

“Go West, Young Woman!”

Munitions Diary 1985



**Women at Work
in Melbourne's Western Suburbs**

LIVING MUSEUM OF THE WEST

Melbourne's Living Museum of the West seeks to record and present the history of working people in Melbourne's western region up to the present. We are a **living** museum because the people of the region are involved in the research and presentation process. We are a museum without walls. Our museum is not confined to glass cases within one building. Our work is concerned with peoples' memories, peoples' thoughts, peoples' stories and peoples' own collection of photos and other material objects.

Initially this collection of memories, thoughts, pictures, writings, objects is being recorded on tape and on photographic film. It is important to record these things now before they are lost for ever. The next step is to get some of these recollections, thoughts and photographs back into the region from which they came. Our museum is committed to doing this through publications, through video and through exhibitions. These are important ways of presenting some of the very complex and valuable material we've collected and of honouring those who have provided the material in the first place.

A major focus of our museum is the theme of work. Work has been a dominant fact of life in our region. Some of the work places of the region are on a large-scale and of major significance in Australia's economic development. Among these are the Ammunition Factory at Footscray and the I.C.I. factory complex at Deer Park. Although names and buildings have changed, these factories are the oldest of their kind in Australia. They were, as shown by G. J. R. Linge in a major book published in 1979, part of Australia's industrial awakening in the 19th century.

Women have played an important role in these factories, especially in war-time. Their stories will open your eyes and develop our awareness and our understanding of Melbourne's western region and of our world. All over the world there is a growing movement concerned with peoples' history. We are part of this movement. It is time people were given a chance to tell their own stories.

OLWEN FORD,
Museum Co-ordinator.

FOREWORD

This is a diary which celebrates, in words and photographs, the women of Melbourne's western suburbs who have at one time or another worked in the explosives and munitions industries.

These industries provided employment to local women, in some parts of the western region for over a hundred years, and so many of their experiences are linked closely to the histories and functions of these companies. Their stories are the human side of large-scale factories — of massive noisy machinery and of the countless annual production of bullets, mortars and dynamite. Their daily work routines, performed sometimes for many years on end, were made up of the processes and skills their employers required of them.

Handling dynamite, gelignite and ammunition was the job of some women who worked for small private industries up to the 1930s. They did this for Kynoch Limited, for the Spotswood Fuse Factory and for Nobel (Australasia) Proprietary Limited.

The Kynoch factory was established in 1913 by the Birmingham company of the same name, and in the small tin structure in West Footscray, between 30 to 50 girls from 13 years of age made cartridges. Perhaps the most dangerous work was at the Nobel site in Deer Park, where gelignite was wrapped and packed in the small huts, containing gangs of four women, who produced explosive material destined for the mining industry. By 1928, Imperial Chemical Industries of Australia and New Zealand Limited acquired the local business in explosives and ammunition and by 1936 all work other than fuse assembly was being carried out in Deer Park.

For those who worked in the Colonial Ammunition Company Limited, a small arms manufacturer which began production in 1890 beside the Maribyrnong River, work was less dangerous and more mundane. Endlessly handfeeding brass and nickel into bullet-drawing machines was the order of the day – every day. The monotony for some was only punctuated by the occasional flooding of the Maribyrnong or the arrival of a thunderstorm when all machines would be shut down and production ceased.

New techniques and discoveries sometimes changed the processes within these factories and so altered the work routines of the women who performed them. This happened when cordite was adopted as the explosive in small arms during the 1890s, creating a new work process — and a potentially dangerous one — for women employees.

In 1910 the Colonial Ammunition Company erected metal rolling mills where the present Ammunition Factory stands today in Gordon Street. More buildings, new work processes, more employees! Then in the 1920s came new employers. The federal government took control of the Colonial Ammunition Company and their interest was not restricted to small arms. World War One had proved the importance of munitions and so the Ordnance and Explosive Factories became new places of employment.

