't get to town. [*Inaudible*] they'd walk to the store, like down here, at Jubilee. Ma, my wonderful mother. She'd see to it when I would work the night shift, the C shift, 12:00 to 7:00. I'd go to bed when I got home. I ate a little bit and went to bed till about 2:00. Then I'd get up and then I'd be up all the evening until . . . maybe a little nap before it was time to get ready to go to work. And she always made sure that I woke up in time to get ready and go to work. I had a wonderful mother.

*Was there a cafeteria there?*

M-hm.

*Could you eat there, too?*

Not very often. We all more or less carried lunches, but there was a lot of people that ate in the cafeteria, a lot of people that didn't want to bring lunches. I don't think there's many people carry a bag lunch anymore.

*So how did your job fit into the overall production of a bullet?*

You mean what I was doing?

*Yeah.*

Well, like I told you there [was] little cups; that was the first draw. I wasn't on that. Then it went to another draw that drew them all, and it was machines that had soap water running, because if that soap water wasn't running when these punches would go down into these things, it would . . . one day I forgot to turn the soap on and the machine went 'uh, uh' and there it was, all four punches was down in there. Yeah, they got hot, you know.

*Was that why they had the water?*

Yeah, lubrication.

*Which draw were you?*

I was here the day they were taking these pictures. Now, you see that girl there? She's at the machine. I worked on that line, but I wasn't working there when she was there. I think they liked her because she had that sweater on. Yeah, that's the way the machine looked. See, she had a rag. The punches were in here, and then here they come rolling out. They were all wet. Then they run out on a little conveyer. Then they went to the next line, whatever the next line . . . that there shows her relaxation and I think it was her boyfriend was in the service, or was she in the service? I don't know if he was her boyfriend.

*Did you have to stretch and do exercises?*

No, uh-uh.

*You didn't have to stand, though, did you?*

This is what she did after she . . . I just showed you this because of what she was doing here. That was the line I was working on. Because I was standing back watching them take her picture.

*You watched that picture being taken?*

Yeah, I watched it.

*Did you always work that same job, or did you change jobs?*

I was mostly on that, on the draw line. That was the first time I worked out there. Then when I [inaudible] the Korean deal, I was in the loading department, where we put the powder in. So I was a powder charger. There was two of us. The rest of the men, they had to handle the heavy plates. Some of them were very simple. The unit had different operations. Some of them were very simple. You just shoved the block in and pulled the lever down, and then the thing went automatic. Pushed all the bullets down into the case. But another girl and I, we charged powder. It was kind of a fun thing to be doing that. But we took turns



with the rest of it, the rest of that . . . on the unit. But we had a unit that the people on our unit, we really worked real good together. So it made it kind of fun thing.

*It was fun to go to work? Okay. Was your job there union or non-union, during World War II?*

You know that I can't even remember that. Towards the end I think we were with . . . yeah, I think we were with the union later. Yeah, it must have been, because when we got called in the office that time for that one lady that was giving us problem, yeah, the union was there. I don't think it was at first. I'm not sure. Isn't that funny I can't remember that?

*But at least later on it was a union job? What were the working conditions like? Was it hot? Were you uncomfortable?*

When I think of out there, how different it was with what I put up with at American Can, it was hot there. At American Can, it was hot. But I think the arsenal, it was all together a different . . . it was so different. It was nice.

*It was assembly line type work that you were doing kind of then?*

Yeah.

*Was this the first time you did this kind of work?*

I had just worked at Brown Biggalow for those few months. I was making calendars.

*But ammunition and what you were doing [inaudible].*

Well, this factory, it's kind of all the same order. It's repetition. You're doing the same thing all day long, but the things we were doing was different. I mean here we were making bullets. American Can, we were making cans. But I mean it's still the same, every day the same. Repetition. It's doing the same thing all the time.

*Did that bother you?*

Well, you see, I needed the paycheck, and I never jumped around from job to job to go and see anything different. I hadn't gone to school, only to the eighth grade. I graduated out of the eighth grade. Country school was awful for me, because I was two miles from it. It was a one-room school, one teacher, all eight grades. My mother and father were milking cows. I don't know if you're interested in this, and they were selling grade A raw milk. Had a lot of work in the . . . The barn had to be spic and span because the inspectors were there looking all the time. So I would go to school and walk all by myself over to that dumb school, and neighbors were . . . a barn in between. So I got to the fourth grade, and I hadn't learned hardly anything. In fact, I have poor grammar. You can tell that. And so anyway, I was supposed to have lost a library book, and my aunt was building a house in town, right over here on Evermount Street, so we could go to Catholic school. So anyway, believe it or not, 1928, we had a library truck that'd come around, a mobile library truck. And the teacher said to me, "Aren't you going out and getting any books?" And coming back to this school next year. I was in the fourth grade and I knew well enough what was going to happen. She failed me. So I had to take the fourth grade over. So when I come down here to St. Bernard's, it was just beautiful, my beautiful nuns. I had such beautiful nuns teachers.

*And so you went to school here?*

I went to St. Bernard's until the eighth grade, and then, of course, we had a lot of kids in the family. My mother had eight. She had nine, but one had died real small, and of course, my aunt's house was only two bedrooms, so we couldn't all fit in a bedroom and stay here and go. So I couldn't stay in town, no room to stay in town to go to Washington High School, and it was too far from White Bear to go to White Bear, because we hadn't bus service yet for schools. So then I didn't go to school, high school. So I had to be satisfied with factory.

*Was this the first time you'd worked for a really big company?*

Brown Biggalow was big.

*That was real big, too?*

M-hm. Nothing like the arsenal, of course, comparison.

*Was your work stressful sometimes or not?*

I can't say that it was.

*Not even when you were packing it, it wasn't? Or were you nervous about anything?*

I don't know. I was younger then and I took things different. And then American Can, I walked in that place there and everybody was for themselves. It was a different era. It was what 40 years or 30 years or difference. So no. I got the stress after I went to American Can. I wound up with two nervous breakdowns, and you never get over it. Because I used to go to work and I had to have a clean place, and I worked the afternoon shift, 3:30 to 12:00. And I would come to work and it would be rags and grease and I would fill my machines up with double seaming, I put the ends in big long tubes. You had to put them up in the machine. I had two machines to fill, plus I had water test cans. And if there was a jam, I'd pull out the jams. I would work and work to get my area clean. And one day, my line was down so they sent me on another line. I was waiting for the cable to go to take the cans, and I was all ready. I had my log sheet ready, I had everything cleaned up, and the boss come out from the office, and he must have got heck from somebody that he was first one to pick on. And he told me that if I didn't get a broom and sweep he was going to have me in the head office. Well, I was at American Can about 26 years. So I was going to go to the nurse. I told the mechanic, watch the machine. I'm going. I couldn't walk. My knees got like rubber. So I went in the office and I wanted the girl to help me go up to the nurse because I couldn't walk alone, and she was busy on the phone with the orders, you know, taking orders. And all of a sudden, I just went completely wild. I went crazy. I felt no malice against that . . . they thought maybe that I would come out of the office and kill them, but I was in no shape. The nurse come down with a wheel chair and they took me out to the front door, and the ambulance took me to the hospital, with a nervous break down.

*Did you ever feel that way at the arsenal?*

Never. Never.

*Was there any pressure?*

Like I say, it's altogether different. It's altogether different. The whole world is different.

*Did they want you to work quickly at the arsenal at all or not?*

No, we worked according to the machine . . . you know, like when I was in loading, we all kind of liked to work together, so we got done earlier, so we'd clean up around our area and we'd have a few minutes to sit down before it was time to go home.

*What do you think about your part in the war effort?*

I don't know how to answer that.

*Well, do you feel like you made a big contribution to the war?*

I think so. I think I did. I bought the bonds and worked hard at my job and got along with everybody real good out there, made a lot of friends. It was why I wanted to go back when that Vietnam thing opened up, but I thought I better keep my ten years rights.

*But if it weren't for that, you would have gone back?*

Oh, yes. Oh, sure.

*What do you think about the role of the plant itself, just the whole thing in the defense effort? Do you think it was real important?*

Yeah. I think so. Everybody was working for one cause, and that was to get rid of the war so the war would be over. They had big posters up, and then they had like Mussolini, they had him hanging up there one day, you know, in a picture. And then we watched the other ones, the Japanese quit and the Germans quit, and it was all for the best.

*What kind of other posters did they have that you remember?*

Well, I remember the first, it was like a teletype, and we walked past an office and there was a machine that was just ticking away all by itself and it was sticking out some kind . . . now they have so many sophisticated different fax and all these different kind of machines like that. But I mean we all stood outside that office, the window, and we watched this little machine. It was ticking out some message. I don't know what was on it, but it was for something about the office. Ticking away all by itself, and it was a teletype or something they called it. It was just something new. All the inventions since I was . . . still inventing things.

*What about the mothers with children that worked there? What did they do with their children? Did any of them have little kids? Any of your friends?*

Oh, they must have all had kids. Yeah.

*Where did they bring them [inaudible]?*

I know Inez, my good friend Inez, she had a girl that was a diabetic and she would come to work and she would be so worried that she got the right insulin. That's a shot, you know. Some of those people come a long ways.

*Who was taking care of their children? Could they bring their children to the plant?*

Oh, no. Nobody crossed that line. Only us with our badges. Nobody. No children. Hm-m.

*So did their parents take care of their children, then, or friends?*

There must have been people, grandmother, aunts or somebody, but it was not so much . . . you never heard so much like day care and baby sitting like now. I mean I never really paid too much attention to that. All I remember, as I said, the mothers were worried about when they were taking over these different islands, the Japs and everything, it was sad, you know, to see how they were suffering. Because my brothers didn't go in until Korea, and then I remember my mother being very sad. They worry.

*Do you remember did they have a newspaper at the plant?*

Yeah.

*Do you remember that? Do you remember what it was . . .*

A little paper.

*What was that called?*

I don't know. I wish I would have saved one. It was different things went on the plant.

*What kind of articles did they have in there? Do you remember what they'd write about?*

Different things, if somebody was promoted or like promotions. They had some groups where they formed bowling teams, then they had that news in or whatever.

*Were there certain jobs at the plant that only women did?*

Well, to be honest with you, it was mostly women. There was very few men. And then it got so that some of the women were able to do the mechanic . . . they called them adjusters. It was a lot of women working.

*Were there certain jobs, though, that only men did?*

Oh, yeah. The mechanical end of it, make adjustments, like in the loading wing, they had to be tested. They had a girl going around and she picked cases out of different ballistics to see if they was getting the right powder weight. There were a lot of women inspectors.

*Were there any women that were supervisors and managers that you remember?*

No, I don't remember any.

*Were they mostly men? They were? Do you remember any morale boosting efforts, like promotions, any slogans that they had at the plant?*

I know they used to put bids up. If you wanted to go in a different department, like the tracer wing paid more, a few cents more, and I didn't go in there because of my lungs. I didn't want to get that powder. I heard that powder was dangerous for your lungs, so I never bid on that. But the loading wing paid a little bit more than the people on the lines. And the inspectors got paid more. Ballistics got paid more. One day I remember going. We got on the bus, and I don't know where this bunker business was, but anyhow, we went in this place where they were testing. They had a machine gun stand up and they had a [inaudible] with them, and they let us hold the little gizmo down and shoot off, and those bullets went out of there so fast. And then way down on the other end, it was like a tunnel, there they had the armor piercing plates, to see how they . . . they test the velocity and how straight they shot. I remember that was one of the highlights.

One of the highlights was my seeing the mother and father of the Sullivans, and then getting my little E Award. Those are things that kind of set . . . you know, we remember.

*Why don't you tell me about that? What's that E Award?*

That was kind of for good production or a lot of production. I suppose all the ammunition plants, they were all up there, but I think they just kind of tell you, you know, you're doing a good job. I know Roosevelt went through there one night, but I mean I wasn't working that shift. But I guess the train went right on through there, because the trains went right in there, you know, they'd load up the ammunition.

*Did you hear anything about the President visiting?*

Well, it was in the paper after it was over with, but it was kind of secret before. We didn't know he was coming. At least I didn't know.

*Did people talk about it afterward a lot?*

Oh, yeah. It was something happened. The President of the United States stopped, you know.

*Did that boost people's morale?*

I think so. I think the posters did, too. Like I say, everybody was working for a cause, that the war would be over and the boys could come home. We have so many funny awards now, where they go . . . they're going again, you know. You know, they're not the same. It's not the same, defending the country. The country was in very bad danger then. You know, bombing Pearl Harbor. I was at Brown Biggalow that morning when we heard the news, Sunday morning.

*What was that like?*

When we heard the news about Pearl Harbor? It was terrible. A lot of the girls had boyfriends that were gone. Everybody was all nervous and excited about it. It was awful. War is terrible.

(End of Side 1; Beginning of Side 2)

*Today is September 21, 1994, and this is Deborah Crown. I'm speaking with Julia Kohler. This is Side 2.*

*So the plant did get an Army/Navy E Award then. You said that earlier. What exactly was that?*

I guess it was just for excellent production, that we met our goal and whatever that they expected.

*And what was that day like when that happened?*

June (looking at some papers) 15, 1943, and I was on the day shift, but they brought in people extra from the other shifts so they would be there, too, and it was up on the hill where they had wooden buildings. There was wooden buildings in that plant. Well, there's bigger parking lots up there, and it was a terribly warm day. It was so warm that our heels of our shoes started sinking into the black top and some of the people were fainting. It was just almost unbearable. They had speakers, they had wanted a production lady I think that accepted the pin. I mean it was just wall-to-wall people from all over, all the buildings.

*And did they give a little pin to everyone then?*

We all got a pin. Not that day. They just more or less give it there and we got our pins later on. No, we didn't all wait to get a pin. Some of us went back down to the building and went back to work.

*How many people were there?*

It said here 20,000.

*Tell me about when the plant closed after World War II.*

You mean the day I was there?

*Yeah.*

I was on the case draw line and they said it's all over with. So I was living out in the country there, and I had no idea all the whoop-di-doo that was going around at the Cities. Everybody was celebrating.

*Did you just stop working?*

*Yeah.*

*You just stopped?*

We just stopped. M-hm.

*And what was going on in the Cities?*

The celebration that the war was . . . I don't know if it was VJ Day or it was the other one. There was a couple of them.

*What was that like to you? Were you happy? Were you worried? Did you go back to work after that at the plant?*

Go back to work. All that we did was take our shoes back and our glasses back and that was it.

*But you had no notice before that you . . . ?*

Hm-m. Well, we knew kind of from the news and everything that it was kind of closing in on the Germans, where the Russians were coming in one direction and the United States was coming at another one and that it was going to the end. People knew it was pretty much coming, you know, to the end.

*Did you ideas about working at that plant change over time from when you started?*

You mean the working condition or what I thought about it?

*Yeah, what you thought about it.*

Well, I enjoyed my job there. It was wonderful people to work with. It was harmony. You know what I mean? We got along. It was no bickering. I never heard of anything, except that one little girl that give us the trouble on the unit. Otherwise I can't . . . it's a long time ago. Long time.

*So how was the pay at the plant? Was it good pay?*

No. (Chuckles) Well, it was the pay for the times.

*But compared to outside jobs outside the plant how was it?*

Well, there was other plants like maybe making more than we were, the war work, the contracts. I mean we thought it was pretty good, you know. I even forgot what I was making. Everybody would ask and they were supposed . . . "Don't tell anybody what you're making." I don't know why it was supposed to be a secret, but we didn't say too much about what we . . . it was really nobody's business because I wasn't asking anybody else what they were making.

*Was the pay the same for everyone working the same job?*

Yeah.

*Even if you're a man or a woman or whatever?*

I don't know what the men were making. I have no idea.

*During the war, were many people or most people saving their money during the war, or were they spending money a lot on a lot of stuff?*

I don't know. I think they were spending their money on what they needed to run their household, gas was rationed, shoes, you had stamps to buy shoes, we had our stamp books, sugar was rationed, butter. So actually, you couldn't splurge on a lot of things, because it wasn't there. I bought a pair of shoes that I didn't need stamps for and they were glued together. The sole and top was glued together, and being that I was working by the soap water, the machines where all the soap was running down here on this machine, the soles left loose of the shoe, and lucky I had a pair of safety shoes in my locker. We were not supposed to take our safety shoes home. You know, those were the ones that didn't have any nails in them because the metal could make sparks. But I had to wear them home because I didn't have any . . . nobody knew it, of course. But those shoes came unglued because of the soap water.

*And you didn't have anymore stamps to buy anymore shoes?*

Oh, yeah. I had stamps. I still had my stamps, my stamp books. I still had some stamps in them.

*What were those? How did you get them?*

We had to go over to the school in our district, like where you go vote, and sign up and then they give them to you, the books. And they were like little trading stamps when you bought shoes. What else was it? I know in the grocery store, it was sugar and butter. I don't know what else. Maybe that was it. Oh, it was awful hard to get tires. It was almost impossible to buy tires for your car. I didn't have a car then. Gas was rationed. So I mean the people more or less got along with less because they couldn't buy it. I mean they bought with their money, what they were earning, what they really needed. So I don't think there was too much spent foolishly. That they didn't need I should say.

*What did people do for entertainment?*

I was out in the country there and I didn't do much.

*You didn't go anywhere really?*

I never was one for . . . I didn't bowl and I didn't drink. Some of them from the C shift went drinking after work, and they weren't feeling too good when they come in that evening. They had a hangover. I never had to worry about that. I used to go home. I was a good girl. I went home.

*Did some people gamble?*

No.

*Or play cards?*

Hm-m.

*Did the plant or the area have any recreational activities?*

Not that I know of. See, I don't know. The Vietnam deal, the South Asian deal, whatever you call it, it might have been some changes then, but I didn't go back for that one.

*Did you notice a higher incidence of illness or sickness out there because there were so many people?*

Hm-m.

*Were water supplies and sewer adequate? Was everything all right with that the whole time you were there?*

The water? Sure.

*She's showing me a letter from December 19, 1943. You got a letter when you were sick.*

Yeah, and I don't remember being that sick.

*Dear Julia Kohler, at the request of your fellow employees, who have informed us of your illness, we wish to extend our sincerest wishes for a speedy recovery. We miss you out here at the plant and hope you will be back with us soon. Sincerely, the Labor Management Committee.*

I think I was only off a week-and-a-half.

*And they sent you a letter.*

They sent me a letter that they missed me. I'm sure everybody got one that was out.

*Would you say the area changed during the war at all, as far as people's morals or their values?*

I can't say that.

*Was there a curfew in the town? Did you have to be in your house by a certain time?*

I lived on the farm. I wasn't in the city here. I have no idea. I remember the black-outs, you know, when you weren't supposed to have any light on.



*Did they have those around here?*

M-hm.

*What were those for?*

I don't know. I think they were more for testing in case something did happen. It wasn't very often. But I think it was just being prepared, like they have now. They have air raids, not air raids. What do you call that noise they blow every Wednesday here in town? They're testing for storms, yeah.

*But they did have black-outs.*

I don't really remember too much about that part. Seems to me it didn't happen very often if it did.

*Did they have any drills or anything like that at the plant, any fire drills or anything where you would practice in case there was a fire?*

Can't remember that.

*Did you have any safety meetings where you were talked to about safety?*

We wore hair nets on our hair, and then after a while, the people working in powder, like tracer, they all work coveralls. It was a one piece thing, like a jumpsuit and kerchiefs on their head. But that was in the powder. And then after a while, they were taking measurements and loading where I was working for the powder chargers, but I got laid off before then.

*What about those special shoes? Who wore those shoes without the nails in them?*

Yeah.

*Who was it that wore those? Was everybody supposed to wear them?*

No, just people that worked in the wings, in the powder where the sparks, tracer and the primer and the loading, where you put the powder in the shell. No, we were the only ones that were issued shoes. And we had to give them back. They were built very good strong working shoes, so I didn't mind wearing them.

*Did anyone dislike the plant because it made bullets?*

Not that I know of. It was a long time ago. Maybe after a while I'll be thinking about that.

*How about during Korea? Was the attitude different?*

Well, yeah. I can say it was a little different. I mean the first one everybody was . . . they were more . . . I don't know how to explain it. I think the years changed no matter what, but it's hard to explain how the changes are. I think people got along better.

*Would you say that most of the women working at the plant either had worked before they had started working there, or were they just mainly housewives?*

I think they more or less came out of the . . . to be in the work force, to help the war effort, most of them. Because those days too many mothers stayed home, you know, and the husbands worked. And, of course, when their husbands were gone, they had to work. People didn't work like they did now.

*So for a lot of people was that maybe their first job, a lot of [inaudible] women?*

I think so.

*Do you think that many of them wanted to continue working?*

Oh, yeah. That's how they got the taste of money. Once she wanted to quit, and she's oh, why don't you go out and buy a new refrigerator so you'd have something to work for instead of quitting. But then after the war was over, the men were supposed to get their jobs back and these different places where these women were working, like American Can, there were so many women working there that were doing men's work, and they just kept on working.

