
Bruce Teede JP

Born Geraldton WA 7/3/1928.

My War effort 1941 – 1946 – 1949.

I left Perth Boys School early in the war. The Japanese were conquering every country to the north of Australia and it was feared that they would attack us. Perth Boys School being close to the Perth Railway station which would be an obvious target for the Japanese Bombers was in a vulnerable position so the authorities decided to close it and the adjacent Perth Girls School and then disperse back to the local schools within the suburbs.

Previously I went to the Inglewood State School in 3rd Avenue which was only a 5 minute walk from my home on the corner of 4th Avenue and Robinson Street in Mt Lawley. However the Authorities decided that I should go to the Maylands State School which was about 3 miles away, this was not a very good idea and although my parents objected strongly they would not let me return to Inglewood State School, so I asked if I could get a job and leave school, I was 14 ½ at the time.

My Dad was the Personnel Officer at the Commonwealth Government Ammunition Factory in Welshpool; he was able to get me a job as an Office Boy with the Munition Stores and Transport Division of the Ammunition Factory. So began my war effort, on Friday I left school and on Monday I was an Office Boy in a Big Munition Works.

The Munition Stores Complex was enclosed by a high wire fence with locked Main Gates and a Guard House staffed by armed guards. There was also an Office Building, Motor Garage and a Mechanics Workshop.

The actual Munitions Store was a massive building one tenth of a mile long with a rail line on one side and a road for Motor Trucks on the other side. A massive Overhead Crane traversed the full length of the building, the building also had an Office complex on one end that was high off the floor, from there you could see right along the whole building. There was also a weighbridge near the front gate.

My first day at work was very exciting for a 14 year old kid. I had to present myself to the Guards at the Gate where they took me into the Guardhouse then took down all my details then got me to sign it. They then rang the Office and the manager came to pick me up and took me to his Office. There he told me what my job would be, gave me an Identification Badge which I was to wear at all times, the number was 5024.

It was the usual Office Boy stuff, stick stamps on letters, and get the lunches for the Office Staff, run around after the office girls. I also had to deliver parcels and mail to the Stores Office and the Office in the Munition Works.

To carry out my duties it entailed riding my bike out through the Stores Complex gates and around to the Munition Works gate to be verified by the Guards and then down to the office. Apart from riding my bike 9 miles from Mt Lawley to Welshpool and then 9 miles home again every day, plus I did about 9 or 10 miles around the Munition Complex each day.

After a few months of being a rouse-about for the Office girls and being thoroughly sick of it the opportunity arose for me to get a job as an offsider to the Motor mechanic, of course I jumped at the opportunity as maybe I could get an Apprenticeship. Being a mechanically minded kid this was right up my alley and I took to it like a duck to water, part of my chores were to drain the oil, check the tyres, polish the boss's car as well as sweeping up in the Workshop. My wages were 15 shillings a week.

Things in the war deteriorated, Rommel seemed to be winning the battles in the Middle East and the Japanese were sweeping all before them and getting closer and closer to Western Australia. The big Munitions store was full to the brim with all sorts of war material; trucks and trains were bringing in and taking away tons and tons of equipment every day. There was also a lot of war material being made by many Engineering Works in Western Australia along with every other type of equipment required for the war effort. Along with this equipment there was tons of 303 Ammunition from the Munition Works which all came to the big Store and was then shipped overseas from there.

As a result of the war situation the dwindling petrol supplies were rationed and most of the Munition Works vehicles were fitted with Charcoal Gas Producers as were many private vehicles. The charcoal came in wheat bags and one of my jobs was to fill the hoppers every day and clean the filters and scrubbers which cleaned the soot from the gas before it went to the engine. What a dirty job it was if you can imagine a fair skinned snowy haired kid covered in black soot looking more like a Chimney Sweep than a Motor Mechanics offsider, that was me.

The Boss came to pick up his car one day and had a good laugh when he saw me, I complained bitterly and he said don't worry son there is a war on and this is your war effort. So I promptly told him what I thought of his Gas Producers and the War Effort. As a result of this exchange with the Boss he told me I would get an extra 1 Shilling extra as dirt money for every Gas Producer I serviced, whacko! That amounted to an extra 4 or 5 bob a week on top of my 15 Shillings a week wages. Big money for a kid of 14 even if I had to ride my bike 18 miles every day and when you consider the soldiers in the desert were getting 5 Shillings a day I guess I didn't have a lot to complain about.

Mum did complain when I arrived home, myself and overalls like a professional Chimney Sweep. Mum was not very happy, sometimes it would be raining and washed the soot deep into my skin and into my overalls. She had to hand wash them and scrub on a Washing Board. The Bath was a sight after I had finished.

After some months at this job Dad came home one night and said the Ammunition Factory was going to offer 3 Apprenticeships as Toolmakers in its very modern and comprehensive Toolroom and that I should apply if I was interested. I surely was so I filled in the Application Form and a week later received a letter back advising that I had been selected with two others from the number of Applicants, to start next week for 3 months probation and to report to Mr. Wally Howitt the Toolroom Foreman.