Improvements were constantly made at the Gordon Street site, but the older factory operated much as it always had. However, after 1945 the need for munitions decreased. Some buildings were torn down, others sold and many women were retrenched. Those that remained were moved to the Gordon Street site where small arms production continues today and more than 1300 people are employed.

Of all the munitions producers, the small arms factory has always employed the most significant number of women. When the factory began, 120 women were employed on piecework rates as against 20 men. By World War One there were 700 women working there, some as young as 14. However, it was during World War Two, with the shortage of male labour that female employment in munitions escalated dramatically. Although very few women took up positions of authority, remaining workers on the factory floor, it was at this time that they occupied what had previously been perceived as “men’s work”. Due to the shortage, they moved into work demanding exactness and imposing danger. These were not positions of power but of considerable responsibility. One such position was that of a charger in the Percussion Cap Section.

Women’s labour has always been essential to this industry but during World War Two an even greater level of commitment was demanded — and given. In analysis and discussion of the War, too frequently is their contribution to the War effort overlooked. In a small way this publication celebrates their work and that of women in earlier years, who gave their time to this industry.

The discussions appearing throughout this diary are transcribed versions of the **spoken word** and were originally recorded on tape. They were made in 1984 and are recollections of years long past. Therefore, some opinions may clash, both within the diary and with ones held by those who read it. Also, although some editing has taken place, we have tried to retain the original quality of interviewees’ speech. Passages are meant to represent women **talking** about their experiences in the munitions industry — not writing about them.

JENNY MITCHELL,

ROD FAULKNER,

Researchers for Living Museum of the West.

CHRONOLOGY

The recollections of women workers in the munitions and explosives industries rarely capture precise histories of the industry. Their concerns mostly cover work processes and daily routines. Therefore a brief chronology of these industries in Melbourne's Western Suburbs is provided below:

- 1875 — Jones, Scott and Co. begin explosives manufacture at Deer Park.
Jones, Scott acquired by Australia Lithofracteur (Krebs Patent) Ltd. The name was subsequently changed to Australian Explosives and Chemical Co. Ltd. and later purchased by Nobel (Australasia) Pty. Ltd.
- Government powder magazine erected on Footscray side of the Saltwater River. It was called the Ammunition Depot, Maribyrnong but since the 1920s has been known locally as Jack's Magazine.
- 1882 — Victorian Colonial Government seeking to interest overseas private explosive companies in establishing factories in Maribyrnong.
- 1888 — Application for 3 acres by the Colonial Ammunition Company with an option to buy 30-50 more for future requirements and contract to supply small arms to the government.
- 1890 — The Colonial Ammunition Company begins production in the factory later to be known as "Down Below", "The Old Tin Shed" and Number One Factory.
— Cordite adopted as explosive in small arms because of its efficiency and smokelessness. This gave rise to the .303 inch bullet which dominated small arms output until after World War Two.
- 1897 — Australian Explosives and Chemical Company purchased by Nobel-Dynamite Trust Limited.
- 1901 — Colonial Ammunition Company leases 40 acres of land up to Gordon Street.
- 1910 — Erection of Metal Rolling Mills, Gordon Street, known as Number Two Factory.
- 1913 — Kynoch Ltd. established in West Footscray to produce ammunition, explosives and gas engines.
- 1928 — Imperial Chemical Industries of Australia and New Zealand Ltd. acquire Nobel (Australasia) Ltd., Kynoch and the Spotswood Fuse Factory.
— Federal Government purchases all of the Colonial Ammunition Company's Australian assets for 150,000 pounds and establishes the Government Ordnance and Explosive Factories.
- 1936 — Kynoch Ltd. move to I.C.I. Deer Park site to newly erected factory.
- 1937 — Spotswood Fuse Factory moves to old Kynoch premises in West Footscray, where 28 machines produced Australia's safety fuse during the subsequent war years.
- 1940s — I.C.I. operate Government's Albion Factory at Deer Park during War years on cost plus basis, producing cordite for use in World War Two.
— New Small Arms Factory erected beside the Maribyrnong River. Old Factory torn down. New factory leased to Myer Emporium Limited. Gordon Street ammunition factory the sole producer of small arms.