*What did those men do that wanted their jobs back?*

I didn't know of anybody that wanted their jobs back. Just maybe because American Can started building on and got those big orders for . . . beverage was coming in style. Years ago, you didn't see stuff in cans. So American Can was expanding their business with the cans. Spam come on and different cans were being made. So it made more jobs. So a lot of us, we were doing men's work. In fact, after a while, it was combined.

*Were there any labor shortages anytime? Did they have more jobs at the plant than they had people to work them ever?*

I don't know. They seemed to always get enough applications to fill in what they needed.

*People wanted to work there?*

M-hm.

*Were there any controversies that you remember in the community about who the plant hired or didn't hire? Did they hire elderly people?*

Yeah, some of the women were older. See, I was young then. There was some of them. I imagine they're long gone. Some of them were quite old. But they seemed to keep up and do their work. There was one little old man--I don't know where they found him--it was a little old grandpa and they used to play such tricks on him. They used to tie things on the back of him. He'd be walking down the hall and there'd be something dangling in the back, a paper cup or something. He was always laughing. He kind of kept the morale up for the people. He was funny. It was funny. There were very few able young men around, unless they were 4F. One of my best friends started going with a man, he was 4F. He was lame.

*What's 4F?*

Physically unfit for service. Oh, you've never heard of 4F. Yeah, 4F was people that didn't pass the physical for the service, for the Army. She and Edward got married. They went together quite a while before anybody knew they were going together.

*They met at the plant?*

M-hm. He was young, one of the younger ones. She was a very nice girl. You never heard of 4F?

*Hm-m. No, I haven't. Did a lot of people stay on at the plant after World War II?*

Oh, I don't think . . . no. They couldn't. There was nothing. I never knew of anybody that stayed on.

*So where did they go after the war?*

Got other jobs. Most of them got jobs again, other jobs. I had to go get a job because I was single.

*Did the community change after the war was over?*

You mean out there?

*Yeah. Just this whole area?*

Well, you see, I stayed on that farm and I never moved too much around to really know what kind of change was being made. I loved that farm. People used to say to me, I'd get a vacation and they'd say where did you go? I'd say I didn't go anywheres. I had my flowers and my garden and right across the street, the water department had evergreens, so I could go down by the evergreens. It was just like being up north. Then I didn't have to drive far away to go and get myself all tired out coming back. So I didn't go too much extra.

*Is there anything else that you can remember about your time at the plant that you think would be important for people to know that were listening to this maybe say 100 years from now? What would be something important that you'd want someone to know about the plant?*

Have you got that down about the parents of the . . .

*Why don't you talk about that a little bit, because I don't think the tape was running.*

I didn't talk about that on there, did I?

*No. They should know that.*

Well, one day my line was broke, my machine was broke down, and somebody told me to go to the office, and I thought what's going to happen to me now. And he said go down to the cafeteria and here they had built a little stage. It was Thursday, March 11, 1943, and the mother and father of the five who had died, the Sullivans brothers who had gone down in that ship, and a sister [*inaudible*] was along. She was the only survivor in that family. She had broke her arm and she had her arm in a sling that day. But they were all talking about the boys going down. All five went down on that ship and we were all feeling really bad. Five sons, who were 20- to 28-years-old. All five of them went down.

*Why were they there? Why were those Sullivans there?*

For a war bond drive. Of all the people working out there, there was quite a few of us in the cafeteria; they couldn't get everybody in there, but I was kind of fortunate to be just at the right time to be there, you know, because that's really . . . every time I get a chance to see that show on the TV . . .

*They made a movie out of it?*

They made a movie out of it. I watch that show every time. It's such a beautiful story.

*Do you remember the name of that story?*

I don't know, but it's something about the Sullivans.

*They show that on television still today?*

The movie has been made in Hollywood. A movie has been made. They've shown that show quite a few times on TV. And it's a story of how they grew up and they argued about how they got along at home, you know, the five boys, they all had different ideas. Like the mother and father went shopping one day, and they had to carry in wood for the stove, and so one got a brainstorm idea that they should just cut a hole in the wall outside, you know, and then they could make a box inside. The box was inside. They had to bring it in from . . . so they cut a hole in the wall and they hit a pipe in the sink, and the water was going all over the floor. I don't know how they got that [*inaudible*] in the show. The father and mother come home and they blame it onto the oldest boy because he didn't stop them, that he didn't stop his brothers from doing that. So anyway their father, it was just terrible. I forgot the name of the Irishman that took his part, and he just left home. And they had a fight. The father hit the kid or the kid hit the father. I don't remember which. I've watched that show so many times. It's such a wonderful story because it's so much like growing up the way we had it. So the kid, he went out of the house and he was gone, and they were all out looking for him, because the father went and punished the wrong one. The oldest one didn't have anything to do with it. The younger ones had that idea. It was a real good show. Get a chance to see it, go and see it.

*So this family lost all five of the boys. They all went together on one ship. Wasn't that unusual for all of them to be on . . . ?*

When they went to enlist, they said absolutely not. You cannot all five go at once, and so then they all backed out. We can't all be going and be on the same ship, we're not going. Somehow the government or something decided okay. Because they wanted to take everybody they could get their hands on. It was draft time. I often think if my mother had five girls in a row before she had any boys--I was the oldest--and I was very sad when they just celebrated [*inaudible*] 50 years or what, and I was thinking of ma, and I was born a girl, because I would have been one of the first ones to go to that . . . I would have been just the right age for that war. And God knows, they showed all those crosses, and it made me kind of sad in a way. She really did me a favor by having a girl.

*Would you have wanted to go fight?*

No.

*Is there anything else that you can think of that you remember?*

I don't think so.

*Well, thank you very much.*

(End of Interview)

(End of Side 2)

**EVERETT NEEDELS**  
**September 21, 1994**  
**St. Paul, Minnesota**  
**Deborah L. Crown, Interviewer**

*Today is September 21, 1994. This is Deborah Crown talking with Everett Needels.*

*Where were you living when you heard the ordnance plant was going to be built?*

I was living out in Highland Park, Midway District, in Randolph, Watson, over in that area.

*Had you lived there for a long time?*

I bought the house in 1932, before I was married. My folks lived there with me, and until we got married in 1939. Then my folks moved out and my wife moved in.

*Were you working or going to school, or what were you doing at that time?*

I was working for a chemical company called R.A. Myers Company, 1535 Marshville, St. Paul.

*What was the area like at that time?*

You mean where I lived?

*Yeah.*

Well, it was residential. Small to medium houses, large golf course not too far away, Creton High School, a military school, was there, and we had a small two . . . I guess it was one bedroom, living room, dining room, kitchen. Small house. Didn't have much money then. Twenty-five hundred dollars I paid for the house. I was paying it off at \$25 a month, but it was a house.

*What were the people like around here back then?*

Well, they were all white Caucasian people, working people, middle class I guess you'd call it; not low class, but they weren't high class.

*What was the reaction of most people in the area when they learned that the government was going to buy that land and build the plant?*

I really didn't hear of anything when they were buying the land for the arsenal. That was bought sometime in '38 or '37, sometime in there, and really I didn't even know it was going on, as far as an individual is concerned.

(Tape recorder is turned off.)

*Did any land prices in the area rise or fall as a result of the government purchasing that land out there for the arsenal that you know of?*

Well, you must remember at time I was about 22- or 23-years-old and I could care less if the land prices went up. (Chuckles) I had my house that I was paying for and \$25 a month and I was happy. Whether the values went up I had no idea.

*Can you describe the conditions of the construction site when they were building it?*

Well, I knew where the area was and it was about 25 miles from my house and I really had no occasion to go out there to see what was going on, and I had no intentions of going to work for the Army at that time. I was trying to make a living selling chemicals. That was my prime concern. (Laughs).

*Did the area change, that you know of, during the construction of the plant? Did people start noticing that an ammunition plant was being built there and did their attitudes change because of that? Did they start thinking of different things?*

I really can't say that I knew anything about it as far as individually. I may not have even known that the thing was being built. See a little notice in the paper once in a while maybe, but as far as people were concerned, I didn't hear anything.

*So you were selling chemicals before you went to work for the plant. Now, how did you hear about the job at the plant?*

Well, I had two sons at the time. I got married in 1939, and war was declared December 7, 1941, and I figured that I had a draft number, I had a relatively high draft number, and being married I was in Class C, I think it was. So I was deferred to start with, and I don't know. It was sometime in the middle of 1940 or the later part of 1940, I figured well, the war was going on and I figured I better get myself a defense job, otherwise I might end up in the Army. So I went out to their employment place on University Avenue and put in the application for a job, and I didn't hear anything from them for oh, gosh, it must have been six months or more. They called me up and wanted to know if I'd come over, and they had some positions open in the -- well, it was the . . . I don't know exactly what kind. It was running one of the milling machines, extruding the bullets or something like that, that I had no knowledge of and I wasn't the slightest bit interested in getting into something like that. So I turned that job down. And then I waited for another . . . I must have been, well, it was October of '42 when they called me again, and they had some openings in the primer tracer explosive division. That was a little more attractive to me. I didn't know anything about explosives, but I knew about chemicals so I took that job and went to work October 12, 1942 as a primer explosive manufacturer. Now, primer is a powder that goes into the little primer cap on the end of the 50 caliber bullet, also the 30 caliber bullets. And what they put me to do is to take the raw materials that came in various shapes and sizes and powders and to weigh those out in certain batches. We ended up with a 12-pound batch. We had so many pounds of antimony, I guess you call it, not alimony. And it had some lead in it and some of the 30 calibers had TNT and they 50 calibers had another powder called PETN, which I don't know what the chemical word is for it. That's what we called it. That was the explosive part of it. So that's how I got started out there as powder handler number one.

*Before you started working there, what did you think it would be like to work at the plant?*

Well, I'd been working as a salesman for this other company for ten years and the chemicals were cleaning supplies, janitor supplies, soaps, laxes, brooms, mops, things like that, had been on my own as far as my time was concerned, and to get tied down to a 3:00 to 11:00 job didn't set too good. But there's nothing I could do about it.

*That was the shift you worked?*

Yeah.

*Three in the afternoon to 11:00 at night?*

Yeah. That was called the B shift, second shift.

*If you were more flexible with your other job, why would you want to go and work at the plant?*

Well, I guess everybody was leaving town, all my friends joined the Army or were gone, and here I was a non-defense operation, selling soap, which wasn't too critical. I guess that I had a certain amount of patriotism. I don't know whether you'd call it that or not, but I felt that I should be doing something, and I also had the threat of going into the Army if I didn't do something. So there wasn't too much of a choice.

*There was a lot of talk about profiteering among defense contractors. Were you concerned about this? Did this bother you? Did you hear of anything like this?*

Well, as an individual, you might hear of some of this stuff in the newspaper or on the radio or somewhere, but you really don't know anything about it. I knew they were building the plant out there. Somebody was making some money on it. That's their business. I had no way of knowing anything about it, except what I read in the paper. I guess it didn't bother me very much. We had a war going on. Had to get it over with. I knew that the war wouldn't last forever.

*Which facility did you work at at the plant? Where were you?*

In location?

*Yeah. Were you in one of those buildings?*

No, no. The primary tracer area was all fenced in, and we had special badges that nobody could come into our area. Everybody was scared of it.

*Why?*

Well, it was explosives.

*Was it dangerous?*

Yeah. Damn stuff would blow up on you. It was hot. And so the area was located on the northeast corner of the plant. Was a fence around it and all by itself. I don't know how large the area was, but it was probably an area of oh, probably six blocks, maybe six or seven blocks long and probably four or five blocks wide. They had this great big, high fence around it, and nobody could get into it unless the guard would let you in. So we were secluded all by ourself.

*How many individual buildings were there?*

Well, there was a cave built into the side of the hillside, which they stored their raw materials in. They came in by boxcar and that had a special fence around it, too. Even I couldn't get in unless I had the keys. And then there was one small--I don't know what you'd call it--but it was our locker room, where we ate lunch and changed clothes, and the foreman was in there. It was a small building, probably oh, 30 feet by 30 feet, and the rest of the place was these bunkers that was out in the area, and they were quite a ways apart. They

were covered with earth. They were all above ground, but they had built up the building and then they had covered the whole thing with dirt and grass. And the only thing that was open was . . . in the center was a skylight. So if the explosive powder would blow off, it would go up in the air. Otherwise you'd look at it [and] it'd look like four funny looking buildings and you wouldn't have the vaguest idea what they are. They were all covered with dirt.

*So how did you get in?*

Well, we could drive in with a automobile to the parking lot. Then with our badge number, the guard would let us in. See, we had special badges. And then we would have to stay in there until 11:00 at night and a guard would come down and let us go out again. So once we were in there, we were there.

*You didn't leave the building at all?*

Well, we didn't leave the area. This little lunch room and locker room was our headquarters, and as I say, it was only about 30 feet square, 30 feet by 30 feet, and then we had our four bunkers off in there and that's it.

*So what exactly did you do? What was your title?*

Well, when I first came in there, I was hired as a powder handler one, and that job consisted of going to the cave where the raw materials were stored and measuring out the various chemicals and so many pounds of this and so many pounds of that until we had a 12-pound batch. Twelve pounds was a batch. And those were put into rubber containers about the size of a three-pound coffee can, and they had a lid on them. And I worked with that for just a few days. Then I was promoted to powder handler two, which put me out in the bunker.

*In a couple days?*

Yeah, well, I think they were expanding the production area at that time, because when I got hired, there was another chap that got hired on the same day, and the plant itself was starting to produce ammunition, and they needed primer powder, and so they expanded the primer area, and there was only I think eight of us in the entire primer area per shift. There was three shifts; so there was 24 of us that made powder, and usually on each shift, one person would [inaudible] this measuring device, putting powder in with the powder handler two, and the rest of us would be taking it and putting it into primer powder. And there was only four buildings that we could operate in. So there was 24 of us that was working, making powder. And then there was a couple chaps that wheeled it from one area, from one part to the other. In other words, you had to transport and they had what they call buggies or something like a two-wheeler with a box in front of it, and you'd . . .

*They motorized?*

No, no. You pushed them. They weren't very large. Probably about three feet high and kind of a box with a lid on it and a handle on it and four wheels, and you just pushed it around. We had asphalt paths that we could push it on. And so we would take and when we would make the powder, then somebody would take it from our building and they'd transport it up to a building called 135, where they put the powder into the primer caps. That was a different division, though.

*At what point was it dangerous? Was this dangerous to transport it?*

No, when it was dry, it was fine. If it's TNT, you could take a handful of it and throw it up in the air, catch it and do anything you wanted to, kind of a yellowish looking conglomeration, but when they got combined



into the three or four other ingredients, and we would take it into this building that had the bunkers around, they had a little mixing machine, which was probably, oh, 12 inches by maybe 15 inches, which had a paddle going around, motorized paddle, and this motorized paddle would go around very slow, and at that time, we would put some--I can't remember whether it was water mixed with--we fellows working there, we called it gum. Whatever it was, it was mixed with water. It was a liquid anyway. And we would dump this powder that was in the 12-pound can into the mixing machine, put in the pint or whatever it was of liquid and close the cover down and turn the switch on. Now, the switch was about 50 feet away from the mixing machine. That was outside the bunker.

*The switch was outside the bunker?*

The switch.

*Why?*

Well, in case something went wrong and you were turning the switch on in the building, you'd get blown up along with the powder. So they had all kinds of safety precautions. And so we would run, when we put this chemicals in, gum, into the mixing machine, we'd close the cover down, then we would have to walk out to the switch, which was probably 50 feet away, and there, we turned the machine on. And the machine would run for . . . I can't remember how long we ran it, about 15 minutes, though, somewhere in that area. And this paddle would go around very slow, mixing it very carefully. And then at the given length of time, we shut the switch off and then we would go back into the building, and we would take the lid off the machine, and it was a dumping device that you could dump this mixed powder onto a glass plate. Now, it was moist. And this glass plate was probably, oh, three foot by six feet, maybe seven feet long, surrounded by a water moat, big table that had water in it and then this glass plate was set into the water and above the water. And so we had this batch of 12 pounds of explosive powder on a glass plate. And then we would take our hands and make it like a loaf of bread.

*Was it still dangerous at that point?*

Oh, yeah. It wasn't so bad when it's moist. And we'd have to take a spatula and it was not the kind of a spatula that you are thinking of at home and stirring your gravy, but it was about a six or seven inch piece of either wood or rubber of some kind that we would shave this loaf very thin, shave it all the way down, to see if there's any of the chemical that wasn't properly mixed, and usually you'd find a little lump of one of the chemicals that was not mixed and you'd take and throw that into the water moat that was around there, and when you'd check that all out--you'd have to shave it very thin to see that there wasn't anything that might be a little piece of one of the chemicals that was a lump, and you had to go thin enough so that you'd find it. And usually in every batch, there would be some impurities or lumps or stuff like that that you couldn't . . .

*And you'd just take them out rather than try and mix them back in?*

No, you just took your spatula and kicked them into the water moat. And once in a while you'd find one as big as your small fingernail, you know a lump in the powder that didn't get mixed. So you had to go through that whole 12 pounds, about the size of a pound-and-a-half loaf of bread.

*How long did that take?*

Oh, five, ten minutes maybe. Then when you got that and you were satisfied that the powder was all thoroughly mixed and it was still damp, you would take and divide that up into 12 rubber cups, which held supposedly one pound of powder. You had 12 pounds over here to start with; so you ended up with 12 -- they weren't weighed, but I mean you'd fill them up and divide it out. Then there was a wet cloth of some

kind that you would put in each one of those, on the top of it, and you'd put the cover on. Had to keep it damp. If you were careless and didn't get all of these impurities or lumps off of your glass tray, then they would dry out and if you accidentally happened to rub over that, she'd blow.

*Rub over it with what?*

Well, if you're monkeying around with your hands or something and you had one of these dry lumps and you put some friction on it, it'd pop on you. And that would be the end of the entire 12 pounds, because the whole thing would blow up. We had to be pretty careful. And then they took these 12 pounds and you had a crate that you put those in, and you would take it out into one of these buggies, which we operated with and we would transport that up to the building 135, which was probably three blocks away, and we would put it in a refrigeration box of some kind, and that was the end of ours. Now, if this powder stayed up in that refrigerator for more than--I kind of forget the length of time--but it would probably be maybe 24 hours or 36 hours at the most, it would begin to dry out, even though it was in the rubber cup with the damp . . . and it'd be too dangerous for anyone to work with. So that powder was destroyed. It was taken out of those rubber cups and taken over to a disposal dump and ignited and burnt up because it had set too long and it was starting to dry out.

*And that's too dangerous.*

Yeah. One of the fellows that I worked with, after I left the plant, in '45, he evidently did something wrong and that building blew up on him and the door blew out and he was out at the switch, which was 50 feet away, and the door hit him [and] killed him.

*Just from the door flying out, the door killed him?*

Yeah, but I mean the explosion of this 12 pounds had enough force that it blew the door off the building. And then I also heard--I'm not positive about it--but at night, when they were moving some primer caps that were already loaded with powder, there was two other guys that got careless and they blew up the truck. They were killed, too. Had to be pretty careful with the stuff. It was hot. So it was a long four years I'll say.

*What kind of safety precautions did you have to take?*

Well, I guess they had all the safety precautions. We had special clothing that we wore, which was nothing but -- my wife used to call them pajamas. They were kind of a gray uniform, which had no pockets in, and pants had a drawstring on them. You tied it up. And there was a shirt, just a short-sleeved shirt, and we had to have special shoes so we wouldn't generate any static electricity.

*What kind of shoes were those?*

I can't remember.

*Like tennis shoes?*

No, no. They were hard shoes. They weren't the most comfortable things, but I think that the plant furnished them to us. I'm not sure about it. I know they furnished the uniforms. But outside of that, I can't remember of any other special . . . we were supposed to take a shower every night before we went home and get cleaned up. But I can't remember any other special things that we had to do.

*Did they have any safety meetings or anything like that?*

Not particularly.

*Were you trained then?*

Well, I guess the training was somebody would go out and show you for a couple batches and that was it. First, you want to remember, at that time, nobody knew anything about primer powder. Federal Cartridge, over in Onnoka, was the operator of the plant and they were making shotgun shells. So they were probably as close to knowing something about this stuff, but I don't know whether the same kind of powder went into the primer as went into the 50 caliber bullets, but as far as training was . . . I guess a couple batches and you were on your own. (Laughs). They told you about it. Be careful. Now, remember, I was only 27-years-old. I could care less about a lot of things, you know. But I was in the chemical business and I knew if you mixed the wrong chemicals together you'd get some [inaudible] reactions on it. And so that helped me a lot.

*How many of those batches did you turn out in one day?*

Well, we had an eight-hour day and our maximum batch, if I remember right, was eight.

*Eight? It took about an hour for each?*

Supposed to take an hour for each.

*And in one batch, about how many bullets would that . . .*

I don't exactly remember. Just from what I might have picked up from people, it seems to me like that would make about 30,000.

*One batch would make 30,000?*

Yeah, primer cap. I'm not sure about that.

