

# Thrills of a Woman Working in Munitions

## Few in Great Shell Factory Labor for Mere Pay, the Majority Being Eager to Beat Kaiser

By ELEANOR BOOTH SIMMONS.

WHEN I decided to serve my country and hasten the end of the war by working in a munitions factory I didn't have a moment's doubt but that I'd be received with open arms and told to don the overalls of sex equality and get on the job.

To be sure I only meant to work one day, but every little helps. Say a woman can make 1,000 boosters in a year of working days—a booster's a thing in a shell, you know, or perhaps you don't know—say she can turn out 1,000 boosters in 300 days, isn't it a mathematical proposition that she can make three and a third boosters in one day?

To be sure, also, I wasn't trained, but I had a complacent feeling that I possessed intelligence. Surely intelligence counts. Anyway, making boosters and such things always looked excessively easy to me when on a tour through a munitions factory I watched women at the oily task.

You don't even make the whole booster yourself. You take a flat piece of metal that a huge biscuit cutter machine gives you, a round piece of metal just the size of the biscuits mother used to make, only thinner, and you slip it under a kind of punch that turns it into a shallow cup in a twinkling of an eye, and that's all.

### Some of the Many Processes.

The girl at your right, in cooperation with a machine that's as safe and simple as the old family horse, makes the cup deeper and slenderer. Another girl gives the booster a bath in some kind of compound—and, goodness knows, it needs it—and still another wipes it off and other girls inspect it, and finally the booster is finished, ready to be filled with the powder which is one of three charges in the kind of shell I'm talking about—a shell weighing something under twenty pounds and warranted to kill a number of Huns if it gets them right.

Well, I felt competent to work on boosters, though I didn't suppose that just the first (and only) day I'd be put on important machines that do difficult things such as "finish turn body and bourlette, clean seal from powder pocket" or "knurl hand groove, crimp and radius" (see pay roll analysis). I was willing to take a humble position and I sought with confidence an employment office which makes a specialty of getting women to back Uncle Sam by making munitions.

Just to make them want me all the more, though the way American women have been urged in the public prints and by Mrs. Eleanore Pankhurst to work at munitions and shipbuilding left me no doubt that they'd snatch at me, I mentioned that it was my intention to write a story for the papers that would bring women in droves to make ammunition for our boys. The ladies in charge thought that would be lovely and promised me a card that would put me on the pay roll over at Edgewater, N. J., at once. Hopefully I hastened home and set the alarm clock for 6 A. M., so I could be on hand with the rest of the toilers when the gates opened.

### Most High Lady Refused.

In the cold gray dawn I attached myself to a strap and subways down to the employment office aforesaid for my card. Alas! it appeared that the ladies in charge the day before weren't the Most High Lady. The Most High Lady faced me this morning and it appeared that she was one of those conscientious ones. Why are so many of my sex burdened with conscientious scruples about things that don't count?

Well, the Lady Manager didn't think it would be honest to send some one who only meant to work one day to a factory. It would, she pointed out reproachfully, be deceiving the employer. I had begged to have the employer kept dark as to my intentions so I'd be sure to get the same treatment as the other women. But the Lady Manager shook her sleek head. It was, she said, dishonest in theory—what-  
ever she meant by that.

Feebly—for I can't eat breakfast so

early in the morning—I pointed out that the present great world crisis had sent many theories spinning, and while it might be acting a lie to hire out when I meant to resign at the end of the day the good I hoped to do with my little typewriter would surely offset the sin against truth. In vain! She was adamant. Other lady managers of other employment offices were similarly proof against my pleadings.

At noon, completely exhausted by my search for work in a country which folks are telling us has ten jobs for every job want, I decided to give up my conscientious sex and throw myself on the mercy of a man. By telephone I got a man at Edgewater, where the American Can Company is making shells, and where it wants 1,000 more women right along quick now. The man was satisfactory. He said cordially, "Come on over and the place is yours."

### Men Much Easier to Deal With.

With renewed spirits and wondering why men, though they are sometimes so annoying about some things, such as holding up the suffrage bill in the Senate of the United States, are frequently in matters like my present errand so much easier to deal with than women, I took a Fifth avenue bus to Ninety-fourth street, where the pier was that led to Edgewater.

Here I was met by a courtly official who guards the pier and soothes the ruffled spirits of persons who want passes over and can't get them. The man at Edgewater had told this guard, Mr. Griffith, to entertain me till the boat came, and nobly he fulfilled his task. He showed me a clipping about prayer versus work and engaged me in discussion about it. He allowed me to listen while he interviewed a feeble looking foreigner who wanted a job and was willing to take anything, be a superintendent or anything, so's he didn't have to work much.

Presently the boat came in and another polite and pleasant man in uniform welcomed me on board and in a few minutes I was being inducted into my job at Edgewater.

Everybody by now knows what a munitions factory is like. It's noisy and it's oily, but there's a thrill about it, somehow, if you look at it the right way. But it's certainly oily.

I never realized the oil there is about serving your Uncle Sam that way until Mr. Fitzpatrick, my host, gave me those overalls. Well, he didn't hand me the overalls exactly, but Mrs. Murphy did. She's the welfare lady over there and she was very helpful about pinning up the overalls, because they were made for a bean pole, which I'm not.

### Swaggered in Her Overalls.

First I thought I just couldn't put my—well, you know it didn't seem as if even patriotism was potent enough to make me wear such oily overalls. But once I got them on and swaggered forth I felt fine in my soul. Useful, you know, a cog in a wheel of the machine that is going to down the Kaiser and bring peace to the world.

And when I went into a room where a lots of girls and women were making boosters I could face them as I never could while being taken through a factory as a mere observer. There's something in the faces of workers in oily, grimy clothes when they turn and look at smug observers—well, I may be mistaken, but going through a factory always made me feel inferior and small. But now I didn't. I was one of them.