DOWN BELOW

The Government Ammunition Factory's first building was alongside the Maribyrnong River. It was called the Number One Factory and the Gordon Street site was Number Two Factory. The Maribyrnong location was commonly referred to as "Down Below".



"Old Tin Shed" — World War One — Bullet Forming Operations.

"The tin shed wasn't terribly big. There was quite a few people in there and everything was in rows and of course we had the overhead pulleys, like big belts on to each machine. We had no electric motors on the machine those days, everything was handfed. You had to be a bit quick at times, but the time went quickly. The first day or two you used to think: "Oh, I'll never learn this!". But it used to come to you all of a sudden and you'd find you were working just normally. Didn't take very long. It was a little bit cold I suppose. We didn't notice it much in those days, we were young, we were busy. It was only when it rained the rain came through (Laughs). The lights'd go out or something. If there was a thunderstorm the machines might go off. You had to wait till they were fixed. We'd call out to one another from one end of the factory to another and follow our voices, to find one another. There were blackouts because of the War. All the windows were blacked out, so no lights would shine through. We weren't allowed to have windows open or doors because it was a target if the lights were on. There wasn't much in the way of facilities. No hot meals or anything. The caterers from down the cake shop in Footscray — "Garths" I think their name was — used to come up at lunchtime and bring up pies and pasties. The canteen was out in the garden. If it was wet you tried to stay in the factory if you could rather than go over to the canteen. (Laughs). Then when they built the new factory they built a fairly big canteen. We had hot meals then. There was a mad scatter when everybody knocked off. They used to give us 3 minutes to have a wash to go home. A whistle would blow and one of the men from the acid room used to bring out a bucket of water and put it on a platform and everybody dived in that one bucket of water. One bucket of water and one piece of soap and one towel. (Laughs).

Miss DORIS WRIGHT, Essendon,
Nickel Section, Small Arms Ammunition
(1939—1980).

CORDITE SECTION

The most dangerous section "Down Below" was the Cordite Section where the production of bullets started out. The high danger level meant it was out-of-bounds to all that did not work there.



"Down Below" — World War One — Cordite Loading.

"The only section we wasn't allowed in was the Cordite Section — powder room. We weren't allowed to go down there. The workers were only allowed a certain time down there, I understand, and then they had to come up or something. It was dangerous. You weren't allowed to go there. If there was a storm or anything they had to come out and stay in the locker rooms. They couldn't go back down again until they were told, if there was a storm on."

Mrs. MABEL WHITE, North Altona,
.303 Brass Section, Small Arms Ammunition,
(1940s and 1960s).

"The cordite used to be brought to the Ammunition Factory on huge drums. It all had to be rewound because it would be in a tangled mess. You would rewind it onto something like a huge cotton reel. Then it would be put through a hole into the machine room where the brass came down out of a hopper and the machine would bite the cordite off and fill the brass shells, which would be .303 bullets. I'd say there would be about, perhaps 20 machines, but to keep those going there would be 4 women, rewinding the cordite and looking after those machines, changing over reels. As cordite goes by weight, each time the cordite ran out and there was a new cylinder, that would be a different weight. So the weight would have to be changed on the machine. You would have to count up how many bullets that amount of cordite made. That was all registered, kept a record of. But there was about 4, I think, of those rooms and there would be the same amount working in each room. The men weren't working on machines, they were foremen or leading hands. They did the heavy lifting in those days, because we got women's wages. When 90 % of men's wages came in, well of course, men were very reluctant to do the lifting and what have you. (Laughs). I mean, you were on your own, you know. But not while I was working in cordite. That came in when I was working at the Explosives Factory, well after the War."

Mrs. BILLIE ANDERSON,
Cordite Section, Ammunition Factory,
(1940—1942).

PERCUSSION CAP SECTION

This section was one of the more dangerous ones at the Gordon Street Ammunition Factory and so precautions were rigidly enforced. The work process here was very complicated and the following extract summarises just a part.