*Did they have to destroy a lot of that stuff that didn't get used, or did everybody keep up?*

We had to slow down is what happened. When the plant was having trouble somewhere, they'd send word down to the powder area, "Don't make any powder today. We're shut down." Or if they were having difficulties and the needs were not as great as they thought, I suppose that someone scheduled the production of the bullets, and with 25,000 people working there, you can always get a hang up someplace. And so there was days when we'd make three batches, maybe four batches, sometimes five. The foreman would tell us how many batches.

*So did you go home early?*

No, we sat there till 11:00 at night.

*You still had to stay there?*

Yeah.

*How many days a week did you work?*

Six days a week.

*Did everybody work six days a week?*

Everybody in the whole plant ran six days a week.

*Was it closed on one day?*

Well, I don't know what the . . . I know I worked from Monday to Saturday, whether the rest of the plant was operating in some form or not, I don't know.

*So you worked more than 40 hours a week?*

I worked 48 hours a week, time-and-a-half on Saturday. And the best part of it was we started at 78 cents an hour.

*Was that good pay?*

Well, a powder two handler, where was I at practically all the time, our pay was \$1.20 after I got promoted to powder two, \$1.20, time-and-a-half for Saturday, and the rumors--I don't know whether they're true or not, but I presume they were--that our area was the highest paid production area in the plant, \$1.20 an hour. (Laughs) But you got to remember that was 1942, and you could buy two pounds of hamburger for a quarter, and you'd buy a dozen eggs for 15 cents. So it's all relative. And out of every paycheck you were supposed to take and buy a \$25 war bond.

*You were supposed to do that?*

That's what the plant was trying to get everybody to do.

*Did you do that?*

I did it, yeah.

*Out of every paycheck?*

Out of every paycheck.

*Did a lot of people do that?*

I don't know. You know, as I said, there was only eight of us in our department, so I was separated from the rest of the plant.

*Did you get a chance to talk to other people that worked in other jobs ever?*

Not particularly. Once in a while, if we had some time to kill. See, with our badge, we could go anywhere in the plant. I could go into the production buildings or we could go into the firing range, or we could go wherever we wanted to with our special badge, and nobody could come into our area, but we could go there. So if we were shut down, maybe we were only going to run two batches that day, we had six hours to kill, we might take our lunch and go off to some other building and eat our lunch someplace else, just to pass the time. So you'd get to talk to people here and there, but not very much.

*Would you say that the people that worked at the plant sort of pretty much kept to their own building and didn't really go out and meet other people?*

You mean in the other parts of the building [plant]?

*Yeah.*

I don't think that the people in the other buildings could leave their building. When they went into one of the production buildings, 135 or 101 or 102, they were on a job that they had to stay in that place. We were kind of a select group, I guess, that didn't have enough sense to get a different kind of a job. (Laughs)

*Was your job a union job or non-union?*

Yes, I had to join the union. I wasn't in favor of it, but everybody that worked there had to.

*Why weren't you in favor?*

Well, first of all, I didn't know anything about unions. I'd been a salesman with a chemical firm on my own. There was no unions in our place. It was a small to a medium size firm, probably 15 or maybe 20 people at the most. So I had no exposure to unions whatsoever. To me a union was a word, but when I joined out there, it was shortly after you got hired that you had to join. You had to join the union. In fact, the only way I was able to, in 1944 I guess it was, when the German [inaudible] went in . . . it looked like the war in Europe was coming to a close, and then the Germans started what they call the German (Bulge?) when they got going again, our plant was running at half capacity. Then, all of a sudden, during this period of time when the plant was running at half capacity, I wanted to get out, and I couldn't get out. Union wouldn't let me.

*You wanted to leave your job?*

We thought the war was about ready to wind down, see.

*And this was in 1944?*

I think it was in the late part of 1944, somewhere in there, and I was starting up my Needels Janitor Supply business at that time. In fact, I'd already started it while I was working out at the plant, this place here. My dad and mother kept opening a warehouse for me. My wife was secretary and I was the salesman, and I was more interested into getting into that than I was making powder. So about this period of time, when the plant was running pretty slow, I wanted to get out. And so I tried. They wouldn't let me go. So I finally figured that if I didn't pay my union dues, the union would fire me for non-payment of dues, which they did.

*That's how you got out?*

That's how I got out. Well, then after the German Bulge deal and they needed ammunition bad again, I said well maybe I better go back to work again. So I went out to the plant and told them I was ready to come back to go to work again, and they said fine. Pay your union dues. And I said, "No, I will not pay those union dues." Somebody in the plant paid my union dues for me, and I went back to work again.

*Who did that?*

I have no idea.

*Was it a friend?*

I have no idea.

*How did you find out that they were paying?*

Well, I couldn't work there unless I was in the union. I went on powder handler number one for one day, and the next day I was powder handler two, cranking out powder again. But I never paid my union dues. I don't know who did. Because they wanted to get people back to work again, see. They needed ammunition again.

*How long were you gone?*

Oh, I guess I was gone for maybe three months, four months.

*Why did you go back?*

Well, after all, they needed ammunition.

*Did you like working there, or did you just want to be a salesman?*

I tolerated the job out there.

*But would you have rather have been a salesman?*

Oh, much rather.

*But you went back there because you felt . . .*

Well, they needed the powder, and as I say, there was only 24 of us in the . . . well, they did start up another building at one time, later on in '43 or '44, so they doubled the crew, but they also doubled the output of the plant. So if I could make powder for 30,000 primers a day, why not? Maybe I was patriotic. I don't know. (Laughs)

*What were the working conditions like?*

I couldn't see anything wrong with them. Of course I had never worked in a production plant before.

*Did you feel safe?*

Yeah, I guess so. I got a bullet through my car.

*You did?*

Yeah.

*From what?*

Well, (laughs) it caused quite a stir around the place. See, we parked our cars on the parking lot, and the firing range was on the southeast corner of the plant, and it was probably a mile over to the northeast corner. We were in direct . . . on the other side of a large hill, and they would have this firing range where they would test the bullets, and they were shooting bullets there all the time. On every shift, they were testing

them all the time, and at night time, you could see the tracers flying off in the air, you know. And ever so often, one of these bullets would fall in our area, and everybody kind of poo-hooed it. You know, they're just flying, until this one went through the back end of my car. It went through the trunk and it lodged three-quarters of an inch into the spare tire. And the safety people came down and they took pictures of it, and they did change their thinking that these were not just falling bullets but they had some pep behind them. In fact, I got stopped on the streets of St. Paul by a policeman. He wanted to know how I got a bullet hole in the back of my car. See, a 50 caliber bullet had a protection head of about three-quarters of an inch or somewhere in that size. And so I had this hole in the back of my car. (Laughs)

*Well, who was going to pay for that?*

I haven't the vaguest idea. I don't think anyone ever paid for it. I think I just forgot about it.

*Did anybody get hurt because of that?*

No, I don't think so. Only thing I heard one time out there is that somebody outside the area, somebody got hit by one of these and it killed them, but that was outside the plant and it was a falling bullet that came from the firing range.

*What's a falling bullet? Is that one that's slowing down?*

Yeah, when it's starting to fall to the ground, see. I never saw anything about it in the paper, but I mean the rumors, they make the rounds, you know. We heard that somebody, an individual, had been hit by one of the bullets, and that was a couple miles away. So as far as that, it's the only one that I ever heard of that was injured by anything that we were doing.

*Was this your first time ever to do this kind of work?*

Absolutely the first time, with about two hours instruction, (chuckles).

*What did you think about it?*

I didn't think too much about it. I was 27-years-old, what the heck? They want to make powder, okay, we'll make powder.

*Now, was this the first time you'd ever worked for a really big company?*

It was the only time.

*You had never worked for one before or since?*

After I got out, I went into the Needels Janitor Supply Company full-time, and 54 years later, I'm still here.

*What was it like working for that big company*

Well, I guess it didn't bother me any. You were regimented to working so many hours . . .

(End of Side 1; Beginning of Side 2)

*September 21, 1994. This is Deborah Crown speaking with Everett Needels, and this is Side 2.*

There was probably--and I'm kind of guessing at it, but in this building 135, which was a production building, is where they put the primer powder into the primer cap, and they had a machine, and from what I could remember about it, all these primer caps were in kind of a tray, and you would, as far as I can remember, the girls would take this damp powder and they would take some kind of a paddle and they would spread it out onto the tray and put the powder into that tray. And I don't know whether there was a thousand caps on the tray. I have no idea. But they had to do that with their hands. I mean they had to do something, and then when they would get a tray of these primer caps filled up, someone would take that and put it somewhere else and they would put another tray in. They had to do that. It seemed to me like it was a very monotonous job, and they had to stand up.

*For eight hours?*

Yeah.

*I'm sure they had breaks, though.*

Yeah.

*But still.*

I think that I remember them all standing up. Well, let's see, it'd be a year ago last January, I had a tour of the production area, and the buildings were all locked up, all away, and I went into 135 building and I could see all these machines and my memory kind of indicates that there was probably 100 or more of these machines sitting around there and I don't know how they operated because we never . . . that was somebody else's job and it was none of our business, see. But they would take these trays of these primer caps and they would take and somehow or other they had to put a coating of some description on it, and then they would take it out into a drying place where they would dry this out so that the powder was red hot again. Because this was all done when the powder was damp. And at that time, I heard that there was two fellows that was working nights and they were moving these trays from one building to another, and something went wrong and they blew up a whole truckload, two of them. Rumors circulated around.

*You didn't hear about those things?*

Yeah, I heard about it at the plant there, see.

*Did they ever publicize?*

No, no nothing.

*Why not?*

Well, don't ask me. That was probably military secrets that they didn't want anyone to know about. As I say, there was nothing in the paper and it was only through the rumor mill that we got it, but I know that if they were careless with it, it could happen.

*Did most accidents seem to happen at night?*

Well, in our area, there was no accidents. Both of these occasions that I mentioned before, the one where the door flew off and these two fellows in the truck, those happened after I had left the plant. I got the



information through people that I knew that worked out there. But there was never a thing in the paper about it.

*Would you consider your job a stressful job or not?*

If I had to do it now, at 81-years-old, I would say it's damn stressful. At 27, no, it didn't bother me.

*Were you under any pressure to work quickly or not?*

They were absolutely against being in a hurry. See, to make this batch of powder, from the time it went into the mixing machine and went onto the glass top tray and into the cups would normally take you, if you were working at a steady speed and not hurrying, would take you about 15 minutes, 20 minutes to do that, but we had a whole hour to do it in.

*So you went really slowly.*

Well, they wanted you to be real careful. And of course, we had to, in that period of time, in that hour, we would have to take that and walk it up to this other building, see, and walk back again. No, there was no pressure whatsoever to hurry up. See, nobody at that time knew much about this stuff. Everybody was scared of it. Take all the time you want. (Laughs) But, you know, the funny part of it is they had a series of measurements from the time that you . . . this 12-pound can of powder was taken and weighed out, over to the mixing machine and I'd carry it up to the production area, they would weigh that. I don't know exactly how they weighed it, but probably by the amount of primer caps that they got out of it. Twelve pounds of primer caps would give you 30,000 [inaudible] primer caps. And I'm sure that they kept track of that. And some of the boys, who were careless and would throw out more of the powder than they should, what they thought was impurities, is they would have a little, say, half-a-teaspoon that you should get rid of, they might take a tablespoon and throw away. And I know that they had production records of the amount of powder that we made versus the amount of finished product. And there was quite a discrepancy between some of us in the mixing, because we were the ones that was throwing it away, and it would come back to us once in a while, so-and-so, hey, you're throwing away too much powder. You're not getting enough. You're not getting a full amount, and they were kind of fussy about that, that you didn't throw away anymore than you had to. And I think that had some bearing on whether your draft deferment was based on.

*Why do you say that?*

Well, if the arsenal had a good production worker who was doing a good job, with no accidents and good production, versus one over here that was, you know, kind of a sloppy sort of a guy, and he threw away his record was maybe 10% less than this fellow and if the draft board called them up for service, which they did every six months, that Twin City Ammunition could say okay, you can have this guy, because he's not much good. If they called over this guy over here, no, we better keep him. And they would extend the deferment.

*You think that the plant had some say in that?*

Oh, I'm sure they did, because there was fellows that was taken out of this, even though we only had an eight-man crew, that crew turned over. If their numbers, this fellow over here, if the draft board says come, Uncle wants you in the army, and the arsenal didn't say they can't lose them, he'd go. Then they'd hire another one to take his place, see.

*And if the arsenal said they wanted to keep that person . . .*

If they said that he was a good production worker and he's critical to our production, they had something to do with the draft board extending the deferments. The A shift foreman was drafted into the Army, and he was a foreman. They even put me on as a candidate for his job. I studied to be the foreman toward the end, and I went to school out there someplace to . . . see, they had to replace the A shift foreman, and there was two of us that was candidates for that job, and I was one of them.

*Did you want to be the foreman?*

I quit before that, before it was settled. That was getting toward the end of the war, see. Nobody would ever tell you anything about this inside stuff here, but I know damn well that somebody was on my side.

*What do you think about your part in the war effort?*

Well, it was a job. I had to do it, I guess. Not that I wanted to do it, but I did it. That took preference over everything.

*What do you think about the plant's role in the war effort? How important was this plant?*

Well, at that time, the airplanes were using 50 caliber bullets, when their aircraft was fighting up in the sky, and they used 50 caliber bullets, and they used a lot of these tracer bullets so they could see whether they were going to hit the other airplane and they used an awful lot of them, and the same with the army rifles. The troops on the ground, they used a 30 caliber, and so it was very essential that they get all they wanted.

*Did you meet a lot of people working there or not?*

No, I can't say I did because the only ones that I ever met were--see, at that time, there was no transportation out to the plant, and if you wanted to work at the ammunition plant in New Brighton, it was 25 miles. It was 25 miles from my house, anyway, and you would, if you had a car, which I did, I could take passengers, and it was usually, almost 100 percent it was girls working in the production plants, living in St. Paul. I was in St. Paul, so that's where I gathered my passengers up, but I had the choice of picking who I wanted to ride with me. Mostly the only choice that I had was that it was somewheres on my route. I lived in Highland Park and I went right out Snelling Avenue and I would get people that worked in that area so I wouldn't have to drive too far away. And I had four passengers all the time, and generally speaking, they were mostly young ladies in their 20s and 30s. Occasionally, you'd have an older person, and they would pay me \$10 a week for hauling them out there.

*The people would pay you that?*

Yeah. I got \$10 a week.

*From each of them?*

From each of them.

*That's a good deal, huh?*

Six days a week, it was not very much for a fare going out there. Six into \$2.50, about 30 cents a day I guess, somewheres in there, but in lieu of that, I would get extra gasoline coupons.

*From who?*

From the plant. You see, we were only allowed so many gallons of gasoline per month as a civilian, and it wasn't very much. But if you had a job like this, carrying passengers, they would give you additional coupons so you could buy the gas to do the hauling. So I always had enough gas to get around, and that's how I managed to make a few calls on my side job. So I hauled passengers out there all the time.

*Did a lot of people do that?*

I guess so. Everybody got there. There was no buses, I know that. There was no street cars. You had to get there by automobile, period.

*What was traffic like then?*

Well, there wasn't near as many cars as there is now. Traffic was no problem.

*Was the plant segregated? Did women hang out with women and men spend time with only men, or was it real mixed?*

Well, there was a lot more women out there than there was men. I don't know what the ratio was, but I would say probably 50 to 1.

*Did many of those women . . . what did they do with their children?*

Well, I didn't know any of them. The ones that I rode with were all single gals.

*Were there some jobs that only women did?*

M-hm.

*Like what?*

Well, some of these production jobs.

*There were really no men that did those?*

I can't speak for the whole place, but what I saw was women everywhere, and there was few men.

*Were there some jobs that only men did?*

Well, the machine adjusters that adjust these machines that get out of whack once in a while, and yeah, there was certain jobs that men did only.

*What about management jobs? Were they mostly men?*

As far as I know. I know in the PT area, where I was, which included the girls, there was a man superintendent, name was Milt Smith and the assistant superintendent was Guy Parkin. Then there'd be a general foreman, and as far as I know, those were all mens' jobs.

*Were there certain jobs that only members of a certain race did?*

Well, there was not very many colored people in Minnesota at that time. Back then, the colored people was mostly down south. There was a small area of St. Paul that had a small population of colored people. There was no Asians, no Mexicans, there's no Spanish. There wasn't any in Minnesota, mostly Swedes and Norwegians. (Laughs)

*So you don't remember seeing people of different races that worked out there very often, or not?*

I can't remember any portion of a different race that I was acquainted with anyway.

*How did your job finally end? You left and then you came back, and then how did you leave again?*

Well, I guess after the need for . . . see, during the war, the airplanes developed a different kind of a gun.

*While the war was going on?*

Yeah. And so the need for the 50 caliber bullets was not as great at the end of the war as it was at the beginning of the war, and the 30 calibers, they may have changed that type of gun, too. Towards the end of war, especially after Germany had surrendered, the Pacific War was way out the other end of the world, and that was most a naval war, and when the time came to . . . I think I stayed there till the Armistice, VJ Day, I think so. Can't remember.

*Were you asked to leave?*

I think they just said anyone who wants to quit can go home.

*Was there a company newspaper out there, like a plant newspaper?*

Yeah. Yeah.

*Remember what that was called?*

No.

*How often did that come out?*

I don't remember ever getting it down in our area, but there was a paper published out there. I saw a picture of Franklin Roosevelt toured the plant one time. I saw a copy of it then with his picture on the front. It was 18 by 15, or three or four pages plant news or whatever it was. I don't remember ever getting one down on our end of the . . . I think we were a forgotten part of the world. But they did have a plant newspaper.

*And what kind of articles did it have in it? Did you ever see one?*

I just saw the one that had Roosevelt in it, when he toured the plant.

*So what was that one talking about, just when he was . . .*

Oh, it was patriotic. You know, everybody's got to do their share and get the plant running. I don't remember if I was in the plant at the time when Roosevelt came through or not. I did see it in the newspaper that it was in there. We never were allowed to go visit with him.

*Did his visit have an affect on people working there?*

Well, it's always an honor, I guess, it is, when the President of the United States comes. You remember that all your life.

*Were you surprised that he [inaudible]?*

Oh, yeah it was a very secretive visit. You didn't really know about it until after he was gone, and in my lifetime, I've only seen one other President. Saw Eisenhower when he came here one time. And so it was something that you should remember.

*Did they have any morale boosting efforts or promotions like why we fight campaigns?*

Well, there was a lot of patriotic slogans and do this and do that and buy war bonds. Yeah, there was a lot of that.

*Do you remember any of them specifically?*

Not really, no.

*But there were a lot?*

Oh, yeah.

*Did they have posters up?*

Yeah. Even in the town. The newspapers would have ads and billboards and there was a lot of promotion, patriotic, do your duty, you know, join the Army. (Laughs)

*What was it like when the war ended and you'd been working at this job and the war is over and now everybody is leaving the plant? What was that like?*

Well, it was a great big celebration. I remember I was over on University and Snelling, and the whole town was out in the streets. Everybody was drunk and everybody was happy. I don't know how I happened to be at that, but that's one of the things that sticks in my mind is I was over wandering around the streets and in the bars and wherever you . . . people everywhere.

*Did the plant give out any awards that you remember?*

Well, I got two.

*What were those?*

To be honest with you, I've forgotten. (Laughs)

*But they gave you awards for . . .*

I have two certificates of merit I guess they called them, and I've got one of them hanging up in the garage out at my (Laken?) place, and I framed them. They were in about a 12 by 8 certificate, and it says Award of Merit or something that Everett Needels did this to promote the war effort or something to that effect, and they were presented to us out at the plant. I got two of them. I haven't the vaguest idea what they were for. Probably something to do with maybe improving the system of production that we had.

*Did you do that?*

I suppose. I'm kind of a curious sort of a character that if I can see a different way to do it better, I make myself known. Down here at the Needels Company, I'm still doing it, and I get in trouble down here. The young generation doesn't always appreciate it. I don't know how many other people got it. Like I say, I got two of them. I suppose some of the others got it. It wasn't any big deal.

*Did your ideas about working at the plant change over time?*

Not particularly.

*You told me what the pay was kind of like at the plant. What was it like outside the plant?*

Well, I tell you, when I was in the janitor supply, salesman, I'd been at it for ten years and I was earning about 75 to 100 a week in commissions. Say 100 a week, that'd be \$400 a month or \$4800 a year, which isn't, in today's standards doesn't amount to very much. But I was sitting out there on a lunch counter and I was working, figuring my income tax, because income tax came in shortly before that, and all these other fellows that was around me, "You pay income tax?" Nobody paid income tax. I was the only one in our bunch that paid income tax. They set me aside as a rich bitch.

*Why didn't they pay income tax?*

Well, they didn't earn enough. On their civilian jobs. See, the wages weren't very high.

*So you think maybe the pay at the plant was better than . . .*

Yeah, at a \$1.20 an hour, that was high pay. Doesn't sound like very much now, does it?

*Was the pay at the plant the same for everyone? For men and women?*

No, I can't say much about the other parts of the plant, but I would say that--and I'm just going by guessing--that most of the production plant out there was from a dollar downwards an hour, less than a dollar an hour, because I started at 78 cents.