There were oodles of women and girls in that factory, young women, middle aged women, almost old women. Some were pretty—looked as if they'd left the glove department in a store to come there. Some were homely of course.

Here was a motherly woman who might have been darned stockings at her fire-side, so placid and kindly was her face as she bent over the table where she with a score of others was inspecting some part of the shells. By her side was a regular Greenwich Village type, bobbed hair and the rest of it.

Of course I couldn't be an inspector, but presently I was allowed in another



SENSIBLE DRESS IS UNIVERSAL AMONG WOMEN MUNITION WORKERS

room to sit down at a solemn looking contraption that plugged up and down, permitting one to put half completed boosters under it and obligingly hollowing them out; and I did a few boosters. There was the prettiest girl next me, a bit plump, but with lovely curly hair and the nicest pink and white complexion.

She told me she was a stenographer, but could make more money here. Oh, no, she didn't care about serving the country, but wages were good here and it was easy enough, just dipping the boosters in the bath of compound that makes the steel so much better to work with.

"But it's awfully oily," I said. "It's good for the skin," she chirped. "Honest, I never had such a smooth skin as since I'm working here. I think the boss ought to bottle this compound and sell it to women in drug stores."

I turned my back on the pretty girl and fished out an overdone booster from the thing I was supposed to watch. Her attitude was disappointingly frivolous. Somehow I pictured women flocking in droves to munitions factories out of pure patriotism, and more and more it was being borne in upon me that it was just wages that brought them.

It isn't at all the way Mrs. Pankhurst pictures the women of England. Are English women more patriotic, or is it that the war has gripped them, the horror of it, as we have not yet been gripped?

Well, anyway, the blond girl was working fast and skilfully, so her motive didn't matter. And presently I found that there were women in that place who were working with a full sense of all it meant and all their duty; were taking their wages, of course, but not regarding the wages as the whole thing. It was when I had done my bit by making at least one-tenth part of several boosters and was seeing other parts of the factory, under accredited guidance.

Up on the third floor, I think in the finish face and thread, cut off buttons and finish bottoms, buff bottom hand groove department, I was privileged to meet Miss Williams. Miss Williams wrote a letter to one of the papers not long ago telling how she liked her job over there, and so I knew about her. She was a music teacher in Manhattan, and when Uncle Sam called she just naturally shut down the lid of her piano, gave her pupils a vacation till the end of the war and put on the overalls at Edgewater.

### Looked More Like Young Man.

She came up to me laughing and glowing with health and vitality, her short curly hair framing a face full of sparkling intelligence. In her brown overalls and blouse she looked like a brisk young man and more competent than lots of men.

"Yes, I like it," she said. "It's great. Oh, of course I miss my music, but I'll go back to it when the war is over. And I don't miss it very much, because when I'm through with the day's work I'm too sleepy. There's no time for much but cat and sleep and work."

"I get up at 5 to get here in time and I go to bed at 9 so as to be fresh for the next day. Oh yes, the shells are heavy to lift, seventeen pounds or so each one, but I got used to that soon and my muscles don't ache now."

"It's hard, but—" she took a long breath and looked down the length of the room full of women standing at the lathe

machines doing mysterious things to nearly completed shells, such as knurling out a place for the copper band that a brass shell has around it, though as to whether that is for ornament or to make it burst more destructively, search me.

Well, as I say, Miss Williams took a hitch in her overalls and looked down that throbbing, humming, deafening place, on the oily, grimy women, and I took a hitch in my overalls and gazed at Miss Williams and we both nodded and shouted at one another above the clamor:

"It's great!"

Now you catch the spirit Miss Williams has and others like her and you will like working in a munitions factory. You get the thrill of being a part, even ever so small and insignificant a part, of a great organism that is doing something worth while; something history making, and what are oil and grime and noise and long hours of lifting heavy shells that leave you too tired for anything but sleep?

I know of no exaltation like that of being a part of a worth while machine, feeling all the parts throb in unison with your efforts; though doubtless doing a big thing alone or leading other men and women on to do something great is more thrilling. And yet is it any more wonderful to be the officer leading a regiment over the top than to be one of the privates without whom officers would be useless? And I don't believe it is half so interesting to direct the affairs of a munitions factory as it is to work in one; though of course it's less greasy.

### Not All Have the Vision.

But alas! all women who go to take jobs in munitions factories don't have the vision. I fell in with a group coming home that day. They had worked one day and promptly resigned. There was a saucy looking Irish girl who said she lived out and begged she was going back to her housemaid's place; no more munitions for her.

"Isn't it pretty good money?" I said. "Twenty-three dollars or so a week almost from the first, and when you get on piece work you may make, if you do well, as much as \$7 a day. I knew two girls who each made \$11 one day, but of course I don't expect ever to make \$11 a day. Still it's pretty good money, and then it's working for the Government, helping with the war. Don't you care about that?"

Her upturned nose took an extra tilt. "Yes, for about was hour you think it's fine, wor-kin fr th' war. Then your ar-rms begin to ache and the second hour they ache wor-rse, and about 3 o'clock in th' mar-rnin'—it's night work I'm talkin' about, lots of the girls does that—you look at the clock thinkin' it must be 6. And after that you're just waitin' for the stoppin' time to come. And next day you're so lame you can't walk. I'm goin' back to housework."

"You aren't so independent working for one woman," I urged.

"Sure, I'm as independint as anybody. The way I look at it nobody amounts to anything," said she.

I was going to tell her name, but if I did she'd probably be wrenched apart by mistresses of homes anxious to possess the phenomenon of a housemaid who likes being one.

The second girl in the group was a fair

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