Percussion Cap Section Workers, World War Two.

"I was also a charger, which was a highly explosive job. There were only certain types of girls put on it. It was a boy's job at the start of the First World War but they let Nell Gough and I do it during the War and we did a better job of it if I might say. We were more precise in our work, we didn't take such risks as the boys did. But to do all the jobs in the first place, the composition — or powder as we called it — used to come in as a clay lump, and they used to weigh it out while it was wet and put it on a little handkerchief made out of Fuji silk on an electric heated table. Then it would come back to powder and they would pick that up and put it into a little bottle. That was brought along on a trolley to the charging room. Then the girl would put the powder on the charging machine, which consisted of two plates with holes, just like the top of a salt cellar and the holes would be closed. Then she would put a tray of empty caps on the shelf, outside the machine and then she'd go outside and look through a little glass panel and she'd hook hold of it and slide it in under. She'd open the holes and then she would take what we called a rake, made out of beautiful plush velvet and it was flexible at the end. She'd rake the powder up and down over these empty holes till every hole was full. Then she would go in and inspect it and see if the holes were all filled. If not, she'd come out and rake it again. But the boys, when the boys were doing it, they would use a little camel hair brush and perhaps push a little bit of powder into the holes — that's how they'd get blown up."

Mrs. MINNIE MOLONEY, Yarraville,
Percussion Cap Section, Ammunition Factory.
(World Wars One and Two).

WORK PROCESS —

Nickel Section, Bullet Forming Machines, Punches and Dies.

The Nickel and Brass Sections at the Ammunition Factories employed a great many women to work on the machines, helping to produce .303 bullets:



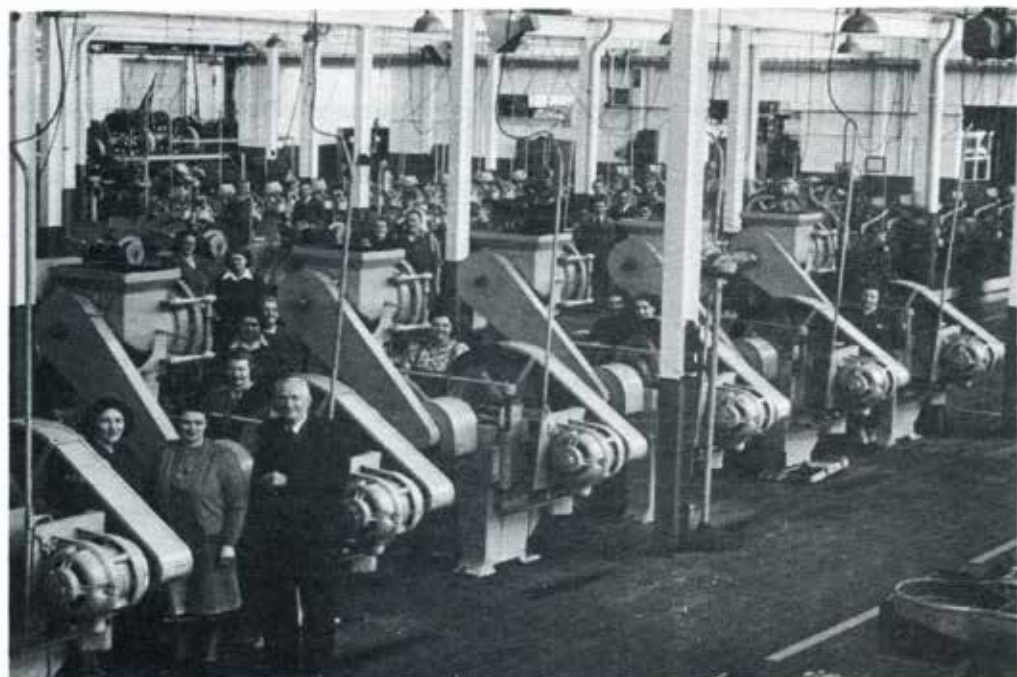
“Old Tin Shed” — Bulleting Machines — World War One.