*Did many people or most people save their money during that time, during the war?*

There was nothing to spend it for.

*Why?*

You couldn't buy anything. You couldn't buy any coffee, women couldn't buy any silk socks, they couldn't buy any lipstick, meat was rationed. You could only buy so much meat, gasoline, you had to have coupons to buy it. You could get the bare essentials to eat on.

*Did that bother people?*

I don't think so. I don't remember. I mean that's the way it was. We all got enough to eat. I know my wife's folks were living on a farm up by Wilmer and we would go up there once in a while and get half a cow or something. We could get that without meat coupons because it was from her father, and margarine was just coming in about that time. Butter was say 35 cents a pound and margarine was 15 cents a pound. So everybody was using margarine. It was white then. You've probably never seen white ole have you? It looked like lard is what it looked like. And you would take and get a capsule of yellow coloring, and

you'd have to mix that yellow coloring into this like you'd mix a cake and make the ole look like butter. But I don't know how many people bought war bonds, but it was hard to spend anything. You couldn't buy a car. There was no new automobiles. They quit making them period.

*Why?*

That all turned into ammunition. I was lucky that I bought a car. I bought a new 1940 car in 1940. So when the war started, I had a relatively new car. One of the fortunate few I guess. So I got through the war with that car. But it was hard to spend anything.

*How did the community get along during that time? Was there a higher crime rate because of the large population of people working at the plant? Was anything affected by this?*

I can honestly say that I have no recollection of crime at that period at all.

*None at all?*

None at all. No kids with guns. If they got in a fight, they'd use their fist to fight it out. There might have been a robbery occasionally, but as far as any crime . . . there was very little of it anyway.

*Was this the same for teenagers?*

Yeah. Teenagers, they went to school and behaved themselves. I have no recollection whatsoever of any problems at that time.

*Did a lot of new people move to the area to work at the plant? Or did the employees mostly come from around here?*

No, a lot of people would drive a long ways to get to the plant. They lived where they lived. I know there's one chap that I think he lived in Hutchin, and I think there was another one that lived in St. Cloud, and they would pick up passengers on their way in, see. There'd be people somewheres along [*inaudible*]. They had to have passengers, otherwise they couldn't get there. I don't think there's any influx of population in the cities because of this plant.

*What did people do for entertainment back then?*

Go to bed. That's about it.

*There wasn't much?*

If you worked on the B shift, which was 3:00 to 11:00, it took you one hour to get there and one hour to get back. That's ten hours out of the day, and you had two or three hours of time to do your whatever you wanted to do, and then the rest of the time you had to go to bed.

*Did people gamble at all?*

I don't think so. Well, we played cards (laughs) during our lunch hour at the plant. We played penny ante out there.

*What's that?*

It's poker. You bet a penny.

*But nothing too high?*

I mean we had to do something to wile away the time, you know.

*You played cards. What else did you do?*

That's about it. We were in this small building.

*So if you got everything done early, you couldn't leave early?*

Hm-m. Nope, no way.

*Why's that?*

We were hired for eight hours a job and we put in eight hours. We couldn't get out of the place in our area because we were all fenced in.

*And the guard would have to show up and let you off?*

Yeah. And I'm sure that's the same with any of the other places, too. If you did want to go home early, there was no way to get home because you didn't have a ride.

*Do you know if the plant or the local community had any organized recreational activity?*

Not that I know of.

*Would you say that this area changed during the war in any way?*

Yeah, I think maybe it was the start of this promiscuous sex deal. That possibly got started out there.

*Why would you say that?*

Well, there was a lot of single gals out there and there was a few men around there, and I have got hunches, I hear rumors once in a while of different things happening. I think it was the beginning of it.

*What about the way people viewed what it was to be wealthy? Like you said that you were paying tax.*

(Laughs) Well, after the initial shock of it wore off and I got my tax returns done, everybody forgot about it. I wasn't set aside.

*Was there ever a curfew in the town?*

I don't think so.

*Not even for children?*

See, I was working up till 11:00.

*Oh, that's right. You were.*

I was an [inaudible] in my spare time at my house for a period of a couple years, but I just don't recall of any curfews. Might have been.



*How did the war and the plant affect everyday life in the area, as far as housing? Could you buy a house? Did people buy houses during the war?*

Well, I tell you, as I mentioned earlier, I bought this house in Highland Park in '32, and it was a four-room house. Not very big, 24 by 28 approximately, and I had two sons, and we needed more room. And I had to apply to some government agency that would allow us to buy lumber to build it, add an addition on.

*Because otherwise you couldn't buy lumber either?*

No. You couldn't do nothing. And it was quite a struggle to get permission to do this, and we finally had a fellow come out to the house and look at our house, and we had two kids and one bedroom and one closet, and when he saw that, he said, "Well, I guess you need some more room." But he gave us the okay, a permit, to buy lumber. And we built an addition. We built one more bedroom and a kitchen [*inaudible*]. It was tough.

*Did many of the women that worked at the plant, did they have a job before the plant was open, or do you think that was maybe their first job outside the home?*

I think most of it was their first jobs.

*Do you think a lot of them wanted to continue working after the war? Or did a lot of them want to return home and stay and work only inside the home?*

I think it was the beginning of the women starting to want to get out and work, especially the single ones. How else could they buy socks?

*Were there labor shortages at any time?*

Well, most everything was channeled into the defense industry. Northwest Airlines was modifying airplanes and all of the other metal shops, they had war contracts, and there was practically nothing built for civilian use. Everything was channeled toward the war. Certain places would make parts for machine guns. I think it was almost 100 percent.

*Did the plant ever run out of people? Did they ever need people to come and work?*

I don't think so. That was a good job out there. That was a high paying job.

*So people wanted to work?*

Yeah.

*Were there any controversies in the community about who the plant hired or who they didn't hire at all?*

I am not aware of any that I heard about. Most of the people were working in Minnesota at that time. Remember, Minnesota was an agricultural state, had a lot of farms, and the Twin Cities was not near as large as it is now, and (pause) the people from the farms was coming into the cities to get jobs. I don't think there was any controversy of any kind. Like I mentioned before, there was no other races here in the Twin City area to speak of. Black people were an exception, rather than now where they're 20 percent of the population. I just don't think there was any controversy that I can think of.

*What happened to people that lost their jobs at the end of the war at the plant?*

Well, I suppose that as soon as they stopped the war production, then it's like my case, I went to work right away [*inaudible*] my soap business to get it going, and I presume that other people went back to wherever they'd been working and they were getting back in the business again. Things just started up again.

*How did the community change after the war?*

In what manner are you referring to?

*In any way. Was it a boon town after the war, or was it difficult to get started again?*

Well, everything that you wanted to buy was at a premium. I'll tell you that. See, they hadn't built any refrigerators for four years. If you had one that died in those four years, you either patched it up or went without. And so there was a big pent-up demand for almost anything you could think of.

*You said earlier that a lot of people didn't spend a lot of money during the war. Then when the war was over, they had money. Were they ready to spend it?*

Yeah, they were ready to buy something. They all needed something. And prices started going up about that time, too. I don't remember the rate of inflation at that time, but I know that I paid \$785 for my Ford car new in 1940, and it wasn't long after the war they were up around \$1000. Prices went up. The more people that want something, the more prices go up. But that boon period kind of went on for four or five years.

*Did you begin working there when they were still constructing part of the plant?*

Well, when I first went out there, they were reconstructing some of the stuff that they had already put in.

*Why were they doing that?*

Well, it didn't work the first time. The thing I remember mostly was the heating system. They had the big steam lines, and they had put them up on top of the ground, these great big pipes and they'd be all over the place. They'd just run steam from the central boiler, and run these pipes, and in the winter time, it got too cold for them. So they were in the process from taking them from up in the air and digging them down in the ground. That's the only thing that I remember that was happening, as far as reconstruction. The buildings that they built were all the same. I don't know whether that was the exact reason for it or not. That was probably what made to sense to me, anyway.

*Was most everyone, would you say, proud of the war effort?*

I would say that everybody did their job. Wasn't much else they could do. Either you had to do that or join the Army, one of the two, at least for the men. Women didn't seem to get involved in the service very much.

(End of Interview)  
(End of Side 2)

**LAURA PETERSON**  
**September 20, 1994**  
**Mounds View, Minnesota**  
**Deborah L. Crown, Interviewer**

*Today is September 20th, and I'm interviewing Laura Peterson.*

*My first question, where were you living when you heard the plant was going to be built?*

I have to think about that. I was living in South Minneapolis--now it's a terrible neighborhood, but at that time it was an okay neighborhood. I don't remember the exact address, but it was on Pleasant Avenue South.

*Had you lived there for a long time?*

No. Probably two years.

*And what were you doing at the time? Were you working or going to school?*

Yes, I was working at--at that time they called it the Walnut Exchange--I was a telephone operator there.

*What was the area like at the time? Just the city in general, what was it like?*

It was nice, beautiful. You never heard about all these robberies, murders. There just wasn't anything like that.

*Did you lock your door?*

I'm sure we did.

*But the crime rate wasn't . . . ?*

No. At least it wasn't in the papers and we didn't hear it on radio. That was before television. And around that neighborhood, it was just fine, just fine.

*Do you remember what the area where the plant is was like during construction?*

No.

*Did you see it during construction?*

No. Well, when I first started, it wasn't complete. When I started working there, it wasn't complete.

*When did you start working there?*

In January of '41. I don't even know when they started building.

*I believe they started building it in late August of 1940. So they worked pretty fast. So there were some people working on construction that were there when you started working?*

Yes.

*Were they living right on the site, or were they . . . did you notice them?*

No. I'm sure they hired them. I had a brother that was working out there, but I think he would have been in the army, but he didn't pass the physical or something. So then he, to do his job, for the war, he came out there. He did have a job. He was a printer. But he gave that up and came out there. But he didn't start probably until '42.

*So you were working as a telephone operator before you started at the plant?*

M-hm, for Northwestern Bell.

*How did you find out about the job at the plant?*

Well, I'll have to go back to this. (She opens some paper.) This Mr. Carr, he was the one that started all of this, and his wife was working with me at the Walnut Exchange. He told her to get the best operators, or to give him the names of the best operators that she thought . . . I was one of them, and there was this-- what was her name? I have to look here.--(Long pause while she is looking for name.) Oh, Maxine Benjamin, she came from the Walnut Exchange, and there was another one, Lucille Genritt. There was three of us that was recommended, and Mr. Carr just had us take a physical and then we started.

*Before you started working there, what did you think it would be like?*

I thought I was going to make more money, for one thing. I thought it was going to be nice. You know, that was really going out in the country at that time. There was no Mound's View. There was New Brighton. A lot of these little places sprung up in later years.

*Was it a long drive?*

Yes, it was.

*How did you get there?*

By car. They had buses running, but I was fortunate that I never had to take a bus.

*Why did you want to work there instead of staying at your regular job?*

I just thought I was improving myself and doing something for the country. Sort of a lark, you know, change. That's all.

*Which facility were you at? Which building were you working in?*

The administration building. I think it was 105. Oh, I remember that. Gosh.

*And what exactly was your job at the plant?*

Just to be a switchboard operator.

*What was an average day like?*

It was the same as working for the telephone company. We had a break, a 15 minute break, and we had a nice, I guess you'd call, lounge or lunchroom or something, and we had coffee on all the time, and our chief operator did that. And . . . you know. It was more personal than working at the Walnut Exchange. It wasn't that many girls. So in that way, it was a little bit more fun, little more congenial.

*How was your job done? I don't really understand how that all works. I've never seen a telephone operator.*

Down here, when they pick up their phone, a light would show on here, and we'd say operator, answer it by saying operator, and then they'd either give us the extension number or a name that they were calling, and we had to . . . most of the calls, understand, were just in the administration building. But, of course, it was connected with all the plants, but we didn't have anything to do with the workers in the plant itself. Probably the foremans or something like that would use the phone, but the employees were not . . . they shouldn't use the phone, tie up the, the switchboard like that for personal calls, unless emergencies or something like that. But we had a doctor there, and a nurse was there all the time, and it was very professional, very.

*Was your job union or non-union?*

No, it was non-union.

*What were the working conditions like?*

Wonderful. (Chuckles.) You know, we had our own restroom, lunchroom, and Mr. Carr, he had his office there, and it was very, very nice. Really, really nice. We all got along so well together, even when, you know, we had a larger group of girls.

*How many of you worked there when you first started?*

I was one of the first ones.

*How many were there total then?*

Well, our chief operator was there, Mr. Carr was there, and then we three came, and then--I have to think--he was gradually interviewing, too. So that's how it increased. So there was not . . . this group here, we were the day group. And then when we left, see another group came on, but probably not as many. And then when they left, then the all night, then we came in the morning.

*But there was somebody there all the time?*

All the time, and more than one. Never just one.

*Was this the first time that you worked for a real big company?*

No, I worked for Northwestern Bell.

*Was the work stressful or not?*

Yes. When you worked, you worked hard, and it was. If you read this, they didn't at first have enough equipment for all the calls that we had to take care of. So you can tell in this article here that it was

stressful. [*Inaudible*] handle over 300 calls per hour, with a terrific strain on our mind and nervous system. That's how it was.

*Was there pressure to work quickly or not?*

No, I can't say . . . you mean from our chief operator or Mr. Carr? No, they never . . . No.

*But it was stressful I suppose when you have a lot of calls coming in.*

Yeah, you know. Yeah, you know, you get tense. Yeah.

*What do you think about your overall part in the defense effort?*

I did my part. (Laughs)

*You feel like you contributed?*

Yes, I did. Yes, I did.

*What do you think about the plant's role in the defense effort?*

Oh, I think they did a marvelous job. I really do. They, they really did. There's a little letter here that . . . he was a Private, and he wrote to--he was in Germany at the time--and he said 'to all workers at Twin Cities Ordnance Plant', and it was real . . .

*Why don't you read that?*

Okay. 'From somewhere in Germany to all workers at Twin City Ordnance Plant. We boys over here are very proud of you. In our drive through France, Belgium and Germany, I've noticed a lot of our ammunition comes from your plant. We know that the company and its workers are doing a wonderful, good and a big share of the burden that it will take to bring this war to an end. Now that we are fighting the enemy on his own soil, we must double our efforts. We will continue doing our best, and hope you continue doing as well as you have in the past. Or if there's a possibility of doing better, the boys over here would be grateful to you. Couple of things a man needs here is ammunition, and of course, mail. Wishing you a lot of success in the future. I remain Private Leonard Skibba, Company C-23rd Armored Engineers, APO 253, in Care Of Postmaster New York, New York.'

*That's nice.*

Yeah, for somebody over there taking the time to write a letter like that, that is nice.

*Did actually working there, did it make you feel closer to what was going on than say if the plant never would have been built?*

Sure, absolutely. See, I have to go back a bit. I was divorced, and when I started working out at the Twin City Ordnance, I had two sons. And my mother wanted me to move in with her, and then that's when I started in '41, and (pause) well, I had met this man, and he was--I think he went over in '41, too--well, at first he was in Camp Cook in California, and then he was--well, one time he came back. He had a furlough and we got married, and so I was very in to the war, because he was sent over, and he was in the Fifth Armor Division, and they were supposed to meet--this was at the end of the war then, toward the end--and they were supposed to meet the Russians, and the Russians were late coming through Germany, and so they

had to wait there, because they wanted to come in along with the Americans to show that they had fought, too. And it was, by that time, it was '45, and my husband came home in June, 1945.

*What other kinds of people did you meet working at the plant?*

Sometimes the fire fellows that worked in the fire department, once in a while they'd come in, they'd come in to see Mr. Carr, and they'd come in and talk to us, too, you know. People that worked in the building, they were always interested. They thought it was fun to come in and watch us. They did. I know a lot of them did.

*They'd just stand there and watch?*

Yeah, they'd just stand back and watch us (gestures). (Laughs) Yeah. No workers, that I remember, ever came in the building, but I do recall that once in a while some of the firemen would come in. So.

*Just to talk?*

Yeah, just to talk. If you were on relief, why you could talk with them, and, you know, was . . . that's what I say. It was so pleasant. It was all business in one respect, but again, it was a smaller, friendlier group. We were more personally involved with each other. When I was working at that Walnut Exchange, there was so many, you know, you got to know them, but not really personal. Only a few. But there, we were one big happy family. Really.

*What kind of things would you talk about?*

Well, we'd talk about the war, because some of them, their husbands were in the war, too. And we'd tell about . . . my husband used to write. I wrote every day and he wrote every day. Every day. Every day. And so all of a sudden, you'd get a big batch, probably six, seven letters at one time. Even more, and then I'd try to get them in the right sequence so that, you know. And the girls would talk about that, and everything.

*Did a lot of them have relatives over there?*

Oh, yeah, they did.

*Most of them, would you say?*

I'd say most of them, m-hm. They were involved in some way with the war.

*You said you had two children. What did you do with them during the day?*

I moved in with my mother and dad.

*So they took care of the kids?*

Yeah, during the day, yeah.

*What I'm wondering is was there day care?*

M-hm.

*There was no day care anywhere?*

No, nothing like that. It had to be, like I, living with my mother. I didn't have to worry about them. And I worked day hours, so I was with them in the evenings.

*Was that the case for a lot of other women that were there? Did a lot of them have children?*

I have to look at this, (chuckles) then I can remember. Yeah, there were. But I really can't say what they did with their children. I think I was the only one that was living with my parents. But they somehow managed. Somebody must have taken care of their children. Some of them weren't even married.

*Was there a plant or a company newspaper that you remember?*

Oh, sure. This came from something that came out every month, but I think this one came from a regular newspaper, *The Tribune* at that time. But we had . . . it was monthly.

*There was a monthly paper? Was it for everyone in the plant?*

No, just office, the administration, probably the foreman and some of the out in the plant, but I don't think the employees that made the bullets, I don't think they got it. I don't know for sure.

*What kind of articles did it usually have?*

Like this?

*Yeah.*

Like this. See, Mr. Carr gave this luncheon for all the operators. I don't know if we'd done something special or not. Basically they did things. We'd have these special . . . somebody's birthday. You'd bring your birthday cake, and we'd celebrate.

*That was all at the plant?*

Yeah, in our little lunchroom. It wasn't out of the building. It would be too hard to go into the city and have a luncheon or something. No, you had it right there. We had it in our dining room or rest room.

*Do you remember any morale boosting slogans that they had there, anything they used, a catch phrase or anything that they used to use?*

No. I don't recall if there was.

*Did the plant give out any awards, do you know, to people, like employee of the month or anything like that?*

I wouldn't say for sure. I don't know. But I think they did. Seems to me that they did something like that. I think it was some kind of a monthly reward, but that was mostly for the plant. I don't think it had anything to do with the office workers or the switchboard operators. Did anybody that you've interviewed before say that there was?



*They didn't recall anything. They didn't know, but I haven't really interviewed a plant worker yet, not anybody that actually made bullets. I haven't interviewed one of those people yet. What other kinds of people worked at the plant, as far as were there people of different race there?*

There wasn't in the administration that I remember, no. There was no Afro-Americans, but I couldn't say about the plant.

*Were there certain jobs that only women did or only men did?*

In the plant?

*M-hm. Or anywhere, where you were?*

No, they were all women.

*Where you were?*

M-hm.

*All women operators?*

M-hm.

*As a woman, how were you treated when you worked there?*

Wonderfully, sure. Fond memories of that part.

*How did your job end?*

My husband came home in June of '45, and he wanted me home. We had bought our own home then, and so I quit. I don't recall. I think that was in June of '45, and I'd say that they started cutting down. The war was over at that time, and they gradually cut down that way, but when I quit, it was because of my husband coming home.

*Do you remember the plant shutting down after the war was over?*

It never really shut down. That was--oh, what was the name of the . . . Mr. Horn, he was in (Onnoka?), and made bullets, and then he came and set up this one, and I think the name of the place when he was in Onnoka was just called Federal Cartridge, and of course, when he took over there, it was at Twin Cities Ordnance Plant. And I think they still have their place in Onnoka yet. I think it's still I suppose for hunters and probably some of these goons (chuckles) that have guns.

*How was the pay at the plant?*

I don't remember how much I got.

*But it was good?*

It was more than what I was making at the time for Northwestern Bell.

*So would you say that the pay was probably better for most people at the plant than anywhere else?*

Oh, I'm sure. I don't know about the plant workers. I had my brother working there, I don't recall that we ever discussed salaries. I don't think so. So I don't know anything about that.

*Did women make about the same as men for the same job?*

See, we didn't have any men. The only man we had was Mr. Carr.

*That wasn't in your department, then?*

Yeah. So I wouldn't know about the other office workers at all.

*Did many people or most people tend to save their money during the way, or were people spending a lot during the war?*

Hm-m. I didn't. I didn't. I was waiting for my husband to get home and to get on with my life, and he would send money to me. And I had a separate account that put in, so that we had a good down payment for our home.

*So you were saving for a house that you and your husband were going to buy when he came back from the war?*

Yeah, m-hm.

