

WASC <sup>824</sup> ~~#32~~

# On Her Majesty's Service

WASC 824

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# BANG! SOMEONE'S FALLEN OFF A BIKE AT ERDE

FEARS that an explosion from Waltham Abbey's Explosives Research and Development Establishment could cause a major disaster were put to rest when a party of town councillors and Press representatives visited the establishment on Tuesday.

The party, headed by town's mayor, Cr. Mrs. Joan Hewins, learned that despite its title ERDE devotes only about a quarter of its efforts to high explosives. The remainder is connected with rocket propellants, rubbers, plastics and ceramics.

The establishment is a research one and not a factory, as was its predecessor on the site — the Royal Gunpowder Factory.

Because of this, there is no need to keep large stocks of explosives at the site as the production is done elsewhere in Royal Ordnance factories.

But, despite this fact, the safety and security regulations and procedures at the establishment are second to none.

After lunch, and an introduction from Dr. L. J. Bellamy, the Establishment's director, members heard a detailed talk from Mr. Vernon Griffiths, the chief safety officer.

He explained that the products researched at ERDE are intended for use by the Armed Forces, who have their own very high standards of safety.

They would not, he said, be at all interested in an explosive for a bomb or shell which could not safely be dropped from a considerable height.

Mr. Griffiths ran through the procedures taken to ensure everything in their power is done to eliminate an accidental explosion.

He said that they know they are dealing with

explosive materials and therefore very great care is taken in the handling and production.

The accident record, he said, bears this out as it is much better than that of chemical industry as a whole.

Last year, he said, there were 11 reportable accidents. Of these, two were men who had fallen off their bicycles inside the establishment's area and two were people who fell over their own feet. A further one was a police constable who dislocated a shoulder.

Mr. Griffiths said that there has not been an accident involving an explosion for a number of years.

In the storing and manufacturing of the substances used at ERDE, Mr. Griffiths said, all equipment and processes are continually monitored by a full-time safety team and no material

is handled in more than tiny laboratory amounts until its properties are fully known and all potential hazards assessed.

## RISKS

Working methods are devised to eliminate risks.

Many explosives are made safe by wetting or by the addition of special stabilisers before handling in bulk.

However, Mr. Griffiths said, it would be wrong to rely entirely on this and operations are therefore arranged in such a way that even if an accidental explosion were to occur — even involving the entire contents of a magazine, which is a virtually unknown phenomenon — there would still be no danger to people in the town or to those staff not engaged in explosives work. And no serious damage would be done to houses or vehicles outside the perimeter, he maintained.

## SAFETY

This is done, Mr. Griffiths explained, by a series of safety limits and design and construction of buildings.

During the tour of the establishment's south site in Sewardstone Road, the visitors saw machine-rooms and facilities for carrying out processes.

During the discussion that followed Cr. Mrs. M. Bird asked how difficult it would be for someone to sabotage the establishment.

Mr. Griffiths said that anyone intending to do this would have to know a great deal about what went on.

All buildings, he said, in which there are materials that saboteurs would be interested in are inspected every three hours.

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