“When I was in the old factory, the first machines I started on had a slide. You stood behind the slide and you had a box of work alongside your machine and a small box in front of you and you’d have a scoop in a big box and you’d scoop the work into the little box and then you’d dive in and get a handful of work. You got used to it after a while. You picked it up, nearly everyone the same way, but if it wasn’t, you had to turn them round and have them all the right way, and you’d put them down a shute. You tried to keep that full and it had a die and a punch on the end of the machine. The punch worked backwards and forwards and when one dropped into the slot in the slide, the punch came and picked that up and drove it onto the die and shaped it there and then dropped out, down the shute and into the box. Quite a few of them were like that same type of thing.”

Miss DORIS WRIGHT, Essendon,
Nickel Section, Small Arms Ammunition,
(1939—1980).

COMMERCIAL/POST WAR WORK

After 1945 the need for ammunition fell away greatly and so many machines at the Ammunition Factory at Gordon Street were modified to produce other items.



S.A.A. Section, Gordon Street, 1950.

"Well it was different entirely after the War than before. During the War all those buildings were just a hive of industry. You know, they were working at a flat-out rate. After the War they were taking outside jobs and doing a lot of plastic things, with plastic powders, like making telephone cases, doing those deodorant blocks, making cardboard boxes too. There was many things that they were doing that was nothing to do with ammunitions. And those jobs were pretty good too, because there were no bombs there, no risk. There was a certain amount of explosives but nothing like the extent of the War days."

Mrs. BILLIE ANDERSON, West Footscray,
Explosives Factory, (1942—1947).

"After the War we went on to commercial work. We did quite a bit of commercial work. We made cigarette lighters and petrol irons, protractors for school, latch housings for cupboards, lipstick cases, lampholders, the two different kinds of lampholders, you know, where the globe fits in with J-slots."

Miss DORIS WRIGHT, Essendon,
Nickel Section, Small Arms Ammunition,
(1939—1980).

THE FORELADY

Although the Munitions industries employed thousands of women, very few were known to all. Miss McLaren, the head forelady of the Small Arms Ammunition Section was one most women can still recall with clarity.



Nickel Section Workers, Gordon Street, 1945. Miss McLaren is in front row, centre, in black.

"And you weren't allowed to smoke... and we used to smoke sometimes in the toilet... (Laughs). In Gordon Street we were allowed to take our cigarettes and everything in... and we kept them in the locker rooms where we put our clothes and we had our morning and afternoon tea, things like that... but there was a forelady there, she wasn't in each room... Miss McLaren was her name, but she has passed on. She was strict, very strict, but a very nice person. She was very very strict and she'd come round and she'd say: 'I think someone's smoking here'. And she'd know by the smell in the toilets... Sometimes, they'd slip their cigarettes in and put them down their chest, you know. Which was wrong! For their own sake, it was very dangerous."

Mrs. MABEL WHITE, North Altona,
.303 Brass Section, Small Arms Ammunition,
(1940s).

"Miss McLaren was very strict and she would say, you know: 'Pick up that bullet there'. Or as she walked through, someone would whisper: 'Mind out, here comes Annie!'. You know how it goes on, same as anywhere I suppose. But she never did anything but treat me with respect, so I'm just speaking... But I would say that she had been pushed too. But she was a very good — I can't remember the name of the position she had... she was higher than a forelady, she was top over all of us. She had an office — what she actually did I don't know."

Mrs. AUDREY McMASTER, Yarraville,
.303 Brass Section, Small Arms Ammunition,
(1940s).

LEGENDS OF THE 2ND WORLD WAR

The War created many problems for those on the home front. There were Manpower Acts, air raid drills, blackouts and rationing of food and clothing. In particular for Melbourne, the American serviceman murderer Leonski was creating havoc and fear. We even managed a little battle action with the sighting of an unidentified aeroplane flying along the Maribyrnong River! All of this engraved itself upon the minds of women working at the time in the Western Suburbs' Munitions Industries.