*When people did spend their money, what did they tend to buy during that time?*

You couldn't buy nylons. At that time, I guess they were rayons. There was a lot of things you couldn't buy. Foods.

*Certain foods you couldn't buy?*

You were rationed. My mother was given stamps that you could only buy so much meat a week, and for sugar. For a lot of things, and then once in a while . . . oh, and cigarettes you couldn't get. It was real hard, and then one of the stores downtown would say they got some stockings, and it would be just a madhouse. Everybody . . . and if you were working, maybe you'd ask somebody to go down and get them for you. Everything was rationed. You couldn't buy a new car. Gasoline was rationed, and like I say, a lot of food was rationed, because we had a lot of boys over there to feed. People had to do their part. Yeah.

*How did people in the town seem to get along with each other during the war?*

You mean back in the city?

M-hm.

Well, I was living with my mother and all the neighbors, they were all friendly. Everything was friendly. This is just different life now to what it was at that time. There's a lot more people here, and like I say, when I started to come here, to the plant, that was a long ways. Living in North Minneapolis, and there was just one main road going out there. That's a fact. I can't remember.

*What was the traffic like?*

Well, people would get . . . say you got out of the plant at 3:00, and then going home, there'd be a lot of cars on the road, but of course, nothing like now. Nothing.

*Did a lot of people move to the area to work at the plant, that you know of?*

No, I don't think so.

*It was mostly people from around here?*

From Minneapolis and St. Paul, that worked where I worked in the telephone office.

*What did people do for entertainment during those days?*

Go to a movie. That's all I did. On Sunday afternoon, I'd take the boys and we'd go downtown and go to a movie. We never did it during the week, though. Sunday afternoon, and we'd have Chow Mein after (chuckles). Boy, that was a big treat for them. They thought that was wonderful.

*To have Chow Mein?*

Yeah, got to a movie and have Chow Mein.

*Did some people gamble?*

Not that I ever knew of. About the war you mean?

*Did the plant of the community in general have recreational activities for people? Scheduled recreational things, like did the plant ever have like a company picnic?*

Not that I know. If they did, I don't remember. Or I never attended anything like that.

*Was there a higher incidence of illness or crime during the plant's operation, due to the large number of people?*

No. Like I say, it didn't have anything to do with the plant at all in the administration. There was quite a few people that worked there, a lot of different departments, but I never heard of anything . . . uh-uh.

*Was there a curfew in the town at all? Did people have to be in-doors at a certain time?*

No. We didn't have that. Like England, we didn't have anything like that.

*Did anyone dislike the plant because it made bullets that you heard of, or was the opposite true?*

No. I don't think so. I never heard, personally, no comments about making bullets. There probably would be now, but at that time, no.

*Did people protest the war?*

No. Not that I know of. They never had, like downtown, no. Uh-uh, no.

*How did the plant affect every day life? Did it have an affect on the outside world around the plant?*

No, I don't think so.

*What was housing like then? Like housing in the area? Were there housing around here then?*

No. This was out in the country. This was way out. Uh-uh.

*Did any of the plant workers live in any kind of . . . ?*

Well, they came from Onnoka, Minneapolis, St. Paul, I suppose some of them might have come from some of those towns north of here, because there were many, many workers there. That was a big operation. They just came from surrounding towns.

*Did many women work at the plant?*

In the plant itself? Oh, sure. There was a name that they called the girls. What was it that the nick-named them, all of them? It was one category. Gee, I wish I could remember. I can't.

*That they called them just at this plant, or all over?*

Oh, they did all in California and all the states, the women that worked in the plants . . . they did mens' jobs.

*Like were they called like Rosie the Riveter?*

Yeah, there you are. Something like that. That isn't actually what they called them.

*Something like that?*

Something like that. They were all considered that. Because they had to operate big machinery that ordinarily would be mens' jobs. The women did it. And they were proud of it. They were.

*Would you say that most of these women either worked before they came to the plant or just worked inside the home?*

I think they mostly came from home. That's what I think.

*Did you know women that did that, some of them that were housewives before they started?*

Oh, yeah, even the operators.

*Did they want to continue working when the war was over?*

No, I don't think so. Maxine Benjamin, she did. She got a job after at the Gray Company. She's the only one that I remember that did that.

*Were there labor shortages at any time?*

Oh, sure. We were always looking for employees. You know, the healthy young men, they had to go to war. So it was men that couldn't get in the army that came there to do their bit, and older men too that would have been too old for the war.

*But they all wanted to work?*

Sure. Yeah.

*How did the plant solve the problem of not having enough people all the time?*

Well, I don't know. They kept working 24 hours a day, making bullets. They'd make different size bullets, too, and bigger ones, too. There was a name for them. I think it was caliber or something like that. Probably they worked overtime when there was a shortage.

*Did the community change much when the war was over?*

Did it change? (Pauses to think.) Yeah, sure it changed, gradually, not overnight or anything like that, but gradually it changed, because you could get your silk stockings or your rayons or nylons, and you could get your sugar and stuff like that, gradually. And then they gradually started building cars again.

*They weren't building any during the war?*

Hm-m. Hm-m. When my husband came back, I had sold the car while he was gone, and so when he came back, we didn't have a car. So he bought a second-hand car and it was terrible. We had a lot of problems with it, and I think it was in '46 then that we got our first new car. And first you had to know somebody or there was something to get it. You had to know the right person. I can't just remember how it was, but . . . well, anyway. We got a new car.

(End of Side 1; Beginning of Side 2)

*This is Deborah Crown, interviewing Laura Peterson. It's September 20, 1994. This is Side 2.*

*These questions are more from the preliminary report that our historian wrote and that I read this stuff in his report, and then I came up with my own questions. Was there sort of a boom town during the war? Was it kind of a boom going on or not?*

Not here. It was after, gradually after the war.

*What was that like?*

Well, it seemed like more people came and then I think at the time, when the plant was opened, they considered that New Brighton. That is not so now. New Brighton is down further. Like Mound View, see these smaller places came.

*They weren't here before?*

No.

*This area that we are here?*

It was either woods or farms. We did live in Brooklyn Park. We lived in Minneapolis. In '55, I had a sister and brother-in-law that lived in Seattle, Washington, and they asked us to come out there, and by that time, my oldest son was married, and the youngest son had graduated from the University and he had been in ROTC, and he was a soldier in the army. And so we sold our home and all our furniture, and we moved

out to Seattle, and my first grandchild had been born, and after I was there for a while, I got so lonesome we came back. We came back for a visit, and then we decided that we were going back to Seattle and then move back here definitely. Why did I tell you that? There was a reason.

*Oh, about the area, about how they . . .*

Then when we came back, Brooklyn Center and Brooklyn Park,--that's on the west side of the Mississippi, and they were just developing a boom town, like you called it. So we moved from Minneapolis, we moved to Brooklyn Park, and then we were there for almost 20 years when we moved here. So that's how . . . and you don't know when you're going from one little area or town to the next. There might be a sign on the road 'You Are Now Entering Mound View', but otherwise, you wouldn't know that you're even out of Minneapolis. It's just spreading out.

*You said when you started working there, they were still constructing part of it?*

Oh, yeah.

*What was that like? Was it kind of a mess?*

It was a mess.

*I can imagine if people were coming to work and then . . .*

Yeah. Even in our place, like I told you before, we had a small switchboard and as it started growing, there was workmen in there installing larger switchboards.

*Was that hard to work around sometimes?*

No, we considered it fun. (Laughs). It's okay, see all the men pounding. I don't know. I guess we all enjoyed it. It was just fun.

*What else was that time like, because to me, that would be just nuts, if there were construction people everywhere and you're trying to do your job.*

I don't know. The girls or the women I worked with, we never thought anything of it. We really didn't. Never complained about it, never. Never. We just thought it was wonderful that they were making more bullets for the boys over there. Maybe now I wouldn't like it at my age, but when you're younger, everything is more or less fun. Something like that.

*Did you have to fill out a job application, or did he just hire you from the friend's recommendation?*

No, he just hired us. I told you we had to have a physical, but that was the only thing.

*That was it?*

M-hm.

*Do you remember when President Roosevelt came to visit the plant? Were you there then?*

I don't recall that. Did he? What year?

*I can't remember exactly. I don't have my little notes [inaudible]. He did. Oh, in 1942, on October I believe.*

I was there. I'd been working a year.

*I think the visit was at night.*

Yeah, now I remember.

*Was that in 1942?*

Oh, I couldn't say that.

*I thought it was October of '42.*

Probably, but I do remember that. Yes, because they had, on our little monthly bulletin, it wasn't well known. I imagine very few knew about it ahead of time, and I didn't happen to be working the night shift.

*Did you hear anything about it?*

Oh, yeah. That was a big topic. Now it's all coming back to me. It really was.

*What kind of things did you hear?*

Well, everybody admired President Roosevelt, and to think that . . . this plant, we need bullets. It wasn't like making the big tanks or all the other equipment that they had to have. We were small potatoes because of just making bullets. So they really thought it was really something when he came and visited. But, like you say, it was at night. And it wasn't anything that was public knowledge at all. M-hm.

*Did anybody you know get to see him or talk to him?*

Whoever was working nights must have known . . . I don't recall. I don't remember who, at that time, was working nights. I can't remember anything . . .

*Do you think his visit increased morale there?*

Oh, sure. Sure. Absolutely. Because like I say, it was really something out of the ordinary for him to come to our little plant.

*Did the rationing of things, did that bother you? Was that a problem?*

Well, it didn't for me. My mother, she was the one, and my dad. To get the food, you know, we came . . .

*Were people upset with that, or were they more patriotic?*

No, more patriotic. You never heard people complain. I never heard people complain.

*Never. Anyone?*

I don't recall anyone. No, because you were helping. You were helping the war effort, to bring those boys back. And like now, well, hey there . . . well, they did go over there, but they were thinking there would

be a war. And you know how the wives and mothers, they felt terrible about them. And you never heard that.

*You mean you're comparing it now with the situation in Haiti?*

Yeah. We were more patriotic, I guess.

*Like people would, you're saying that now people, they don't want to send anybody anywhere?*

Yeah.

*But back then people weren't like that at all?*

No, not during World War II. I don't know about World War I, but World War II. And then if you had somebody in the service, you put a flag in your window. One star was one boy and maybe mothers had two sons, and they'd put two stars. And then if one of them was killed, they put a gold star. That was sad. If I think about it, I could cry right now. No, people were different. People were different. You never heard the government owes you a job or something. They have so many reasons for things. They call it racism and different things. You never heard about anything like that years ago. It's too bad. And there was Afro-Americans, but there weren't as many as there are now, at least . . . there were Chinese people I remember.

*Did people all seem to get along?*

Sure. I'm French, and both my mother and dad . . . my dad's parents came from France. My mother, she was half and half, French and English, and over on Northeast Minneapolis, there was a colony of French people. And there was another area where they were all Germans and Swedish. Of course, they say Minneapolis, we are Scandinavian, Peterson, my name. And then there were some Finlands, and they congregated in an area. No problems. No problems.

*Everybody seemed to get along no matter where they came from?*

Yeah. M-hm, yeah. It's a different thing now.

*Some people have maybe indicated the most dangerous part of working at the plant was getting to work. Were there accidents at the plant that you heard about, or did it seem pretty safe?*

Of course, you know, where I worked, it was safe.

*Did you get emergency calls? Were emergency calls routed to you ever?*

No. There was a nurse and doctor.

*Oh, did they call them directly?*

Yeah, m-hm. It would probably go through the switchboard, but we didn't handle anything like 911, like that, no.

*Did all the calls in that whole plant go through you?*

M-hm, m-hm.



*So somebody would call asking for and then you'd transfer the call there?*

M-hm, m-hm. Yeah.

*Was it dangerous to get to work?*

[Inaudible].

*Traffic wasn't like it is now?*

Oh, no. No, no, no, no, no. Hm-m. They came different roads in. On Loop North Minneapolis. There was just this one road that came to the plant.

*Do you think that your life was changed permanently because of the war?*

No.

*Did it have a big affect on your life?*

No. After I remarried . . . I used to worry about my husband, but (pause) . . . No.

*How about was clothing different? Did women start wearing different clothing when they went to work?*

Hm-m. You just wore an ordinary dress.

*But didn't have any stockings?*

No. Cotton or something like that. It was rarer that you could get a pair of rayons. I don't think they even had nylons at that time. I think it was all rayon socks.

*But it was hard to find that?*

Yeah, you couldn't just go to a store and buy a pair. No, they'd get a shipment and then they'd have it in the paper, and women would flock to get them. And sometimes you didn't get them. And you were only allowed so many pair. You couldn't buy a dozen pair or you couldn't get somebody . . . where you'd buy a dozen for yourself and a dozen for me. You couldn't do that.

*Is there anything else that you can think of about that time that maybe I didn't know to ask?*

Like I say, it was very, very pleasant working there. Everybody was so nice to everybody. And you were just treated wonderfully. Mr. Horn, he'd come and visit us and you'd sit and have coffee, and you'd talk, and he was always proud of his operators. He was an elderly man. I'm sure he wouldn't be living today. They were doing some work on the building next door, and you hear those big trucks coming in.

*So even he came down?*

Oh, yeah. I think he'd come and visit us twice a week. But he'd go around the plant. He had a car, and he'd go around. It was a big area with all those . . . I don't know. Have they taken down any . . . they must have taken down some of the big plants, haven't they there?

*I think they have removed some buildings. I think they're presently in the process of selling some of their equipment. A lot of it's gone.*

Doesn't Federal Cartridge, aren't they still operating there in . . . ?

*There's some people that are still there. Yeah, I think they're in the process of selling their equipment. They're not making anything right now. What do you think of that? Do you think that it's a good idea that maybe it should be closed or not? Or do you think it should stay?*

I hope we never have to have another war like that. (Pause) I don't know. When the time came, when they were needed, they sure did things in a hurry. Everybody cooperated and it was just like overnight that the plant was in operation. It didn't take long.

*And that was in the winter, too, when they built it.*

Yeah.

*What was that like, in the winter? They were building in the winter? Was there snow?*

Well, I started in January of '41, and there wasn't, even in the administration building, there was a lot of offices that . . . they were building, too. When they'd finish an office, then they'd hire the people, whatever they had to do, and in the back, the plant just grew, just kept growing and growing. So did the switchboard, grew right along with it.

*Did they work . . . ?*

Twenty-four hours a day.

*On construction even? They were building the plant at night?*

Oh, yeah. Yeah. Twenty-four hours a day. Like I say, everybody did their bit, helped, because the young ones, in good health, they were taken away. Well, like my brother, I can't remember, there was some little thing that he was rejected, and he could have continued working at the printing plant, but he quit on his own and volunteered to go out there [and] work.

*Did a lot of people have that attitude?*

Sure, they did. Everybody that I ever came in contact with were what you'd call patriotic and wanted to do everything they could. Yeah. Yeah.

*Is there anything else you'd like to add? Any interesting stories?*

It was fun talking to you, and bringing back memories for me. I know yesterday afternoon, I was thinking about it, and I just had it on my mind in the afternoon and evening, and of course, this morning again.

*They good memories?*

Yeah, m-hm. I was so glad that I found those pictures there, because I know there's a lot of them that are dead in there, too. Our chief operator, she died a few years after the plant closed. She's the one that's sitting next to Mr. Carr there. She's sitting right next to him.

*You're sitting next to her?*

M-hm.

*You were giving a luncheon for him in this picture.*

We were? I thought he did it for us.

*Well, maybe they have the caption wrong. They say 'The telephone operators at the Twin Cities Ordnance Plant at New Brighton, Minnesota, gave a luncheon for their chief, D.W. Carr, Superintendent of Plant Communications.'*

Well, I know he did, too, though. We celebrated birthdays, we celebrated . . .

*This almost looks like a birthday. There's presents in the back there and a birthday cake.*

We had a regular little kitchen there.

*Who else got to use that break room?*

They had to be in the operating room.

*Oh, that was just for you, huh?*

No outsiders. Yeah. We had our own restroom and it had . . . at that time, you didn't have these automatic coffee makers, but our chief operator, she was always in charge of coffee. There was always coffee, fresh coffee. When you'd have your break and want to sip on a cup of coffee. Different hairdo's.

*Could you sit at your switchboard eight hours?*

Oh, no. We had a lunch hour and we had reliefs. They called it relief. It amounted to about 15 minutes. One girl, that's what she'd do--leave.

*Was it ever hard on your back or anything?*

No. We were young.

(End of Interview)

**TED SETH**  
**September 20, 1994**  
**New Brighton, Minnesota**  
**Deborah L. Crown, Interviewer**

*Today is September 20, 1994, and I'm speaking with Ted Seth.*

*Where were you living when you heard the plant was going to be built?*

In New Brighton. No, we had a hardware store in Cannon Falls, and we were running a hardware store down in [inaudible] before the war come along, and then we heard about the plant going to be built. And I had seen that they advertised for engineers. They were short of engineers. And so I went up to Fossier Tower and told them I was a graduate of metallurgy from the School of [inaudible] at the University of Minnesota. And when they heard that, they said, "Well, how soon can you leave on a trip to the Frankford Arsenal for a little training?" They wanted to hire me for this job out here in the metallurgical department, and I went the next week [inaudible], with a few others that were getting training the same way. And we were there for about a month. And before Christmas time we came back, and then about the middle of January, when they first opened the plant . . .

*This is 1942, then?*

It'd be '42, yeah. January of '42. And I was there when they turned over the first [inaudible] machine. But then we moved up here. My wife stayed down in Cannon Falls and ran the hardware store while I was up here alone, and we got permission to get critical material, so I converted a little shed into a house that we could live in, and it turned out to be a good little house in New Brighton. And that's how I came to New Brighton.

*What was this area like when you first moved here?*

It wasn't much different than it is now, except we lived a lot different in those days. The prices were a lot different. But it is a little more treacherous living anywhere in the United States now. But otherwise, it was about the same. Of course, a lot of new houses came in, but there was no big changes except the center of New Brighton moved over to Silver Lake Road, but that was just by attrition of the buildings of the original town and then [inaudible] built up in the new area. But that wasn't very big anyway, [inaudible]. That's about all I can think of that way.

*Did you have any friends or relatives in this area when you moved up here? Did you know anyone?*

No. No, we didn't know anybody. [Inaudible] to us.

*So you moved here first by yourself?*

Right.

*And how soon after that did your wife come up here?*

She came up here in I guess about the summer of '42. We closed out the store in the spring of '42, because you couldn't get anything to sell because people had to have priorities and nobody could buy anything.

*Why was that?*

The war. The government took all our guns and ammunition and knives and certain types of things they might use in army training and so forth, and you couldn't own . . . metallic things were held down. You couldn't produce them. So you couldn't depend on manufacturing anything because of the restriction.

*So is that why you closed your store?*

Oh, yeah. We couldn't sell anything. If you can't sell anything, you can't buy anything. And so we closed it up. And then she came up here in the spring, and then we built our little house, a conversion. And she was a school teacher, so she went into teaching around this area and she was teaching until she retired way up in the mid-sixties, latter '60s.

*How did you feel about having to close your store?*

Oh, it didn't bother me too much. In some ways, we came out pretty good. We bought a store that was run down and we built it up and stocked it up pretty well, and I did some special type of buying. Rather than buying according to the wholesale houses, what they wanted me to sell, sticking with certain wholesale houses, which is convenient, I didn't think that this was the best way. I wanted to buy the best stuff. I was conscientious and I wanted to buy the best material to sell to the community. And I found I could do that best by buying what I wanted from different ones, depending on what they had best, the best materials they had at the better prices. So buying from a number of sources, I could do a better job supplying for the neighborhood. This which we did and it worked out very good.

*What were the other people moving to this area like? Were there other people that moved to the area, too, like you?*

Well, there must have been. I wouldn't know, because I was busy all the time working, but there were new people that came into the plant, just as I came in, on account of other plant. The plant had to drag a lot of new people in, and I don't know what they were like. I didn't meet them.

*Were you here for the construction of the plant?*

Oh yeah.

*What was that like?*

That was quite interesting. A fellow by the name of Carl Westerberg and myself probably really designed the building that we worked in. I was the chief metallurgist and he was the chief chemist, and we together figured out what we might need for space and so forth, and so we designed the layout of the laboratory. The last details of it, of course, was done up by the builders, but the general areas required was up to us. And so we got in at the very beginning of the building. We built the building that we were going to work in. And we hired all the people in there. We interviewed them, I did, for the metallurgy, and for the test lab, testing all the metals coming into the plant for use. There were two divisions in the metallurgical department--the control labs in the plant that controlled the cartridges being made. But ours was the inspection laboratory, the main laboratory, which checked all the material coming in and checked into all problems in the plant that might be metallurgical. We'd have to get in there and see if we could solve it. And this we did. And this was very interesting.

*What did the area look like while they were constructing it? What was it like to be there when it was being constructed?*

Well, it was big. You know, it was new. [*Inaudible*] I didn't know. Well, nobody, even the people living here, wouldn't know much what it looked like, because it was quite wild. It was quite wild country. But it was cleared out, and that was before we come. Because it looked like ordinary land when they were building it. It looked like any other section area, with materials and lumber and whatnot piled here and there. And there were several different buildings over quite an area.

