

## Ontario woman recalls building Bren guns for the war effort

By Madalyn Hamann | Posted: Nov 8 2012 4:09 pm

Enid Elford's wartime experience gave her access to guns, but nobody was shooting back.

"I was in what they called Tin Pan Alley, where they worked on the Bren-gun magazines," Elford said. "They had to bang them into shape and it was noisy."

In 1942, at the age of 19, Elford got a part-time job at the John Inglis Plant (in Toronto) manufacturing Bren guns for the Canadian Army during the Second World War. In his book "Working at Inglis," David Sobel wrote that the plant became the largest single employer of women in the country.

Currently residing in Orillia, Ont., with her war veteran husband, Elford recalled her time at Inglis with remarkable clarity. Working part time, Elford explained that in the beginning, she didn't know what her job was going to be, but learned that she was to weld ketches on the magazines before sending them through a milling machine to be trimmed.

She would take different shifts on different days, earning \$35 a week. To be trained, Elford said, her employers would give them scraps of metal and have them practise melting them with their torch and fuse weld sticks to them. The



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Enid Elford was one of the "Bren gun girls" at the John Inglis war munitions plant in Toronto during the Second World War.

difficult part, she said, was trying not to bore holes in the metal.

“You gradually learned,” Elford said. “And you learned how to manage your torch too.”

It was a safe environment for Elford and her co-workers, but the proper attire such as goggles, bandanas and protective clothing was required, to protect themselves from flying sparks.

Other times, she and her co-workers would have a bit of fun shooting the Bren guns they assembled before exporting them, to make sure that they worked properly and that bullets wouldn’t catch on the inside.

Though the contribution to the war effort was significant, it wasn’t something that Elford and her friends thought of as they worked. A stark contrast from the stream of media today, the only visual news they could get from Europe was the Movietone News Reels at the theatre.

“My brother was overseas, and some of my friends were overseas, but we didn’t really know much about the war,” she said “But now when you see it on television, it’s so different.”



RONNIE\_THE\_BRENGUN\_GIRL\_E

The same as U.S. munitions plant worker “Rosie the riveter,” Veronica Foster at the Inglis plant in Toronto was known as “Ronnie the Bren gun girl” representing Canadian women working in war munitions. Library and Archives Canada photo.

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