*Turning Heads of 9 mm cartridge cases on automatic lathes,
Gordon Street.*

"We had to go on to night shift and they gave us overalls, like men's. I remember I was so freezing. Remember coupons were on, you couldn't just go and buy what you wanted to wear. Stockings were couponed and we were short of stockings; we used to wear socklets, warm woollen socklets. I took my brother's long underpants. (Laughs). I don't remember whether I had stockings on underneath or not — my brother's long underpants and these overalls and I don't know how many jumpers — (Laughs) — to try and keep warm. I can remember the night we were on afternoon shift, lined up already to come, waiting for the whistle to blow and the night shift was coming in — 'There's been another girl murdered! There's been another girl murdered!' And we were thinking: 'Oh! We've got to go home and walk in the dark!'. And that was Leonski. We were frightened at night."

Mrs. AUDREY McMASTER, Yarraville,
.303 Nickel Section, Small Arms Ammunition,
(1940s).



Workers celebrating the end of World War Two in the Gordon Street Canteen.

"Well, the government, if you had no commitments, you had to get into a job or they'd find you a job. Well, the men were away, that's why there were so many women up the munitions working on men's jobs. They were doing men's jobs. It was only natural, because there wasn't that many — once they went, they were looking for people to work — they had to work. There was jobs to be done and you had to do them. I hadn't been long married when the War broke out, so I didn't have much time at home. Those days once you get married you stopped home but then with the War you had to get out and get a job. Well, actually they sent for me to do great coats, but Oh, I didn't fancy travelling in brownouts and that was my best offer really, to go to Munitions. I'd never done that in my life before, but I wasn't the only one. Most of the women up there hadn't done that sort of job, but they all sort of pitched in. It was a bit of a lark when we all built air raid shelters. We would've all drowned in them because they all got full of water. But I tell you, I don't think we needed to know where air raid shelters were because if they raided up there we'd all be blown anyway with what they were making up there . . . A few things came home to us because my husband and I was riding our bikes before he went away and I don't know whether an unidentified plane came over or not but there were 2 bits of shrapnel came down in Ballarat Road as we were coming up. At the time they didn't know whether it was one of ours or whether they were having a big drill . . . You had to do things to really break the monotony because sometimes it was good War news and sometimes it was bad War news and sometimes it was rumours, we didn't know which was which, and then that Leonski, you know. That scare came around and everybody was on their toes about that, you know, because nobody knew where he was. People did travel a long way and it was a brown out and it wasn't too good. Well, I tell you a few times I looked over my shoulder riding my bike."

Mrs. ALMA TAYLOR,
Canteen, Ammunition Factory,
(1942—1946).

TIME AND MOTION

The "Time and Motion" man was seen as a threat to workers' conditions and at the Ammunition Factory in Gordon Street, he inspired a poem of discontent.

"And then they started time and motions and all that sort of thing and saying that you should be putting out more work per day and you must not turn your machine off if you have to go outside. You must leave it go and the girl next to you must watch your machine. This was the hopper machines."

Mrs. AUDREY McMASTER, Yarraville,
.303 Brass Section, Small Arms Ammunition,
(1940s).

TIME AND MOTION STUDY

You've heard of time and motion,
I'm afraid it's here to stay;
I'll tell you a little story
That happened the other day.
I was working away as usual,
Giving my money's worth;
On a little job that only required
My hand to go back and forth.
Well, the boss popped up from somewhere,
With the time and motion man
With all his paraphernalia
And a stop-watch in his hand.
"Before we start", he said to me,
"I want you to know, my dear,
We're trying to make things easier
For you and the others here."
So he watched my hand go back and forth,
But I felt something was brewing —
And after a while he said with a smile,
"What is your other hand doing?"
Well, soon he had me speeded up —
First one hand and then the other;
I could see him watching my poor old feet,
And I thought to myself: "Oh, brother!"
Well, I was right, for in a while
He said to me: "My girl,
You're doing fine, but while you're there,
Just give your foot a burl."
It wasn't long before he had
My left foot going too.
If I had to scratch or blow my nose,
I was really in a stew.
So this was how he had me
In a job he made so EASY.
Like a blasted robot I'd become
Or a piece of their machinery.
But still he wasn't satisfied,
His mind was working fast;
But so was mine, I was so fed up
That I downed my tools at last —
"Now look here sport", I said to him,
"Do you take me for a goon?
There's only one part of me left to use,
And before I'll sweep the room,
You can stick your job as far as you like
Where you planned to put the broom!"