*Did most workers live around town, or were they living right there?*

Oh, no. You didn't live in the area. They must have been living in the town here. I really wouldn't know too much about where they lived. There were so many of them, you know.

*How did the construction people seem to get along? Were there a lot of problems that you heard about between construction people?*

Not so much between the construction people, but I heard this thing between the construction people and the people running the plant.

*And what was that like?*

Not too good. I had my problems there, too.

*Why is that?*

You want to hear it all?

*Yeah. (Mr. Seth sighs.) If you want to tell.*

Well, give names?

*Sure.*

Johnny Horn. He was from the Federal Cartridge Corporation in Onnoka, as you know. And he was the kingpin out there, and he let people know that he was interested in saving a lot of money, to the extent even to [*inaudible*] that a note came through to the heads of the department, [and] he said from this certain date on, the office supply department will not issue new pencils unless they turn in the used stub, which can't be over two inches long. Or something on that order, that length. This is how much [*inaudible*] saving. That's an example of saving. But there was many other things that was far from that. Because this was a cost plus plant, and the more it cost to run that plant, the more the Federal Cartridge made. They were running the plant. So there was many things. I couldn't remember all of them, but I heard a lot of places where they were doing things that the people knew was not the cheapest way of doing it. All I was in was in the metallurgical part of it. And we ran into a difficulty out there. They had it almost from the beginning. The quality of the shells is the problem. They were having trouble. They were not passing inspection. They were not standing up to the requirements of the shells.

*When was this? When the plant first opened?*

No. Well, from the very beginning, they couldn't do a . . . of course they should have been increasing the quality as time went along, and we weren't. They would probably to a degree, but not what it should have been. They had soft heads. A problem was the heads were too soft and they'd expand, and that would allow

the primers to fall out and they'd jam the machine gun. So it was practically all rejections. Up to about 80% was rejected of the stuff. And so this was a big problem to find this, what it was all about. And everybody's supposed to get in there and pitch and find out if it was in their department, the various engineering departments. So I was in there from the metallurgical department, because if it was the metallurgy, it was my area, but we didn't know that going in. So they had to come in and find out if we were involved. And I found that the metallurgy was really involved. So I had a job of . . . to me I had to see if I could find a way of making a stronger cartridge that would stand the test, and we had the stuff from Frankford Arsenal to match. And their stuff stood up well. And ours was way down. But I found out what the trouble was. The heads were soft and they would expand when they fired. So it was to harden that thing to make it strong so it didn't do this. So in order to do that, in my investigation, I realized I had to harden that head, and that meant cold working, more cold working, in the finished cartridge, and the only way you could do that was by changing the amount of working of the steel in the process. And to do that, that involved the tooling. That was not my department. That's the tooling engineers was something that was mechanical. It was mechanical engineering. Because [inaudible] metallurgy, the quality and material in the shell. So I didn't say anything to anybody but just went ahead and designed the punches and dies for the draws, the first, second, third, fourth draws. All of these things around in such a way that I figured that I would get more cold work out of the shells. And so I did this. It was over quite a period of time. I tired this and tried that, and I carried little batches around by hand to carry it through myself, because there was things I couldn't turn over to any of the people that were working for me. Mostly were girls in inspection work. So I had to do it myself. And finally I got a bigger bunch and I got a little improvement and then I got a better improvement, and finally I got permission to shut down the plant. And I waited for a half-an-hour, cleaned everything out, and I put through 100,000 cups into the first draw machine and started through with this method of new tooling, and of the four draws that they had, I cut out one draw. So I only had three draws, which gave it more work and divided up the work in each one, and all the way through to the finishing of the cartridge case, and then we ran through 100,000 and followed that all the way through, and I identified them by grinding the date off of the back of the cartridge case. So I identified the date and so forth, and so this would be a permanent mark, identification of them, so you wouldn't get it mixed up with the other stuff. And this 100,000 went through and when that was all done and completed, I found out that we had to punch cards, punch in and punch out. Although it had nothing to do with our time -- we weren't paid by the hour, but we had to punch in and out anyway. And I found that when I punched out, I was just six minutes, or one-tenth of an hour, short of 24 hours.

#### *Working on that one problem?*

Right straight through, 24 hours on that thing to get it. I've got some of the samples of the shells right here. But then that's another half-an-hour and cleaned it all out, then went back in regular production. But these were all tested and weighed and gone through the finished job, all except loading them up. But we loaded them later on, and tested them to see how they would stand up, and they were standing up so well, that they were blowing up the machine guns that we were shooting them in. We blew them up. We had the cartridges loaded with the hottest powder we could get, and then we used tracer cases, bullet cases, and filled them full of lead so it made them real heavy, almost twice the weight of an ordinary bullet. This is to put high stress on it, to build up the power when they . . . and that's why we were blowing up the machine gun. They couldn't take it. And the cartridges were taking it. Went up 62,000 pounds per square inch, and they were holding it. So I knew what they were doing. And they were all completely tested. Then about the idea of the companies, I was later called in, in the latter part of the [inaudible] time, by the head of the engineering department. After everybody else was gone, he called me in to talk to me and wanted to know what it was all about, and he wanted my resignation. And I says, "Why?" And I got a little gobbledy-gook, and anyway I finally said, "No," I says, "I will not give [inaudible]. I will stay with this job, this project, problem we have, until I'm all satisfied it is all done, completed and tested and all reported, and then I will leave because I have a job waiting for me at Honeywell." And I said, "I'll be gone, but until then I want to stay with . . ." and I did. I stayed and I finished that job. And I did finally go. So I knew why they wanted me to resign

and why everybody was out of the office before I was asked in to talk to. I won't mention the name. They probably know who it is.

*Why did they want you to resign?*

It's a cost plus. The more it costs, the more they made.

*And you were saving them money?*

Yes. The head of I think it was 101, one of the plants anyway, had run this test, and they went into it, he had made a study of it, the cost of that method, and he said it would have saved them I forgot how many thousands of dollars a week, this new way, because it's a cheaper way. Not only cured the problem, but done it in a cheaper method. And it saved a lot of money. And this was the trouble. So the plant manager, he would have thought it was a good deal, but it seemed that Federal Cartridge itself was not too pleased in the fact that it was cheaper to make. And it cured the rejects. There were no more rejects. What they did, if they continued with that thing or not, I don't know, because I went over to Honeywell. I was gone.

*When was that?*

It should have been about the latter part of '43 or the beginning of '44. But I think it was '43. Yeah, it'd be in '43.

*How did you find out about the job being available at the plant, again?*

I think it was my wife that happened to notice an ad in the paper.

*What paper was that?*

Probably [inaudible]. I don't think it was over the radio. I think it was in the paper, but it was just an ad. Announcement of the ordnance plant being built up here and that they were going to be needing engineers.

*And where did you go and apply for the job?*

Up on the Fossier Tower.

*Were there other people applying, too?*

Oh, there was, yeah, at the time. I don't know if there was anybody else in the office at the same time or not, but, of course, there was a lot of them. And when I went down on the train there, I happened to be on there with one of the fellows that was hired, and on the same trip with me was a salesman from a big steel company in Wisconsin that was selling me barn equipment.

*To your hardware store?*

In the hardware store, yeah. I knew him very well, a very nice fellow. So we had quite a time.

*And he ended up working at the plant, then, too?*

Yeah, yeah. He was in the ballistics department.



*Before you started working there, what did you think working at the plant would be like?*

Oh, I had no idea. It came up so fast I didn't get any chance to think about it, what's going to happen. It happened, and then I had to think about what happened. But it was all right. I enjoyed it. I liked the job. It gave me a responsibility that I never had a chance to have before, because nobody knew anything about metallurgy. So I didn't have any bosses. There was nobody [that] could check me at all. I had to find my own problems and solve them and do whatever that could be done. I had to do it myself. And it was really interesting. And I came out smelling like a rose, because these ammunition I [*inaudible*] really did the job. Now, what Federal Cartridge did with it, I don't know. I didn't stay around.

*Why did you decide to leave your job at your hardware store and go to work there?*

Because of this job. I didn't have a job. We closed the . . . I couldn't sell anything. So they closed me down. The government really closed me down, so I went to work, indirectly, for the government, but directly, I was working for Federal Cartridge Corporation, because they were contracting with the government.

*Can you describe an average day of work there?*

I was in the laboratory, and of course, we were inspecting. We had a bunch of microscopes, and we would process the metal, slice them open and then polish them down, and etch the surface, chemically etch the surface to bring out the structure of the stuff, and then they had girls reading these things on the microscopes, and they did the same thing with some of the steel and the other things that came in. Most of it was the brass that was coming in for the cartridge cases that was of concern, and they would look at that stuff and see if it was good. And we could tell whether . . . because they were told what to look for and the grain size and cracks and other impurities in the brass and so forth. So all this stuff was coming in. It was a laboratory type of thing, just routine testing, and then we had a big metalliscope, a large photographic microscope. I forgot the proper name for it. It's a metallagraphical, optical microscope, which you can take photographs . . . photographic scope, so we could examine stuff real fine [*inaudible*] small . . . And any kind of questions that we couldn't tell in the laboratory, with the regular microscopes that the girls had--they were only about 80 power--but this thing went up high. And we'd process our own film for this experimental work. But that was all. We didn't do too much of that. That was just on an experimental basis. The girls did this other kind of work. And then there was this woman in there, Mrs. Bloher, I think Bloher was her name, and she handled all the office work. There wasn't too much office work, but she handled whatever [*inaudible*]. She was real good. I was using the lab. All the experimental stuff that was generally in the laboratory was turned over to the individuals to do all the work on. I did all of that work myself, because it was too important, too critical, and I wanted to know everything as it was developing. I wanted to see what was happening. So I prepared all my own stuff, designed my own stuff and then tested my own, carried it all the way through.

*And the other people in the lab just worked for you.*

Just routine, you know, checking everything, reading the microscopes or preparing the specimens for it.

*Was everything that went into that office checked by you before it went out?*

No, no, no. No, no. No, they knew what it was like. Only if stuff came through that they questioned [*inaudible*] it was any good they'd probably show it to me, have me come to the microscope and look at it. If something was bad, I'd say take it out. We'd take it out of [*inaudible*]. There wasn't too much stuff that was rejected. We got a few [*inaudible*] copper in it, and we found a crack now and then, but it was nothing too big.

*And then where did that go after your lab was through with it?*

Then it would go into the various processing plants and it would be fed into the first draw mill, first draw press, and be formed into cartridges.

*Was your job a union job or a non-union job?*

No, a non-union.

*What were your working conditions like?*

Oh, they were good. We didn't have any problem with that.

*What kind of hours did you work?*

Normal eight-hour, but 8:00 to 4:00. That was your normal schedule. I didn't stay over too many times, except sometimes I might stay over to finish a job, a little overtime. Of course we didn't get any overtime. It was all on salary, but this one time, that one day that I went 24 hours.

*Was everyone on a salary?*

Well, of the engineers I'm sure were, but the people at the plant, I imagine it's hourly. I didn't have anything to do with that.

*Was this your first time to do this kind of work?*

Oh, yes. This was brand new.

*What was that like?*

As I say, it was one of the most interesting things that I've ever done in the mechanical field. Because most of my work has been that way, experiments of working out problems, looking for troubles and curing them, and that is real good, nothing routine about that.

(Recorder is turned off and back on. There is a pause.)

This is what I wanted to show you. Look at the back of any of these others. See the identification on them, the year and so forth? All the cartridges have that. You notice on that one?

*That one doesn't have that on it.*

Doesn't have any on it. This is one of the 100,000 that was run after they shut down the plant and started that day when I worked 24 hours and made 100,000.

*So we're looking at a bullet in a shell right now, and we're looking at a couple of them that he's shown me. And these other ones, why don't you talk about them again here? What's on here?*

TW '42 or '43, depending up on the year it was made. See 1942 from Twin City Arsenal. TW is Twin City. And so that's identification for the year, the plant that made them, and the year that it was made. TW42 or 43.

*What's this part of the shell called?*

That's the back of the shell, of the cartridge case.

*And that's where they'd stamp that?*

Yes, on the back.

*And where do they stamp that? In your department?*

No. We didn't do any work. That was done in the plant, after it come off the line, then it goes through the heading machine, does a last flattening of the back of the cartridge case, then that has the little dies in it that at the same time puts that die in it. It's the last operation on that case does that.

*And this one doesn't have anything on it. And that's one of those 100,000 that you put in.*

[Inaudible] identify it so I know that's one of the 100,000 that we made. We had to know that when we tested them.

*Were these used?*

Because they were . . . we loaded them up so they matched the machine gun. Nothing could hold them up.

*So was that a problem?*

No, that was not a problem. We were just testing to see how much it would take. This cartridge stood up when we blew the machine gun up.

*So it's a good cartridge then?*

Yeah. If they did go, it went with the machine gun.

*Was this the first time you'd ever worked for a big company?*

No, not quite. I worked for--what's the name of the company?--Youngstown Sheet and Tube Steel Manufacturing Company, Youngstown, Ohio. I was an engineer with them in the laboratory. And from there, I went to Toro Manufacturing Company. Did some designing and metallurgical work for them, Toro here in Minneapolis. And then from Toro, from then, then I went into the hardware store. And we went into the hardware store for business experience just to see how it was to have a store. So that was kind of a big experience for me. But that really went real well. It started out poor, but it wound up good. And then from there, I went to the ordinance plant. And after that, there were a lot of other ones.

*Was your job stressful or not?*

No, not really. I knew it was an importance there. There was a type of a stress, but it was not a stressful stress, or whatever you want to call it. I wasn't pushed, because nobody could push me. Because all I could do was push myself, and I did push myself, but it was both mental and physical, but I liked it. So when you like it, it isn't bad.

*Was there pressure for you to work quickly or not?*

In a way there was. The quicker you'd solve the problem, the quicker you'd get in business, if they'd use it. I didn't know what I was going to get when I was working, if I'd ever get it or not, how it come out. I had to just estimate based on what I knew of the nature of metals and so forth, how they worked, what might be done to cure the problem, and I had to make a guess at it, and it was a costly guess to change all that tooling, when I tried it out, what I thought should be working, it did. So it was really gratifying.

*What do you think of your role in the defense effort?*

I don't know. That's a hard one to say. Pretty small thing from all the whole defense effort in the whole United States, it'd be pretty small. However, for a single job, for a single person, in a specific job of any kind, it was important. Either this stuff works or it doesn't work. However, there was good stuff being made. All the other plants had the same trouble we did. Some a little bit more. And how they come out, I don't know. But Frankford Arsenal was making the good stuff. So I can't say that the war was dependent on us or anything like that, but our portion of it was practically zero until this was cured. And if they used it, after I went, I don't know. But I know I left them with some ammunition that would stand up with loads sufficient to break up the machine gun. And we pressure tested them. They made pressure tests, and the normal test--well, it should be about 48,000 pounds per square inch--and actually, in use, they usually come out about 42,000, but to have it come out about 48,000 is pretty good there, and at about 55,000 pounds is kind of a standard figure at which pressure, an ammunition of this kind, in an ordinary rifle, becomes dangerous to hand use, for hand use. Fifty-five thousand is liable to blow up the gun. And this stuff was standing up to 62,000.

*Was that dangerous for the soldiers to use them?*

No, this was safe for the soldiers to use.

*Did it blow up their rifle?*

No. It would. [*Inaudible*]. They don't get it because that ammunition is rejected. That's why they weren't getting the ammunition. We weren't supplying ammunition when it was that high. We supplied some of it. I think it was up to about 80 percent of it at times was rejectable. And this was our problem. To find out, to cure this.

*And that was the cure then?*

This would be the cure.

*What were the other people working at the plant like? What were your co-workers like?*

We didn't have too many, just the bosses above me. And I had a little difference of opinion, not with them, but they didn't say anything to me, but I know they weren't (Mr. Seth is tapping on the table) what they could have been.

*You mentioned that there were some ladies that worked there.*

Oh, yeah. In the laboratory. Yeah, they were just reading the microscopes and looking at the test pieces. And so this was a routine job.

*Did a lot of them have children, do you know?*

Oh, yeah. There were families. A lot of them were family. Some were unmarried. They were both, married or unmarried.

*Did they have day care for their children at the plant?*

Gee, I don't know. I didn't get into anything like that. Wouldn't know a thing about it.

*Was the plant segregated? Did women mostly stay with women?*

There were mostly women in the plant. I don't know, I think just because the women were available. The men were all working on other jobs. Why? I've often wondered why there were so many women that came into these jobs, but there were routine jobs on the microscopes. And, of course, microscopes and etching and polishing, preparing this stuff for the microscope. That was practically all girls in my department, [inaudible].

*What about in the rest of the plant? Were there certain jobs that only women did and certain jobs that only men did?*

There were certain areas where there was only women, that's for sure. But there was some jobs [inaudible] men. I don't know if there was any job where it was only men, really, even in the primer loading area, for the loading of primers. There were little special houses out away from the rest of the building. So if anything blew . . . they had the real explosive stuff there, and those roofs hung loose so when they blow in the little building, that roof would just flop open to relieve the pressure. So your building was made to take an explosion. I think it was mostly men in those things, but I don't know. There might be some women even doing it.

*Was there a newspaper at the plant?*

A regular newspaper put out by the plant? If there was, I don't remember of it. I didn't get any.

*Were there people of different races that worked there that you remember?*

Oh, yeah. Yes.

*Were there certain jobs just for them, or was it just widespread?*

No, there was no--what do you call it, not segregation, but attitude of dividing the various races. There was no division of races required by the plant that I know of. I don't think so. I know all the girls in the metallurgical laboratory, I interviewed them all myself. So they just came through me and I checked them out.

*Were there any morale boosting promotions, such as why we're fighting, like a moral boosting to get you for the war?*

Promoting the war effort, you mean? No, I don't think so. I never heard any. We were all busy doing our work.

*Did the plant get any awards?*

I doubt there were any awards given out at that time. They were too busy doing [inaudible]. At the end, there might have been more of that, after we . . . actually the war had been ending, the end of the war itself, then some of that might have come into it, but not during the war, that I know of.

*Did your ideas about working at the plant change with time, from the beginning?*

My attitude?

*Yeah.*

Well, a little bit, yes. It did after I . . . I didn't realize the nature of the plant, how their plant was run at the time. I never even thought about it, but later on, when I realized it was a cost plus and I began to see some of the things that the plant was talking about that they were trying to do, saving money, they really weren't, and I began to change my mind and realize it wasn't what it could have been.

*Because earlier you mentioned that Mr. Horn wouldn't give you new pencil unless you could show him . . . That seems to be pretty cheap, but then they didn't want you to save money in the manufacture of the stuff?*

They didn't mind my doing the work, running this thing, but the fact that it cured the problem (Mr. Seth is tapping on the table), this should be the boon any company would be tickled pink if you could save them money and knock your 80 percent reject down to practically zero, but that wasn't it. Because I was responsible for this, I was asked to leave. What does that tell you?

(End of Side 1; Beginning of Side 2)

*This is Side 2, September 20, 1994. Conversation with Ted Seth.*

*Do you remember when the plant closed?*

Well, no. I went out of there. I went to Honeywell. So I wasn't there when they closed.

*How was the pay at the plant?*

It was ordinary, ordinarily good. It was okay. I had no complaint on that.

*How was the pay, during that same period, of jobs outside the plant?*

I think they were about the same I imagine. I wouldn't know.

*At the plant were women and men all paid the same?*

Now you're getting into that racial deal, ethnic deal. I have no idea. I had no idea, but I'm pretty sure that they were the same. With any job, the type of the job, I imagine, would call for a certain pay and they'd all get it, except for the engineers. That's individual. And I was satisfied with my part of it.

*Did many people or most people tend to save their money during that time, or were they spending it?*

(Chuckles). I think they were about normal. [Inaudible] with anybody else except there was one gal that worked for me that I went with, she and her husband, period. Be sure of that. They were Chinese. It was Marvel Hung Chong was her name. She was related to the people who had John's Cafe here, from way back, in Minneapolis. They had a little Chinese gift shop up there in Minneapolis also, and later on, my wife, she [inaudible] together, she [inaudible], but while she was down there, we were up here. We would get together and they would take me into the Chinese place for dinner and introduce me to special Chinese [inaudible] that you never hear of, and they taught me the use of the chopsticks and so forth. The first time they did it, they had me served a pair of chopsticks which were polished marble, I believe it was, but their [inaudible] were hard and they were smooth, and they were ornamental, and I didn't know it. But they just gave them to me, and I tried eating with them and those things were slipping all around, and they showed me how to eat with them. They [inaudible] kind of razzing me because I was making such a mess with them, but finally they broke down and told me I didn't have an ordinary pair, because usually they're kind of a reed and they've got little grooves in the outside so they lock together while you eat with them. But these polished things that I had, you know no China man could eat with them. But then I'd take them out. They'd take me to that and I'd take them to the show, we'd get to the theater for the evening. So that's the only time . . . they seemed to be very ordinary.

