

This is Terry Ford on the 6th of December, 2023 for South Shields Local History Group discussing John Ford, his father.

My dad, John Ford, was born in December 17th, 1919 in South Shields. In 1939 he enlisted in the Royal Engineers, the Territorial Army section, "The Terriers" as he used to call them. In November, 1939, he was doing his basic training in Yorkshire, in Stokesley and what he was doing was with a group of men just disassembling, dismantling some old Nissen huts when what happened was there was a strong wind caught one of the Nissen huts and blew it over. Unfortunately, it landed on my dad's ankle and crushed his ankle. He was then rushed to hospital and was then put on light duties after this. For this he was given a pension which was 20% and then after the war the pension kept being reduced to 6%, 14% and he was having to fight all the time to get it put back up because it inhibited on what jobs he could do.

Before the war in 1938 he joined Vickers Armstrong in reserved occupation. So he couldn't actually go he tried to sign up to join the war but he wasn't allowed to because he was reserved occupation, you were considered the job you were doing was much too important to let you go away to work in the armed services. He was working on the big lathes working, producing the large naval guns, which were used in all the big warships so that was his job, was a very important job working on 12 inch, 14 inch, 18 inch, sort of like large scale naval guns.

When he was doing that, he also, he did as a part-time basis, joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tyneside Anti Aircraft Battery in the Searchlight Unit and what they did is they worked alongside the anti-aircraft and when the German bombers came over, they shone that these searchlights to try and detect these bombers so that the anti-aircraft alongside them could destroy these aircraft before they drop their bombs in South Shields and in the Tyneside area and he did that right throughout the war.

So when he was in Vickers, as I say, he was working on these very large machines and lathes and originally we were doing eight hour shifts just working on these machines and then they decided to bring 12 hour shifts in the hope of increasing production. But what my dad said was that by the time he got up, got ready, had something eat, and then had to get the train to Newcastle, it was about a one hour journey. So he was up and left bed and by the time he got to his works it was nearly two hours later and then it was having to work a 12 hour shift. And then again at the end of the night, he would get a one hour journey home and then have to get something to eat and things like that. So he was working roughly, it was about a 16 hour day. And people were so tired at this. What he said to me is that he'd be working on a machine and he'd be nodding off to sleep. Some people, when we were working on these machines, they were actually falling asleep and actually falling into the machines. Well, these are huge machines. Some of these machines would be like 10 foot tall, 40, 50 feet long, and they would just fall into these machines and have serious injuries on these machines. So they had to stop the 12 hour shift system simply because they were losing too many workers through these injuries.

So after the war, as I say he only got a small pension, which he had to fight for and then he worked as a machinist right throughout his career.

He retired when he was about 60 and then he died in 2014, age 95.