Mrs. HASKELL, Yarraville,
Ammunition Factory,
(1930s, 1940s, 1950s and 1960s).

CANTEEN

Most large factories supply their workers with services such as canteens. This offers an opportunity for workers to relax and socialize among themselves and also means employment for others who otherwise are not involved in the ordinary work process.



Canteen Workers, Gordon Street, 1943. Mrs. Taylor fifth from left, top row.

"They were large canteens. If you took a look up there you'd see — you'd only have to see it from the outside how big they are because they come right up near the fence. We used to get everything ready for them to come in of a morning for their morning tea — oh, buttered buns and so forth, they'd have for morning tea. And then we'd finish that up and then we'd prepare for their lunches with sandwiches. We had to cut all our own bread, also our own meat. It never came in packages those days. They had hot dinners for one and threepence and pies for threepence. I think between the two big canteens we used to sit 900. I think it was roughly half an hour the men and women had for lunch. They'd pick up their soups, their hot dinner and their sweets and then we'd have to clear that up by about another half hour for the next lot to come in, about another 900. Then in the afternoon we used to take down afternoon tea with buns."

Mrs. ALMA TAYLOR, Maidstone,
Canteen, Ammunition Factory,
(1942—1946).

CHANGE ROOMS

The importance of cleanliness when handling explosive materials meant change rooms were important and often operated under strict rules.



Percussion Cap Section Changing Room, 'Dirty Area', 1943.

"We weren't allowed to work in our ordinary clothes. We had to change into a sort of serge uniform and we used to have to take the hairpins out of our hair, take our rings off and we had to have a special pair of shoes with no nails in the soles and when we came in from outside the building, we had to take off our street clothes in what we called the 'Dirty Area' and step over a long seat and change into our 'clean' clothes. Then we were allowed to walk into the area on a duckboard, raised off the ground and you were not allowed to go onto the earth any more until you were going home. Visitors to the area had to put on overshoes — we used to call them 'canoes' — over their street shoes. We used to put our street clothes on a coat hanger and hoist them up into the roof so that it was tidy. They used to provide us with the coat hangers which we could hang other things on, and there was ever so many. It looked very queer when you looked at it, but it was very good."

Mrs. MINNIE MOLONEY, Yarraville,
Percussion Cap Section, Ammunition Factory,
(World War One and 1940s).

JAPANESE INSPECTION

Sometimes workers could not follow the reasoning behind their employers' actions. The inspection of the Munitions by a Government Japanese delegation just prior to WW2 was an incident which caused bewilderment and surprise.



Small Arms Packing Room, 1940.

"We have visitors . . . On the shift when we were there, I would have to go around and speak to them . . . And I'd conduct them around, you see and tell them what the girls were doing. But one time they brought around a Japanese crowd and just before Pearl Harbour, and when they came, you know, I thought: 'Well, blow me down, funny these Japanese to go around it!'. But anyhow, they did!"