*So what other things did you do for entertainment? You went to the movies or to the show? What kind of show?*

Oh, I didn't go too much. [Inaudible] out there at our home. We converted a house. I had a lot of work to do, [and I was] working many evenings till midnight.

*On your house?*

On the house, yeah.

*What were people tending to spend their money on during that time?*

[Inaudible] their homes. I didn't get into them too much, you know. I don't think anybody could answer that.

*What was the community like during the war?*

The community where we lived, New Brighton? Okay. It was quite a normal community. It was middle income people, I would say. There was one area--it was called Dog Patch--but that was just a few houses in one little area, but there was no wealthy areas that I know of. It was mostly mid-income people.

*Were there ever any problems between the people that had moved into the area for work and the people that had always been here?*

I don't think so. And another thing, we were kind of in the middle of a wooded area. We were all by ourselves. When I was at home . . . we had [inaudible] a few neighbors around, and they were good. Our neighbors were good and I think in that day they were, in general, much better than they are today. As time goes on, people are becoming more independent, less social, more cliquey and so forth. Matter fact, there's hardly anybody today--I won't say anybody--there's not too many people today that even know their next door neighbor.

*And was it like that back then?*

No. No. I don't think it was that. There were some that was that way, because that was only 50 years ago. Yeah, 50 years ago. So it was better than it is now by quite a bit. I didn't have to worry about getting shot if I drive downtown or drive around the highway here. Nothing like that.

*What do people generally do for entertainment during that time? Where did they go?*

I imagine the people were pretty well tied up during the war time. They were having double job, or having work to do, and I think the pressure of the war probably kept them from being as free as they would like to be, but I don't know. Maybe they had just as much time then as anybody else. Those that were there. Of course some of the people were in the Army, the men, but everybody was pretty well tied up, pretty busy in the war efforts of one kind of another, which probably kept everybody pretty busy. I don't know.

*Did they ever have any social things at the plant? Any dances or dinners or anything?*

No, not that I know of. Now, they may have, but I wouldn't know.

*Did people gamble?*

Oh, yeah. Yeah, I remember that. That's one of the things why they probably didn't do any other things around, because they did some gambling and talking in their time that they had to do it with. But they gambled on their check numbers. I remember that. One place where I remember--that's where I first heard of it, where it first started out that I knew of. They gambled on our check numbers, and that was a poker hand. The highest poker hand that you get out of the numbers on your check.

*Your pay check?*

Your pay check.

*This went on at the plant?*

Yeah. This is between the people. The workers did that themselves.

*And how would you go about betting with your pay check?*

You'd read your pay check, whatever your pay check. So, you had no control of it. [Inaudible] number's going to be on your pay check. Of course, many of them would be pretty close together, [inaudible] probably out of the same series of checks, but there was people of different departments there that were pretty well in there together, so because of that, their check numbers may vary quite a little bit, but whatever, you pick out the five--it was usually about six numbers and out of your hand, you pick out the five best cards--but there I think you had about six cards, or else they had a different system. Maybe they'd take the last five cards, then the numbers would change more. The last five numbers. And they would be the ones that you'd make your poker hand out of. And whoever had the best poker hand out of that, they win the pot. And there's be something like two [inaudible] each week. [Inaudible] a weekly deal. Weekly or monthly, whichever we got paid by. I think it was weekly.

*Where did this poker go on?*

Oh, in the office. Wherever, all over the place, anyplace. Mostly in the office area. I know [inaudible] in the shop where they make the bullet, manufacturing areas, if they did that or not, but I know in the other areas we did it.



*Were there recreational activities? You said there weren't really any that you knew of at the plant?*

No, not that I know of.

*Were there any in the community? Did they have dances?*

Well, of course, they wouldn't be in the plant. They would be separated from the plant. But the people who at night had to get home, they probably lived their ordinary lives after they'd get home, after working hours, but as far as the plant was concerned, there was nothing in the plant that I know of. I shouldn't think there would be. Because you can't get into that plant. You had to go in and out with your identification.

*Was there a higher number of people getting sick during the war because of the large amount of people living here that you know of?*

Anything critical that would be dependent on the plant, caused by the plant?

*Just caused by the number of people that were here, since there were so many people here, did it have an affect?*

Oh, I don't think that bothered anybody. Not that I heard of. There'd be no more crowding than ordinary plants when it's non-war time and outside of that area, anyplace else. Surely it was the same.

*How would you say the New Brighton area or maybe the Twin Cities area changed during the war, as far as people's morals and values?*

I don't think it would have changed anybody very much morally and I don't know why. I can't see that. Going back to your last question about any physical problems, I will say there was some people that were sensitive to brass, to handling brass. They got a little irritation, sometimes a little eczema or dermatitis from handling brass, but that was just because the people were allergic to it and were sensitive to these things, but it was no real major problem.

*Do you think the plant was a safe place?*

Oh, I think so.

*Did they talk to everyone about safety?*

I never heard of any regular safety programs. Well, they did in certain areas. Now, in the powder loading area, oh -- and I wasn't in that area, but I know they were really cautioned, told what to do and how to handle the stuff. Mostly it was how they handled the stuff, [*inaudible*] because they could blow it up.

*Did that ever happen?*

Oh, their little roofs would pop up every once in a while. They did. But this saved the people, because if the roofs didn't go up, the pressure would just about kill you, and if they blew, the roof would open up, I guess the door would pop open and so forth. I think I saw one pop. But this would be critical.

*Did the ideas about people's jobs change? Like maybe some people were now working a job in the city, as opposed to working in the field, working an agricultural job? Was that different for a lot of people that you know of?*

No, I didn't know anybody that had come from agricultural areas.

*How about you?*

I came from the hardware store. That was radically different, of course. I realize what it was. It was a normal thing for that type of thing. I knew it was mechanical work, forming the cartridge case. So I had an idea of what would it be like before I got in there. And it was. It was quite normal.

*Was there a curfew in the area?*

For what?

*To be in your house at a certain time at night?*

Oh, it had nothing to do with them at all.

*Not because of the plant, but just because of the war. Did they have a curfew here where you had to be in . . .*

Oh, you mean outside the plant. I don't think so. I don't think there was any curfew. I never heard of any that I remember.

*Did anyone dislike the plant because it made munitions that you know of?*

Not that I know of, no. I think people enjoyed the work. There was nothing too hard about it. It was just ordinary jobs to be done. They had to learn their job, and I think it was a normal operation that way.

*How did the war and the plant affect everyday life around here?*

Again, I have to speak for myself. It somewhat tied me down. Having to build that house at the same time put me under pressure all the time. I was busy all the time. [*Inaudible*], why after supper I would be working on the house or the car or something like that. I think it was quite normal for me. But other people . . .

*What about the community? Did they have to build new roads? Was there traffic problems? Did the crime rate go up because there was more people?*

No, I don't think it was that. Thinking about, most people were mostly restricted to a degree about where they went because that cost driving your car, and during that time, the biggest thing was the fact that we were under rationing, gasoline rationing. I remember they had signs on the cars: Is this trip really necessary? [*Inaudible*] people. They were talking to people about saving gas and people were using . . . they were allowed so much. [*Inaudible*]. I can't remember how the restrictions were.

*You could only get so much gas?*

So much gas. And then people were using some of their [*inaudible*]. It was some other material that they were using, burnable material, that they used for substitutes for gas, that they were using. It didn't work too good. It'd dirty up the engines and stuff like that, but I remember it just made a little difference in the people's traveling. People were restricted on their traveling by this. I remember that one the most.

*Was there any food ration?*

I don't think there was any rationing, but I think there was certain amount of shortages in various things. You wouldn't hardly know what when, but I don't remember anything special. See the farms would be

affected by farmers being taken off for the war effort; people taken out of these jobs and so that kind of hurt all of businesses for a while, and so this cut down on the outlet and prices go up and people would buy so much.

*Did many women work at the plant?*

Oh, yeah. It was mostly women.

*Would you say that a lot of these women worked outside the home prior to working at the plant, or was this their first job?*

I think the plant caused a lot of it. It wasn't only this plant, but all the war effort, in general, would draw a lot of people in the plant that hadn't worked before. They wanted the people and a lot of people went into working that didn't work before, especially women.

*Do you think most of them were housewives before?*

I think so. I think most of them would be housewives.

*What about after the war? What did they do? Did a lot of them want to keep working?*

Well, again, I was out of there before that.

*But did a lot for women seem to stay in the work force or did many of them just go back to being housewives?*

See, I wouldn't know. I wasn't there at the end of the time, but I am sure they went back. I'm sure there was a lot of them that were now so used to the working and the extra money coming in, and the prices were still up, that many of them were introduced to side work outside of the house, and it caused them to continue to do so. And they're doing it today. We've got a lot of it going today.

*Which minorities worked there?*

Which minorities?

*Yeah. Like you mentioned a Chinese women.*

Well, [inaudible]. [Inaudible] be a Chinese gal. She was a good worker.

*Were there any other minorities there?*

I'm sure there were, but I wouldn't know [inaudible] once in a while there'd be a German. [Inaudible] all these jobs that I've been on in engineering, a lot of it had been in departments where the women were the bulk of the people I . . . my last work was with Univac, Unisys now. There they had girls assembling stuff and the computer work, and they had them. I was working with a lot of them there. And I see this [inaudible] because I had a special [inaudible] taking advantage of those that were from other countries, because they seemed to be a little more conscientious than the people here. And I wanted to work with them and get them to accept me, to sell myself to them, so it'd be easier to work with them. Because I was writing up processes and the methods engineering and getting them to change from one process to another process at times and so forth. So when you're working with them, this is different when they make a change as to their daily routine, and a lot of the women are pretty good at routine stuff. Men don't take routine as well as women do. But some of these women that came from another country, I would go to them and talk to them, right off the bat, and find out what country they came from, and then I'd just casually ask them,

"Well, how do you say 'good morning' in your language?" And they would tell me. And then I would go and write it down, phonetically, the way it sounded to me in English, and the first time I had a chance to see that person, I would see that I'd get close to her and say, "(Mr. Seth says 'Good morning' in Russian.)" If it was Russian, I'd say "(Mr. Seth repeats 'good morning' in Russian.)" It means 'good morning'. Or 'good morning' in Dutch and that and Spanish, because I knew Spanish a little anyway. Swedish I knew well. But I found that this sell me to the . . . I got to know a lot of the girls through that just because I did this. It made it easier for me to work with them when I wanted to do something different, because they're a friend of mine. They're doing it on a friendly basis. I didn't have too much of this with them. We didn't have time. They were already in the . . . weren't new and coming in. They were already there. So that was just one time. Wasn't too many others. [Inaudible].

*Were there a lot of other minorities, like were there Black people there?*

Black, I didn't have any Black I don't believe.

*Were there others at the plant?*

In the plant there were Black people I'm sure. I never thought about it.

*Were most of them, do you think, from the local area, or did many migrate here for work?*

I don't think there'd be too many coming in because I don't know where they would go all of a sudden [inaudible] a lot of people in here.

*So you think they were mostly from the local area?*

I think a lot of them were local. The local people were taking advantage of the jobs, but there was a lot coming in, but I don't imagine there was too many Blacks, but I don't know why. They should come in on the same basis as anywhere else.

*Were there any labor shortages that you know of, where they needed people to work and there weren't enough available? Or were there always plenty of people there for work?*

They had plenty of people to do the job. They were hired for the specific jobs and the jobs remained. There were specific jobs all the time. The cartridges were made the same one day as they were a year from then. They're still made now as they were many years ago. The jobs were filled up and they stayed there. I don't think there was too many going in and out.

*Did many people that you know of lose their jobs there after the war?*

Here again, I was gone.

*Did you hear of anything in the community about that, though?*

No. I heard more about the engineers, about the heads of the departments, and there was only one fellow that I knew. This one fellow that I knew that was a salesman, that I told you about before, in the ballistics department. He went out of there. I knew him after he went out of there, [inaudible] because he lived in Wisconsin. I knew him afterward. I know he had some problems at the plant. He had some [inaudible] that he didn't like. He wasn't too specific about it, but I know he was having some problems with the people who were in the engineering, [inaudible] management.

*He was having problems with management?*

I think it was a little bit on that, about how they did it. I don't know specifically what it was.

*Did this community change when the war was over?*

I lived here afterwards, sure. I lived here. [Inaudible] worked with Univac till we went to Australia, we were in New Brighton.

*Did it change? Because you mentioned the rationing. Did they still ration?*

No, I don't think so. I think that rationing went out. It probably was for a while, but I don't know if it was really food rationing or the people were rationing themselves because of supplies. Probably, they were controlled more by supplies available than anything else. I think during that time was when margarine came into being.

*During the war?*

Yeah. I think it was during that war, if I remember. When we suddenly weren't going, everybody changed from butter to margarine.

*What about after the war was over?*

Then it [inaudible] margarine. Been margarine ever since. But they were introduced to it. It was a big change-over to margarine at that time.

*And when the war was over, were people's attitudes different that you remember?*

I don't know what to say. I mean people are people no matter what.

*Is there anything else that I may have left out that you think you could add? Any stories you remember, anything you want to talk about about your time there or about the war in general? Anything that could give somebody listening to this an idea of what it was like to be here then?*

No. Because other places that I've worked have been of a similar nature, like [inaudible] it's a closed area, and you have to sign in, signing out. Same thing at Honeywell, same thing at different places; not Toro, but other places like that. Even today, like in Univac, Unisys, it's the sign in, sign out, so I'm used to those kind of things that we did there. Anything special? Oh, there's probably some special stories, but I don't know just what they would be.

*What do you think about what should happen to the plant now?*

Well, they've been using it all the time. You know, there've been different companies . . . Honeywell was in there for a while. They took over part of it. Different companies have taken over different buildings. There's quite a number of buildings involved in the ammunition making, and I haven't been any really involved at all with any of it since then. We've been out to the plant and visited out there here about a year ago. We went and visited the plant. I saw some of the same old machines out there, but they weren't being used, and they're using a different thing, but they're using the space [inaudible] how they use it. This was just a tour through the plant. I went through the whole ground. It was the first time I ever went through the ground and realized how much ground there is there. But I do remember the plant itself, where we had the rifle range, the big test range, and a big hill built up to stop the bullets and the firing range building in back in the southeast corner of the property.

*That's where the firing range was located?*

Yeah. At Lexington and 96, had it in that corner. It was on Lexington there, where they had the firing range, and I got into that because we were testing our ammunition out there. I remember standing out there behind the big bunker that could stop the bullets, behind the bullets for the short range and *[inaudible]* long range stuff and we'd be out there, standing out in the open and we'd look at what they fired and it looked like they were firing right at us, and we stepped out of the way. You could see the bullets coming because there were tracers. And we could see them coming, and we just stepped back and out of the way, but actually, they were far enough away from you couldn't *[inaudible]*, but we watched it go right back.

*Did any of those, when you guys were testing them, did any of the bullets go wrong and hit someone?*

Oh, yeah. A lot of them ricocheted. A lot of them wound up over in the plant itself. They found in places where they were imbedded in the wood.

*Was anybody hurt?*

No, not that I know of, nobody was ever hurt. There weren't very many of them. *[Inaudible]* hit a stone or something, but I imagine they were thinking of *[inaudible]* when they built these things, but it would hit something, it would cause it to glance. Some would glance off, went different ways. But there was nobody around there. That was pretty wild country. So the ammunition plant itself was the most vulnerable.

*Were you there when President Roosevelt *[inaudible]*?*

Oh, yeah. I remember when he . . .

*What was that like?*

I didn't see him. I saw him at a distance going by in a wheelchair. He was in the wheelchair, they were wheeling him through, but I didn't go. I don't know why I didn't. I was busy doing something and I didn't bother to go over there.

*What was that like?*

Oh, kind of interesting that he should be there and that I was there myself. I'm not a guy that gets too excited about stuff like that. What I get excited about is what I do myself, like rather than hearing about somebody coming *[inaudible]*, I'd rather go. Like in 1967, I took a three-month leave of absence from Univac and my wife and I went over to Europe and I had a date with a cousin of mine in Sweden to visit with him, and we bought a little motor home in England and lived in it. We picked it up and we toured all of Europe for 13 weeks, for three-and-a-half months, the whole summer, and this is what I'd rather do, rather than have other people go on these trips and be carried around, go on my own and rough it and see how it goes, live with the people over there, fight with them, try and buy stuff. You're dealing with people that don't know the language. That's fun. You learn to communicate with people in other ways, without language, and you can do it. I had some great conversations with people over there, German people. I had one German couple to guide us in the little town of Aiken *[inaudible]* Germany, and on the map showed the closest point that the east German lines came into the west into *[inaudible]*, where we were going to be, and it was pretty close. And we stopped and I asked about this, I'd like to see the line, no .....s land *[inaudible]* and the lookout towers. And I stopped a German couple and told them what I wanted. They answered me, "If you'll take us in your car, we will guide you right over to the place," and they did. We went to it and we had quite a time with them. No, they couldn't speak a word of English and I didn't know any German. I had a few words I could have understood a little bit what they were talking about, but that was all. But we spent quite a time together, and that was at supper time. It turned out in the evening we were parked in the

little town of Aiken, and they were in front of their home, and we were talking there for a while and all of a sudden the woman, she raised her finger and said, "Oh." She got a bright idea. She was telling me just a minute. I got an idea. She went out the back door of the car and she went over to a house, a couple of houses over. She came back with a young girl. And she brought her in and they introduced us, and we started talking with her and she was a high school girl from Stalling, in Germany. It was 18 miles north of there and she was going to school there, and she had learned English and this woman knew it, this neighbor of theirs. So she had this girl talk to us, and she was a 16-year-old girl. And we had a great time. She could talk English good and we had all kinds of information from them. Finally wound up, it was after supper time and we found out that she hadn't had her supper yet and we hadn't had ours. So we said, "We're going to have supper. Will you join us?" She stayed for supper and she left there about 10:30 at night, and we had a beautiful time. It's kind of side issue.

*No, that says a lot about how you get along with people and people of other cultures and being open to . . .*

Yeah, this is [inaudible]. I might mention this. These people, when we were down at the line, right at the fence, and I seen the sign there, on the road, 'Verboten 100M', 'Forbidden 100 Meters', you can't go any further because that road went into East Germany was cut off, and this fellow pointed to the lookout tower up on the hill, and he said to me, in other words, he was telling us that we were being observed with the binoculars as long as we were standing there, it was a sure thing they were looking at us. And he explained the first row of barbed wire fences, and then there was a space and there was another barbed wire fence. Then quite a bit of space and there's a third barbed wire fence, and a little further there's a fourth one. And I found out what they were. The first one is a warning, danger sign, and then the middle sign was an absolutely a site that would be mined, heavily mined. So if you try to go across there you'd be blown to bits very likely, and then the second one over there again was another warning sign from the England side. So he was telling us in German, because I understood what he was . . . with that and the signs and everything, what it was all about. The first was a warning sign, then the explosive sign, and then the warning sign on the other sign again. So I waved to the guy, whoever was looking at us.

*This is just a couple other things that maybe I could ask. Was there a trailer city around there where some workers lived that didn't live in the town?*

A trailer city. There probably was. There must have been some trailer areas.

*Or did they set up other housing for them? Did the government set up housing for people that came in?*

[Inaudible]. I really don't know. I got out . . . of course, yeah, I had my car in the plant. I could take it in and out. I'd get in the car and I'd drive out and drive on home. I was pretty busy. I didn't fool around very much in the evenings to find out about things like that. I don't know who would know. This is not something that you're concerned about yourself. It might be going on right under your nose and you're not even conscious of it.

*Okay. That's great. I think that's all the space I have on the tape here just about. There's a little more time actually. Is there anything else that you wanted to talk about that you can think of?*

Oh, I could think about stuff, but it wouldn't have anything to do with the plant. It'd be all over Europe, when we traveled all over Europe that summer. Another summer we--'69--we went down to the Panama Canal, right down to the (Darion?) Forest in Panama and spent a whole summer . . .

(End of Interview)

(End of Side 2)

**GOVERNOR HAROLD STASSEN**  
**September 22, 1994**  
**Minneapolis, Minnesota**  
**Deborah L. Crown, Interviewer**

*Today is September 22, 1994. This is Deborah Crown interviewing former Governor Harold Stassen. This is side 1.*

*First I have some background questions. How long have you lived in the Twin Cities area?*

All my life, which means 87 years, except for being away in the war and in Washington.