Wally Howitt was a short little American man and we clicked immediately, becoming firm friends till the end of the War. He had been in Australia for some years working in the Goldfields as a Mining Engineer. He told me he started his career as a Cadet Engineer in the famous American Machine and Tool Company, Brown and Sharpe. What Wally didn't know about Engineering wasn't worth knowing and there wasn't a machine tool made that he couldn't work. His passion was passing his knowledge on to the other two Apprentices and myself and making sure it sunk in. Even today after 60 years his words and instruction are forever in my mind to guide me in my work. Wally was very patriotic and there was never a day passed that he didn't remind us there was a War on and the harder we worked the sooner we would win.

I remember one day dawdling along day dreaming about everything but the War and the job I was doing, the next thing I remember was Wally walking behind me kicking my heels and saying "get a move on Bo, don't you know there's a War on, whose side are you on, ours or the Japs". That certainly put a rocket under me and even as the War dragged on and I became a bit weary at times in the early hours of the morning on Night Shift I never slacked and never forgot there was a War on and what I was supposed to be doing.

The wages were 18 Shillings and sixpence, we worked 44 hours per week. I still rode my bike 9 miles to work and then 9 miles home again except when I was on Night Shift or when it was Winter time. At these times I rode to the East Perth Railway Station and caught the train to Welshpool.

Things in the War were getting worse, the Japs seemed to be winning everywhere and the US Navy had a big Submarine Base in Fremantle. Perth was under a black out at night during this time.

At the time a big organisation was started up and known as the "ARP" – Air Raid Precautions. The Headquarters were at the Perth Girls School at the top of Plain Street in East Perth. Along with a number of other Lads, I joined up as an APR Messenger Boy.

Our job was to ride our bikes around delivering messages in the event of Perth being bombed and all the telephones being cut and out of action, we had to wear Tin hats, a Gas Mask, learn Morse Code as well as learning how to use a Signalling Lamp. We met at the Headquarters a couple of times a week and did all sorts of Drills and exercises as well as riding our Bikes all over the place delivering messages. One night we did an escape exercise from the top floor of Girls School, this entailed sliding down a canvas chute to the ground and then running like hell away from the building which was supposed to be on fire. This went on for a couple of years, when the tide of war changed the Blackout became a Brownout, then it was finally scrapped and the ARP was disbanded.

I had passed my three months probation with flying colours and had signed my papers to be apprenticed as a Toolmaker for a term of 5 years. As an apprentice I was taught the finer points of using Milling Machines, Lathes, Cylindrical and Surface Grinders and the art of Heat Treating Tool Steel. During this time I also spent 3 months in the Drawing Office learning Mechanical Drawings and how to make Blue Prints.

The Drawing Office consisted of: Chief Draughtsman, Mr Standring; Engineers, Mr Bryon Cornish and Mr George Hondros; Tracer, Mrs Thompson.

In the Toolroom we made the Punches and Dies for making Bullets and Cases, also assembling the 303 cartridges and parts for the machinery. We also made the Gauges that were needed to check the finished products. The Factor also made Fuses for the Shells that armed the Bofor Anti-Aircraft Guns. We also made all the Tools for the Turret Lathes and mass produced them along with the Gauges for the Inspectors to check the finished Fuses.

Being an Apprentice meant we had to go to the Perth Technical College one day each fortnight, half a day doing Theory, our Instructor was Mr Clem James, the other half day in the Machine shop where our Instructor was a real character, Mr Charlie Bladen.

The Welshpool Ammunition Factory was a vast complex employing several hundred people and Army Inspection Staff, who had a proving range where they constantly checked the cartridges for velocity in a Chronograph machine, they also fired cartridges in Rifles to check the extraction. A Vickers Machine Gun and some Bren Guns set to fire at different rate, this was to check the case and the primers to see if there was any malformation of the case or primer caused by the rapid fire rate of the machine guns. There was also a machine gun set up to fire down a big pipe with a spinning propeller and at the end this was to check the cartridges for their performance in synchronised aircraft machine guns. There was a constant firing of all these weapons at the Firing Range, at times it sounded like a war zone.

I had involvement with every facet of the manufacture of 303 Ammunition and worked long hard hours of shift work right up to the end of the war. Initially I was too young to join any of the Services and when I was old enough to join up I was manpowered.

During the bad period of the War when Perth was under threat of bombing by the Japanese, we had numerous times when the Air raid sirens would sound and we would head for the nearest Air raid shelter, we never knew if it was for real or just a Drill but we didn't waste any time getting down into an air raid shelter.

I feel my War Effort at the Munition Works was just as vital as the people in the Services as without a steady supply of Ammunition to the Army, Navy and Air Force their capacity to fight the enemy would have been greatly reduced. When the War ended I still had one year to go to finish my apprenticeship, fortunately Chamberlain Industries, an Engineering firm from Melbourne bought part of the Munition Works including the Building housing the Fuse Factory and Toolroom also the Maintenance Workshop to build the famous Chamberlain 40K Tractor.

Mr Chamberlain the Managing Director agreed to take over the final year of the Apprenticeships of myself and Mr William O'Meara.

We worked on the Tooling for the 40K Tractor, learning additional skills in the manufacture of prefabricated Jigs, Dies and Gear Cutting and Broaching Tools along with a myriad of various equipment needed to manufacture every part of a modern Tractor.

I stayed with Chamberlain Tractors until 1949 when I moved to Carnarvon in the Gascoyne Region of Western Australia.