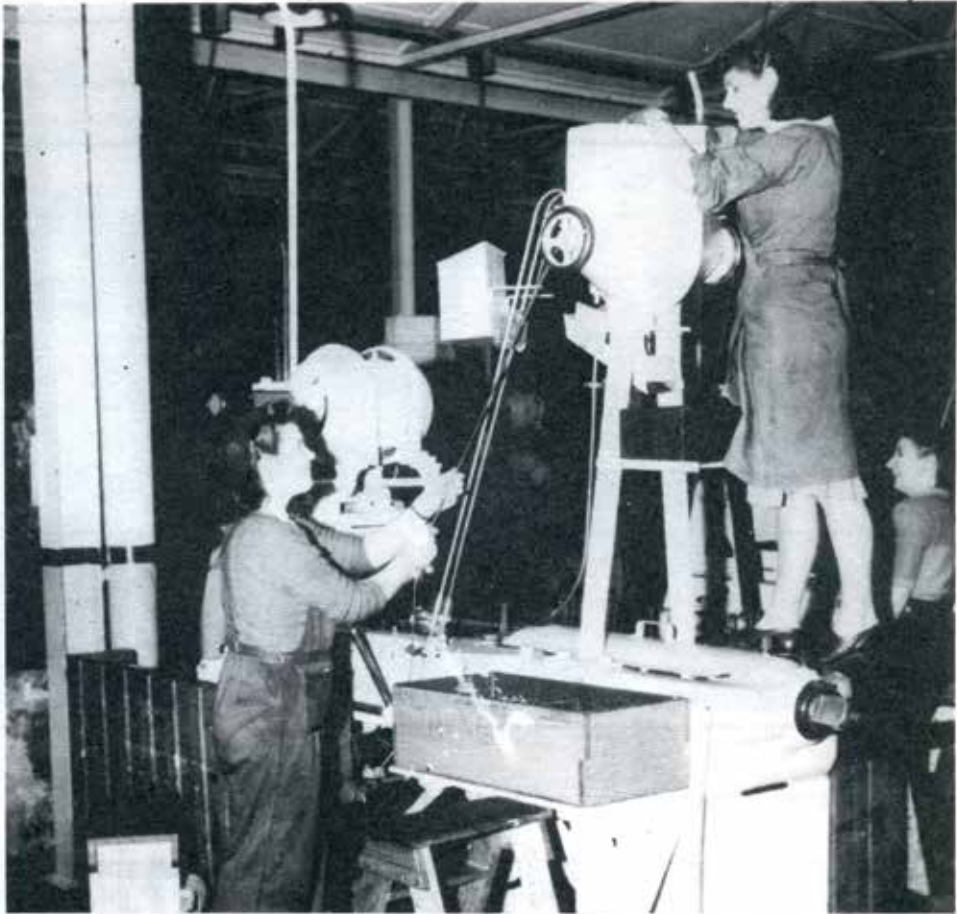
Mrs. MINNIE MOLONEY, Yarraville,
Percussion Cap Section, Ammunition Factory,
(World War One and 1940s).

"When I was in the packing room, I worked before the Japanese came into the War and they came over to Australia on a good-will mission and came down from Sydney to Melbourne and had a look all through Gordon Street Ammunition Factory . . . there was about 7 of them I think. Watched us all working and went into every room and watched them all working. Stood behind us . . . watched us, what we were doing. The workers weren't too happy about it. I know my foreman wasn't, thought it was a strange thing to be doing."

Mrs. VIDA WILLIAMS, Altona,
.303 Packing Room, World War Two.

WORK HAZARDS

Work processes, as in most places, caused their own problems and concerns in the Munitions Industries. Some were alarming, some amusing — after the event.



Recessing the head of the case for the cap chamber and anvil.

"It was one of these dangerous powders — very temperamental, very unstable. You'd see people going around with their skins all yellow, and you'd know: Well, they were working on such-and-such powder or TNT powder. Made you just go all yellow, you know. Just discoloured you like dye."

Mrs. BILLIE ANDERSON, West Footscray Explosives Factory, 1942—1944.

"I can remember too, if you were packing 9 mm, they're only small, but they're very dangerous and when I came home and we did our own washing, and I washed my overalls, put them in the washing machine and when I took them out there was a 9 mm in the washing machine. 9 mm bullet in the washing machine! I thought: 'My God, it's a wonder it didn't go off'" (Laughs).

Mrs. MABEL WHITE, North Altona, .303 Brass Section, Small Arms Ammunition, (1940s).