*When did you begin to become involved with local and state government?*

First of all, I was elected as District Attorney, or Prosecutor, in Dakota County, Minnesota, which is just south of St. Paul. It's an adjacent county to Ramsey and Hennepin. Ramsey is St. Paul and Hennepin is Minneapolis, and Dakota is across the river and adjoining those two counties. That was my home county, also the county in which I practiced law. I was elected Prosecutor, County Attorney, in that county in 1930, upon my 1929 graduation from the University of Minnesota Law School. And I was reelected in 1934. And then was elected Chairman of the County Attorneys of the State. And then in 1938, I was elected Governor of Minnesota. And in those days, they had two-year terms. So I was reelected again in 1940 and in 1942. Of course, Pearl Harbor had happened December 7, '41. So I told the people that if I was reelected for a third term, I would be resigning after--because I was not only a young Governor, I was a young Naval Reserve Officer. So I told the people that I would be resigning after the legislative session, when we had the state well set for the defense effort and going on active duty, and so they should have that in mind when they elected a Lieutenant Governor in 1942, November. And they nominated and elected Edward J. Thigh as my Lieutenant Governor, who later went on and was elected Governor in his own name, and then also was elected a United States Senator. So that in April, late April, 1943, the legislative session was over, I resigned the Governorship and went on duty for the duration of the war, and I was sent out then and became Assistant Chief of Staff to Admiral Halsey in the Pacific. He was Admiral of the combat fleet in the Pacific. So at that point, my knowledge of things in Minnesota was practically severed by the activity of being away out in the war. But up to that point, I was very thoroughly and extensively involved in Minnesota.

*When did you first hear about the possibility of the ordnance plant being built in the Twin Cities area?*

We had immediately stated a policy that we were supporting the defense effort. In fact, when you said you were going to interview me for this, I checked back and I found that I had proclaimed a Preparedness Through Production Week in Minnesota, way back in the early defense program. And I'll leave a clipping of it with you. And I called on industry and private citizens to assist in the National Defense Program, and to assure the continuance of our democratic institutions and so forth. I said it is imperative that every person in this country dedicate himself/herself to the program the proclamation set. And in my inaugural message in that year, I said, "Our joint responsibilities could be divided into these three main groups: Number one, to do our full share as a state in the building up of our national defense and in supporting the President as a united people." I had not supported the President. I was a Republican and he was a Democrat, but after he was elected, I had said that now he is the President and we should support him and we should support the defense effort. So with that background, when they began to talk about moving the development of some of the defense industries into the center of the country, representatives of the Department of--it wasn't the Department of Defense then. I guess it was War and Navy and so forth--but they came out talking about locating plants in Minnesota, and which of course we assured them of cooperation and they began to look around, and in that process, they also then asked about locations around the Twin Cities areas and about



cooperation from the state and the communities and also about individuals who might be involved in such an effort. So it's my recollection that in that process, they came to me and asked me whether I knew Mr. Horn. I said I did. He was a small business man in Minnesota of good reputation. And the next I knew about it, they were then negotiating with him for the building of an ordnance plant.

*What was your impression of the community reaction to the building of a munitions plant?*

It was very favorable in a sense that they knew that you needed ordnance to defend yourself and to fight the war, and that to have one in a community would cause some problems, but they were very much supportive of the kind of attitude which we took as a state, and at that time, George Leech, who'd been a veteran of World War I,--decorated veteran of World War I--, was mayor of Minneapolis, he was very supportive and local officials, community groups were generally very supportive.

*Do you know if many families lost their land due to the construction of the ordnance plant?*

No one lost land. They sold land. In other words, I do not know the details, but they went through a negotiation and of course there we had in the state--always had--a court procedure that you could go through if you needed land for a public purpose. And under that court procedure, the owners can apply for appraisals and contest appraisals, take all of the correct legal steps toward evaluation and the payment for their land. And I don't have any detailed recollection of this particular plant and its acquisitions, but I do know that there were no unresolved problems, as to the way in which the land became used for an ordnance plant.

*Did you ever visit the construction site?*

Yes.

*And what were the conditions like there when you visited?*

Well, first, to begin with, of course, it was just farm land. It was just open land. And the first, when Mr. Horn was designated or contracted with to be in charge of it, he had a small cartridge company. I think it was called Federal Cartridge or something like that. As I remember, they first called him to Washington and talked to him there, and they asked me, as Governor, whether I knew of anything bad about him or was he a patriotic man, was he a good citizen. I said everything I knew about him was affirmative, that he was an effective, good citizen, patriotic, and the next thing I knew, of course, was he had that contract to go ahead and build a plant. At that time, he came to me, as Governor,--in fact, he asked me to come out and see the location--and he said one of the immediate problems will be to get roads put in so the employees could come and the contractors building could come. And I remember vividly, he said, "When could we plan on getting started to put in some roads?" And I said, "Tomorrow." He looked at me, he said, "You mean that?" I said, "Yes, I mean that." And, of course, at that time, we did have that overall attitude of cooperation in defense, and I had a highway engineer, who I had named, who was named Michael Huffman, who was sort of a can do man, terrific engineer, he'd previously been the bridge engineer, and I had found, in my own research, after I was elected the first time in November of '38, that he was a very able person and a man of great integrity. So when I called Mr. Huffman and said, "They're going to need roads out here. Can you get some equipment out there tomorrow and start building?" He said, "We certainly can." So literally the very next day the Minnesota highway equipment went out. As I remember, sort of the first rough work was done by highway crews, because that was the way you could move immediately, and then there were emergency contracts let later for doing more paving and improving and things of that kind with private contractors. But literally we opened up roads immediately for first construction and then expanded roads so the employees could come and go for their work in the plant.

*Do you remember people of different ethnic groups being part of the construction process?*

Yes, and particularly, of course, we had a policy in the state of non-discrimination between racial groups and ethnic groups, and I'd made a real point of that in the state government and in the policies of the state, and in fact, there was a brilliant young athlete called Sam Ransom in St. Paul, who was a high school athlete, and he was a Black boy, and at the beginning of our administration, I'd made him an officer in the State National Guard. I think probably he became one of the first Black officers integrated into a State National Guard staff in the whole country, and he became the leader of getting opportunities for the Black people with companies and with the governments and for fairness in those things, and then that also spread out. There were a number of very able Black leaders, men and women, who came forward and were active in that period. And from an ethnic standpoint, of course, Minnesota has always had, in the early days, an extremely wide diversity of ethnic backgrounds. They [are] well-known as sort of a heavy emphasis on the Scandinavian backgrounds. There also is a German background, but in addition to that, there were many other ethnic backgrounds, especially in the mining areas in the northern part of the state. So there was a strong background for that, and the moment the defense effort began to pick up, the matter of women taking part in the defense work became an important thing. It was actively supported by women's organizations and by women themselves coming forward to work. I think Minnesota had a very high percentage of women engaged in defense work.

*How did the construction of the plant affect the community and the state and the way that they perceived the impending war?*

Well, I think everything was go. I do not know anything about the actual letting of construction contracts or anything of that kind. We did not take any part in that, but I never heard of any strikes or threatened strikes or picketing or anything like that. So I think construction, as far as I recall, went ahead very rapidly to build the plant.

*Tell me about the ground breaking ceremony.*

I don't have a real clear picture of that. There were a number of ground breaking ceremonies for various plants around and enterprises. I used to, when I could, take part in them or designate one of my officials, friends, to take part. So I do not have a specific recollection of that ground breaking.

*How did the construction and operation of the plant affect housing or food, the job market?*

The matter of having good roads to lead into the plant was a very important thing, as I said, from the very beginning. And from Mr. Horn's own planning, he had these projections of how many employees they were going to need and he knew they had to come in from various directions. It was sort of a suburban area. And so the matter of seeing to it that there were exits from other roads, ways to get into the plant and get out of the plant, that was immediately studied, and Mike Huffman, our highway engineer and his assistants cooperated very [inaudible] in the designing of those methods of travel back and forth. And then I think they arranged that there would be some buses from various areas to help them get in and out and so forth.

*Were the majority of the people that worked there from the Twin Cities?*

From the greater metropolitan area of the Twin Cities, yes. I think some of them came in quite a fair distance. And some of them also came and if they were out into the farming areas, they would find places to stay close in. There were some that sort of set up boarding arrangements and family extensions and things of that kind in the area. You should be aware, on this plant, in the same broad area, it was also a Navy plant making the six inch guns for the Navy. It was called the--a pump company was turned into a Navy plant. So this was not the only defense plant in that part of Minnesota. And then there were some in some other

areas, but right in that area north of Minneapolis, which is where this particular plant was located, that you're asking about, there was another important defense plant in the same area.

*So there was temporary housing arrangements that people found?*

Yes.

*Were any of those set up by the government or by the state?*

I don't think so. I think it was cooperation. But I think that was all done by private enterprise, contractors building homes or building apartments or whatever, or by similar means of expanding the housing potential. I think, as a whole, more attention to making it convenient for them to drive a distance and come in and get in and out of the plant easily.

*Do you know if many of the women employed at the plant worked outside the home prior to the arrival of the plant in the area?*

Well, my impression was that most of the women, that was their first special job outside the home. In other words, unless they were you might say in the sort of secretarial area and then moved over into direct defense production, I don't have any clear recollection or statistics on that kind of a question. But I do know that there was a very large number of women employed in the plant.

*Did you hear of any discriminatory incidents against women around there?*

No, just the opposite I would say. There was every indication that in Minnesota, as a whole . . . of course, I should probably say that I've always felt that Minnesota is an area where the liberation of women preceded the liberation movement. In other words, it goes way, way back. There's a tradition. I remember my wife one time was asked when did she become a liberated woman, and she said when she was three years old. So that kind of shows the general atmosphere around. I think there have been a minimum of discrimination against women in Minnesota in comparison to other areas. And that certainly applied when you had the added matter that for national defense you needed to expand defense industries, and women, with the men going off to war, were needed.

*Do you think that the woman's role in this area was definitely affected or definitely changed because of the plant?*

Well, there certainly were a very large number of women working in the plant and working very effectively.

*Did that have a permanent affect on the work force, in your opinion, from then on, World War II?*

I would say yes, but I wouldn't be the best source on that probably. In April of 1943, I went on active duty in the war, and in July I was sent out to the Pacific Ocean into my Navy service. So from that point on, I am just the opposite of anybody authoritative on what happened in Minnesota. See, then I was terrifically concentrating on the war and my Navy responsibilities. So it's a cutoff there that's kind of unusual, but there it was.

*Now I'd like to ask you some questions about when President Roosevelt visited the plant. How and when did you learn of President Roosevelt's impending visit?*

The secret service came to my office and told me that President Roosevelt was planning a trip to defense industries, and that he had planned to come to visit this particular defense plant in the course of that, and they wanted me to know about it and wanted our cooperation, which I, of course, told them immediately they

would have, and then that there should be no public announcement of it, nor should the news of it spread widely ahead of time. But that they would let me know just when he was coming in, so that I could meet him and greet him when he came. So they did. They told me when the train was going to arrive and where President Roosevelt would get off of the train. So I was there, at the train, when the train backed in. And President Roosevelt came off the train and greeted me and I greeted him. They had his special car, automobile. He got in the front seat and Mr. Horn, the manager of the plant, and I got in the back seat. Then we drove up to the plant, and at the plant, they had removed a part of the brick wall in order to leave a way for the car to drive right into the plant. So we drove up and started driving right into the plant and started to go down the assembly line, along side the assembly line, basic assembly area of the plant. And I can give a little touch of humor, but it's literally very true. As we entered the plant, the President said, "You've got quite a few women working here." And Mr. Horn said, "Yes, Mr. President. Our only problem is we need more brass, Mr. President. We need more brass for production." We went down a little further and then to turn the car and get into another part of the plant was quite difficult maneuvering the car around. The President said, "Obviously the plant wasn't built for cars to drive through like this," and Mr. Horn said, "No, Mr. President, it wasn't built like that, but we do need more brass, Mr. President. We need more brass." Then we got a little further along, and some other question came up about the way in which the production machines, of course, kept going and the women were busy there and they'd look up, of course, and see the President [*inaudible*]. So the President asked him another question, and he said, "No, that's being worked out all right. The women are really cooperative. All we need, Mr. President, for more production is more brass." He must have said that five times. And we got the President back down and on to the train, and Mr. Horn turned to me and he said, "You think the President got the point that we need more brass allocation?" I said, "Mr. Horn, if he didn't get that impression, you can't say it wasn't your fault." That was a very amusing thing, and that, of course, was a need. They were pushing for production and there was always a struggle to get enough of the brass needed for the plant. But that was sort of typical of Mr. Horn, zeroing in. He wasn't going to have the Commander in Chief there without telling him what he needed. So that was quite a humorous sort of a thing. And the President, as I indicated, drove up and down through the plant, and the car went back out the place where they knocked a hole in the wall in order to let him do it, and he got back on the train and went on his way, and of course, then it was some days later, after the President completed his trip and was back in Washington, they announced that he'd made the trip and then we could make statements about the fact that he had been in Minnesota and that he had made that trip through the plant.

*About how long was he there?*

I would think that he was there probably from the time he got off the train till he got back on the train. It'd be something like two hours.

*Did he talk to any of the workers?*

Yes. They'd stop the car and he'd ask one of the women to come over and he'd speak briefly to her, ask questions like how do you like your job or something like that or you know you're important for defense. And he's say, well, of course, that's why we're here or something like that. He'd just stop at random, but, of course, he was very outgoing and always was a person with a good association of people, as you know from history.

*Do you think his visit to the plant had an affect on employee morale there?*

Oh, definitely. Of course, it was high anyhow. There was no doubt that they all knew that this was important. They were working there and there never was any stoppage or [*inaudible*] time. And, of course, Mr. Horn was a experienced person working with personnel, a very understanding person. So it was fortunate that they had a man like him to be the one with whom they contracted to build the plant.

*What was the economic situation in the state like during World War II, when you were here?*

Well, Minnesota had a good employment record. We had a high employment even before the plant was put in, because we had very diversified industry. We've always had a very . . . we've been a center for the milling industry, milling grain into flour and so forth, and also [inaudible], mining and miscellaneous manufacturing industry. Very diverse along with its agricultural base. Minnesota had continuously showed basic economic statistics somewhat better than the national average.

*Could you compare the sense of community cohesion before, during and after the war, how people got along with each other?*

Yes. I think that there was such unanimity, virtual unanimity, that the war was one that should be won, for the great feeling of revulsion against Hitler in Europe, including among our own German descent population, because Minnesota had a great tradition of democracy from the very early beginnings and strong feelings about the rights of people. There was a strong opposition to Hitler and what he was doing in Europe, and there was strong opposition, of course, after Pearl Harbor, after the Japanese attack, and consequently, morale was high. There was a unity of feeling, and there was a little bit of a sort of a isolationist movement in earlier years, but I had taken a strong stand against that, against the so-called 'America First' movement, which I then said would be characterized as making America last [inaudible] because of the implications of its isolation policy. And I remember also checking up when there was this isolationist opposition politically, I found at that time, Minnesota had one of the highest percentages, per thousand, of enlistments in the Navy of any state in the Union, and I said, "To think that Minnesotans would be isolationists when you have the highest percentage of enlistments is pretty ridiculous."

*After the war was over and a lot of these people that had worked at the plant for so long and they were daily working for and thinking about the war effort, do you know if many of them experienced kind of a loss of purpose or had any problems resulting from the reconversion to peace time?*

Well, that, of course, is an area that I would not really know about. As I say, I went off into the war myself and I was out there, and then all the way . . . see, President Roosevelt called me back for ten weeks in 1945 to take part in drafting and signing the United Nations Charter. Then I went back out into the war duty. I was on the decks of the USS Missouri when the ceremony of signing in September of '45, and even after that, it was quite a long time before I got back to Minnesota. So I'm not really a good source of any kind of a let down or adjustment and so forth after the war.

*Well, that's about all I have. Is there anything, any recollections about the plant that you could share to offer any more insight as to what it was like to actually be there during the war?*

Well, from everything I heard and so forth, I think, of course, that Mr. Horn was the kind of a person that I think they all felt that he had the kind of supervisory people that they seemed to feel they could talk to and so on and so forth, so the communication, I think, between workers and management and their understanding, their degree of . . . you might say literacy and understanding was very high. Of course, it's also a part of the area in which they built the plant and so forth. See this, after all, is an area where a very great company, The Minneapolis Honey Well grew very technical production and all of that and 3M, Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing, another company in this area . . . And now in more recent years, sophisticated production in medical industry, Medtronic, a great heart production company is here. So there is a background of workers being able to and willing to and lined up for good production, and along with it, a good management group in the state.

*How do you see the plant, as far as its role in the overall war effort? In other words, how important was it?*

As I say, what the final statistics were as to how their total production, how it compared to other plants, I do not know. They obviously have statistics available in government, but I wouldn't be surprised if its level of production per cost would be very favorable. Put it another way, I think that the decision to locate some of the armament production out in the middle of the country was a very wise and logical decision, and if these kind of studies review that kind of a thing, it ought to point the way that any other types of major tasks should consider all areas of the country and what their facilities are, and of course, in these later years, there are what you'll call in-migration of peoples of Asian countries, and there's in-migration more and more of the Black people from the south and different conditions that arise. So there's a very broad mix of population along with that continuing strains of policy and attitudes that come from the early pioneer groups and so forth. I assume this kind of a study ought to be thinking about general rules for governmental action, and another fascinating kind of an offshoot of it, you say here was a fact that the administration at that time was of the Democratic party, and our state administration was the Republican party, but following our long time broad policy of cooperation between political parties, we one-handed produced good results from cooperation and President Roosevelt and his administration wisely made the decision not to just try to do a political twist in where they located plants and so forth. I think there's a strong lesson here that location of plants and of big government projects should not be influenced in an undesirable way by political considerations. They should be focused on the ultimate result to be obtained.

*How do you feel about the plant closing down now?*

Well, of course, the main thing I feel about that, there is a down-sizing going on, obviously, in defense industries and actually in other industries. I think it is overdue to get some big projects to be accomplished by the country that would need productive efforts for more employment, more opportunities, and I'd like to see some thought on that. Also some attention to, for example, when President Eisenhower brought the Korean War to a close in the first six months of his administration, he immediately moved how to have economic activity that would provide employment, and he opened up the whole program for super-highways all across America, these interstate highways. That whole program started by President Eisenhower, when he wanted to have things that should be done and would create employment opportunity. And it did. It brought unemployment down to three percent. So statistically, I hope that government analysts of both parties and of the country do some studying of history to develop economic policies. And what's needed now are what are the types of things that can be put in that can pick up where plants like this have left off or, as other uses that they can be put to where their structures can be desirably used or can they be put up for economical sale for any entrepreneur that wants to buy the plant in order to put in another industry. Those kind of alternatives ought to be studied and thought about. And on a whole nationwide scale, I would hope that big projects that need accomplishing . . . another thing that Eisenhower did was--and maybe I'm talking too much about Eisenhower, but that's because I worked so closely with him, and that's so long ago that so many people now were not even alive when he was President, when Eisenhower was President. But he also moved on the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Seaway, which was a very big economic project and a very good one. So I'd like to see concentrated thinking about what would be desirable potentials of the use of the physical facilities and the worker potential of plants like this one and areas like this for other desirable purposes.

*Well, that's all I have.*

Okay.

(End of Interview)

**APPENDIX A**  
**RELEASE FORMS**

RELEASE FORMS  
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

NAME Carl Holmberg  
ADDRESS 1739 ~~GERVAIS~~ Jervais AVE UNIT #11  
~~70~~ Maplewood, MIN 55116  
PHONE (612) 773-1406  
TAPE NUMBERS: 1

I understand that this (these) tape(s) and transcriptions or forms used to record and index the tape(s) for research purposes will be archived in local and/or state public historical institutions and will be available for research purpose to qualified persons unless otherwise specified below. I further understand that one copy of the tapes will be retained by Geo-Marine, Inc., 550 E. 15th Street, Plano, Texas 75074, for their use in preparing project reports. If at any time I or my descendants wish a copy of the tapes, a copy will be provided by Geo-Marine, Inc. for the cost of reproduction, upon receipt of a request in writing.

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- Other: (Specify)

SEPT 19 94  
Date

Carl W Holmberg  
Interviewee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewee



RELEASE FORMS  
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

NAME Julia Kohler  
ADDRESS 75 Maryland Ave. W.  
St. Paul Minn 55117  
PHONE 489-5721  
TAPE NUMBERS: 5

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9/21/94  
Date

Julia M. Kohler  
Interviewee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewee

RELEASE FORMS  
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

NAME Everett A Needels

ADDRESS 1933 SIMPSON AV

Roseville, MINN

PHONE 1-612 645-1386

TAPE NUMBERS: 4

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None Other: (Specify)

Please send me a copy of Tape

9/21/94  
Date

Everett A. Needels  
Interviewee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewee

RELEASE FORMS  
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

NAME Laura Y. Peterson

ADDRESS 2556 Mounds View Dr.

Mounds View, MN 55112

PHONE (612) 785-2749

TAPE NUMBERS: 3

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\_\_\_\_\_

9/20/94  
Date

Laura Y. Peterson  
Interviewee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewee

RELEASE FORMS  
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

NAME Ther L. Seth

ADDRESS 5019 Washington St. N.E.

Columbia Heights, Minn. 55421

PHONE (612) 571-2635

TAPE NUMBERS: 2

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Sept. 20, '94  
Date

Ther L. Seth  
Interviewee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewee

RELEASE FORMS  
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

NAME Harold E Stassen

ADDRESS 310 Salem Ch Rd.  
Sunfish Lake, Mn 55118

PHONE 612-455-7154

TAPE NUMBERS: 6

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9/27/94  
Date

*Harold E Stassen*  
Interviewee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewee