U. S. ARMY JOINT MUNITIONS COMMAND

KANSAS ARMY AMMUNITION PLANT

FORMER DAY & ZIMMERMAN, INC. EMPLOYEE
TOMMY MCLARTY

Interview Conducted: 30 April 2008
Historian Office
Headquarters, U.S. Army Joint Munitions Command
Rock Island, Illinois

PREFACE

The following interview was conducted with Tommy McLarty. Joint Munitions Command Historian conducted the interview on 30 April 2008 at Kansas Army Ammunition Plant (KSAAP) located in Parsons, Kansas. The interview is a part of a continuing series of oral history interviews conducted by the JMC Historical Office. This interview focuses on Mr. McLarty's career and duties with Day and Zimmerman Inc. at Kansas Army Ammunition Plant (KSAAP) and Lone Star Army Ammunition Plant (LSAAP). Mr. McLarty gives his perspectives on his 40 year plus career.

The text of the interview was approved for release by Tommy McLarty and may be requested from Headquarters, U.S. Army Joint Munitions Command, ATTN: AMSJM-HI, Rock Island, IL 61299-6000.

40 YEARS IN THE MUNITIONS BUSINESS AT KANSAS AAP
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
TOMMY MCLARTY

Ms. Pleasant: Today is 30 April 2008 and I am Keri Pleasant, JMC Historian, interviewing Tommy McLarty. Tommy is a former DZI employee at Kansas Army Ammunition Plant (KSAAP). Tommy, thank you for agreeing to sit down and talk with me. I'd like to discuss your former positions with Day and Zimmerman, Inc. (D&Z). You may start with your first position down at Lone Star Army Ammunition Plant if you like.

Mr. McLarty: On January 1962, D&Z hired me and they said it looked like they would have about six months worth of work. I said that was fine and six months turned into almost 40 years. I was at the Lone Star Army Ammunition Plant in Texarkana, Texas until the company transferred me to Parsons, Kansas. I was assigned to the Kansas Division in May of 1978 as Director of Industrial Relations and I stayed in until I retired in March of 1996.

Ms. Pleasant: You said you're not from the Parsons area. Are you from Texas?

Mr. McLarty: No, I'm from southwest Arkansas. I've been here in Parsons for 30 years, so this is now home.

Ms. Pleasant: When you began at the plant what was the feeling around here? You previously said it was bulging at the seams production wise.

Mr. McLarty: Well at this plant, there were less employees because of its design. When the Army built all these plants for World War II, some had more capacity than others by design. Kansas didn't have as many employees or production capability as the larger plants like Lone Star, Milan, or the Iowa Army Ammunition Plants, but it still employed a healthy number of employees for southeast Kansas. We reached almost 1,800 employees in the mid 1980s with the contracts we had for Department of Army (DA) and at that time we were allowed to go to 3rd party contracts, which are contracts with friendly foreign Governments or other companies as approved by the State Department. The Army and the State Department had to approve those.

Ms. Pleasant: Can you discuss some of the unique items that were produced at Kansas?

Mr. McLarty: There are probably two or three items produced here that are produced no place else such as the cluster bombs. The CBU (Cluster Bomb Unit) detonator, I think the CBU-58 and CB -71 if my memory is correct. That's what the 1100 line was prepared for in'67 when they reactivated this facility. I wasn't here then, but I understand they reactivated the plant in 1967. That particular line for the CBU items was unique and they're currently loading the sensor fuzed weapon, which is a cluster unit for the Air Force and this is the only plant that's loaded those particular items.

Ms. Pleasant: What kinds of changes did you notice across your career here at the plant?

Mr. McLarty: Well change was primarily in the technology area. In the early days when I began with D&Z, everything was almost hand assembled. You'd have 5,000 employees sitting on the conveyor line and different production lines putting part A to part B. In later years because of the scale of economy, engineer designed equipment would then put part A to part B, eliminating the human intervention. It also improved safety. The more you have exposed the human element to the explosives, the more danger you have. Through the years they have tried to engineer much of the line work and as every day goes on they seem to get better, which is good for the operator.

Ms. Pleasant: You talked about the design of Kansas and I know you have some knowledge of its construction, can you elaborate on what you have learned?

Mr. McLarty: This plant was designed down the middle, running from north to south is the production facilities. They're situated in the middle on the east side. Both explosive storage and earth material storage is designed to receive the incoming materials then it's fed across the streets to the production lines and for production into finished goods. Then it goes to the west side storage for explosive storage and of course from there it either goes out by rail, by van or by truck. It is also designed from a safety standpoint to keep human intervention to a minimum.

Ms. Pleasant: In the history that you put together there's a picture of a group and there's somebody holding a duck. Did you ever find out what the purpose of that photo was?

Mr. McLarty: The duck? It looks like it was taken at the old cafeteria and that's a guard in uniform. He has a duck on a leash on the table. The guard is holding a gun if I recall, but yet on the back of the picture there's no caption, absolutely none, and there's probably 50 people standing in the background. Now this picture has significance. It was so unique in the presentation I had to include that because it's a little moment of history, but we'll never know what moment they were capturing photos of.

Ms. Pleasant: Are they promoting hunting? I know some installations have annual hunts for different game.

Mr. McLarty: I don't know, see that's the thing. You can put your own caption to that you know, "The one that got away" or "The one that didn't get away."

Ms. Pleasant: Gotta love the pictures that you find with no information.

Mr. McLarty: Right, there's another picture in the files that I just need to mention. There's a picture in there of an Army Sergeant touring the production line and I was showing this to a group of people down in the Community Room at the library. This picture flashed up on the screen from 1969 of an Army Sergeant back from Vietnam on leave. This was four or five years ago, there was a little white haired old lady in the audience that said, "That's my son." We didn't have a clue it was her son. She lived in Chetopa at the time and so we got the original picture and framed it and sent it to her. That was a 1969 picture and 25 years later it appears on the screen and his mother happens to be in the audience. We thought that that was really kind of a tender moment for that to occur.

Ms. Pleasant: A majority of the plants had a lot of female employees working the production lines, was it the same at this plant or was it more of a mixture?

Mr. McLarty: Traditionally, in the munitions industry as war comes along, the male goes to war. That leaves the female to fill the stools or to do the work and that was primarily true in all places. You still had a lot of men. For whatever reasons, at the time of war you were exempt from going to service if you worked in a munitions plant. Here at this plant women traditionally were the highest number of employees because of that reason. This plant reactivated in 1967 and the bulk of your workforce would be housewives that were available, that were not already in the workforce. They decided to come out because this plant traditionally had opened, served the war, closed until the next event, opened for two or three years and closed and there was no longevity. In 1967 women understood that and most women were looking for work that lasted two or three years so they can maybe save up to get another TV or another car. It was disposable income. Well as it turns out those two or three years they expected to work has turned into 41 years for many women, the length of time that the plant has been open.

Women have better dexterity with their hands than men according to the studies. The munitions industry is assembling a lot of small parts, part A to part B, which takes dexterity. The production of detonators and percussion elements are examples. A detonator is about the size of pencil eraser and they have to be picked up by hand and put into a little box. Women were suited for some types of labor needed at the plant.

Ms. Pleasant: Were there any incidents at the plant that you can remember or any unique events at this installation?

Mr. McLarty: The one thing I noticed when I came up here was that the people in the Midwest have a tremendous work ethic. I grew up at the Texarkana plant. The Kansas plant was always a cost leader and they (Lone Star AAP) were always wearing us out on similar items. The 105mm was being loaded here and in Texarkana. Kansas was cheaper than their unit cost. The 55 and the 17 detonators loaded here were also loaded at Lone Star. They were always cheaper than us. Kansas folks found a way of doing it just a little cheaper and I believe Kansas survived all these years because of the work ethic of the employees. In 1973 the Army considered closing Kansas 105mm production. D&Z said, "Wait a minute let's look at the cost before you make a decision." At the time, there were three plants loading the 105mm; Joliet, IL; Texarkana, TX; and Parsons, KS. The Army put out the cost estimate request to all three plants for the 105mm loading. Of the three plants, Kansas had the lowest cost of all three, so they closed Joliet instead of Kansas.

Ms. Pleasant: I've been working on an Ammunition Industrial Base history. Several authors have written on the topic, but nothing had been brought to the present day. There's a trend during peacetime where funding disappears. Has that been a struggle for Kansas AAP throughout operations and how has that affected the plant?

Mr. McLarty: Absolutely. It's been a problem here since 1993 when this plant was first officially on a BRAC (Base Realignment and Closure) list and D&Z got a facilities contract to

maintain certain parts of the facility. In return they were able to use it under a rental basis. The funds were not the same as when Kansas was fully active. For example, simple things like mowing the grass decreased. They only mowed what was absolutely necessary, whereas, before they literally mowed the entire facility. Hard surface roads have always been maintained in an asphalt or concrete basis. Some are going back to gravel basis because the funds are not there. It may not be as comfortable, but when plants go into a slowdown mode Congress tightens up and AMC (Army Materiel Command) or whoever's dispensing the funds obviously has to tighten up and find places to put the money otherwise. At one time this plant along, with many other plants, had a full time Land Manager that managed the wildlife, the lands, the fishing and hunting. That was back during the 60s, 70s, and 80s. Funding dried up for that, so now that no longer exists.

Ms. Pleasant: What was your personal opinion of the BRAC actions here?

Mr. McLarty: Well, naturally I disagree. You know that something's wrong. You certainly understand the need for it. Again at one time I think there were 26 of these plants during Vietnam and probably all of them were working wide open. It's a tough decision on the policy makers within the Army to decide which ones are going to live and which ones are going to die, and what the needs will be. Of course they make those decisions and somebody has to go. You know, we disagree with it, but we accept it. We have no other choice.

Ms. Pleasant: How will it affect the local community?

Mr. McLarty: It will hurt. This is a $12 to 14 million dollar a year payroll at the moment. I'm in City Government and have been for 12 to 14 years now. Economic development is a strong point and we're always striving to obtain another manufacturer, another industry. It's going to be very difficult if D&Z totally has to fold their tent and go home because of the payroll in southeast Kansas, which is a poverty area. You just don't replace that kind of a payroll overnight. We struggle with it, we're out hustling; we, the City, the County, are looking for other industry. That's why the County and the City have been so supportive of the efforts to keep this facility open in some fashion simply because of the economics.

Ms. Pleasant: In your previous position you had to take monthly trips to Rock Island. Can you explain the purpose of those trips?

Mr. McLarty: When I was at the Lone Star plant, Lone Star had a representative at Government Headquarters (HQ) from 1951 forward. Normally the third week of every month the representative would go to the Government HQs and sit down with the Item Managers and discuss new programs coming down the road or work with engineering projects. There was a liaison between the plant and the Government. Even though the representative was a contractor employee the Government on occasion would send a representative with the contractor, not always, but sometimes. I did that for seven years for the Lone Star plant and I probably had six or seven Government employees accompany me. During the Vietnam days I would have 55-60 Item Managers or Program Managers (PM) that I would meet with during the week to discuss their production delivery schedules, what's upcoming and what they were going to need so that we could balance our workforce to meet those needs. First the Headquarters was in Joliet, IL,

and then later they combined the commands over to the Quad Cities on Rock Island Arsenal. As I said yesterday, the Quad Cities is a much more desirable place to travel to than Joliet was.

Ms. Pleasant: If you could pick one memory about the plant what would it be?

Mr. McLarty: The one that always comes to mind is…and it's not a pleasant one…I was sitting at my desk in 1963 at Lone Star when the phone rang and it was my wife and she said, "The President has just been shot." That point in time always stands out. I got up, walked across the hall to my boss and relayed the message. Of course in 1963 there weren't any radios or TVs at the plants, there was no such thing. That was a very vivid memory.

Unfortunately, Kansas, had an explosion in 1967 when a 105 shell we were fusing went off and killed 11 people in the bay. We had 83,000 rounds with the fuse on them in storage. The Army put a lock on the storage building and said, "Don't touch them until we say so." They sat there until 1975. D&Z designed a remote controlled system to take those apart. They were too dangerous to do it by hand. The company decided that I needed direct production experience because I was in the manufacturing side so I became the Superintendent of that operation. This was my highlight, every day I would go in and we had a remote control system out in the middle of nowhere and we had a key to the storage area. The only key that existed I had. No one could come in when we were operating because it was too dangerous. We were 400 feet away and we had a bank of 16 cameras and everything was remote control and we were operating. We had taken the fuse off these projectiles one at a time and then taking the fuse apart remotely. On a good day we could do 100 of those. We had 83,000 of them so we did that every day, or my operators did anyway. I operated all their remote control equipment from 400 feet away by sight and sound, and of course in 1975 technology was nothing like it is today. Anyway sometime after that they promoted me to Personnel Manager which was one of D&Z's traditions. So, I was moved out of production on to the personnel side there and then later transferred up to Kansas AAP. Sometime in the early 1980s, the Production Manager from Lone Star called and said, "I thought you'd want to know that they just took the last fuse off of that 105 shell." It ran for almost ten years to render them safe. So is that a high point? It's something I remember, it's a unique part of my employment with D&Z for me.

The other daily high point for me here at Kansas was the Safety Department. It was one of the departments in my Division and so I was Chair of the Management Investigating Team. Anytime we had somebody become suspect or armed, the Management Team had to go down and safe it. I don't know whether it's a highlight or not, but that's something you don't like to do every day, but you certainly remember it.

The people were just unbelievable. As I have always said since I've retired you don't miss the work you just miss the people. Did you notice yesterday as we were touring around? I got a chance to see some people I've not seen in several years.

Ms. Pleasant: Yes, you had quite a few acquaintances that were happy to see you. Is there anything else that you would like to share about the earlier days here at Kansas, perhaps during WWII or Korea?

Mr. McLarty: Well, there are always stories that I was not involved with, but there is one story in particular that I always enjoy because they happen to be two of my employees when I came up here. The personnel manager and the supervisor in personnel needed employees so they grabbed a stack of employment applications and got a company car and drove the down the county roads. They drove the rural roads and stopped at farm houses and knocked on doors and asked, "Would you like to go to work at the ammunition plant?" After that, Parsons at that time had somewhere around 30 bars and saloons. They would go down to Parsons at 10:00 in the morning, 11:00 in the morning and go into the bars and saloons and pass out employment applications asking, "Would you like to go to work in the Ammunition plant?" They were desperate. It's rural America, but they found the employees. Because this is rural, they had dormitories built here and employees lived here close to the plant. They had full cafeteria facilities. Now this is WWII, but they ran a bus for them and to Parsons for recreation purposes. Families lived in 3 or 4 bedroom modern homes. They had a camouflage school bus, painted Army camouflage. They had all the facilities here and this was no different than any other ammunition plant. We had a full hospital with 7-beds, Operating Room (OR), kitchen or cafeteria there at the hospital so if the employees were hurt on the job they were doctored, maintained, and put in a hospital room until they got well. It became a small community within a community. The old hospital building was built in 1940 and the OR was huge and had an operating light about the size of a 4 feet diameter table. When we were building this facility in the mid 80s our plant doctor asked if that light could be transferred over. It had sentimental value to him; right out of medical school he used that. We moved it over and it's now hanging in the ceiling. It is huge and it almost takes up the entire room. It's never been used for operating purposes but somebody 20 years from now will walk in that room and wonder why it's there. So anyway, Dr. Farley was our plant doctor. He was just right out of medical school when he was full time here. He gradually opened up a private practice downtown and as it grew. Therefore, his time at the plant was reduced when I came here in 1978. He was here every morning and took care of all the people that were there for sick call or whatever and he'd leave here at 9:30, 10:00 and then he'd go to his private practice office.

Ms. Pleasant: Could you please repeat your story about the guards walking along the fences during WWII?

Mr. McLarty: Yes, when I came here the manager of plant protection came as a guard from the Joplin area when they were building this plant. He and his wife lived in Parsons in a single car garage that had been split down the middle. They had one half of a single car garage that they lived in. I'm told that they had over 20,000 people here during the construction phase and everyone in Parsons had a single car garage or even a chicken coup, that they would make livable. When they built this facility the mindset was that Japan would invade this part of the country, so all of the production lines had a 7 ft. chain link fence with barbed wire at the top. Every 50 ft. there was a security light; 24-7 guards patrolled every production line for the fear that we were going to be invaded. He related to me that they had over 800 guards here at this plant in WWII simply patrolling, because they patrolled all the production lines and the outside fence.

Ms. Pleasant: Some of the plants had very active morale and welfare programs. Is that true?

Mr. McLarty: Oh yes, in fact I can go back to Lone Star during Vietnam. We had an extensive Employee Association. You name the activity and the Employee's Association sponsored it. We had hunting and fishing clubs. We had bingo, bowling, softball, baseball, and basketball all of these were sponsored. The Army funded those projects to a certain degree. In your contract with the Army you were given so much per head for employee morale or recreation, so every plant had those and it was a very organized thing. I was on the Employee's Association Board at the Lone Star plant and it was very competitive. All the organizations wanted their fair share of money. And of course they had dances. With 11,000 employees it was never a problem to fill a team in some sport.

I can recall going with my wife and young daughters to bingo on Saturday nights out at the recreation hall, which was built it was the size of a gymnasium because they played basketball in there. Of course, Army facilities had the same thing I'm sure because they believe in it. Have you been to the Hawthorne facility?

Ms. Pleasant: No, I haven't been there.

Mr. McLarty: When the Navy built that in 1929, it was totally enclosed with their own everything. When we were there in 1980 for the transition they still had a bowling alley; they closed shortly thereafter, but they had a 9-hole golf course, which is still active. They had cabins up in the mountains that the employees could rent for the weekends. They had fishing. They had all of those things because Hawthorne was in the middle of nowhere. It's a 50,000 acre site in the desert basically. Hawthorne was even more involved providing facilities for its employees than what some of the other plants would have in a rural area like this.

Ms. Pleasant: You worked at Hawthorne. What did you do there?

Ms. McLarty: The Army in 1980 contracted operation of the plant and D&Z was awarded the contract. I was here at Kansas at the time but I went on the Transition Team. D&Z pulled people from their various operations; from Lone Star, from Kansas, from Corporate, and from other D&Z operations. D&Z is an engineering company that has operations around the US and the world, so we pulled employees with specialties from their various locations and sent them to Hawthorne to as part of the Transition Team. My counterpart at Lone Star, Carl Evans who was the Director of Industrial Relations, and I helped transitioned the Guard, Fire and Safety departments that were within our purview in our respective plants and we had the managers and experts from the other plants like Storage and Transportation sent out in the transitions.

Ms. Pleasant: When did you retire?

Mr. McLarty: I retired in March of 1996.

Ms. Pleasant: You said that you consulted for a while. Was that for here?

Mr. McLarty: Yes, in 2001 my replacement resigned, so the General Manager called me and asked me if I would come back and take over the Division until they hired a replacement. I came back on a consulting contract. It took a while but we finally hired a replacement. I was here for

two years. We had seven Labor Unions and contracts expired during that time so one of my duties when I was actively, employed was to negotiate the labor agreements during 2001 with the Labor Unions. T

Ms. Pleasant: Did production start increasing around after September 11th 2001 (9/11) here?

Mr. McLarty: No, surprisingly it didn't. We were producing cluster bombs at the time and a couple of other items, but there was really no real need for increase of what we were producing. What we did see was that the Army sent a group of Army MPs (Military Police) here with their HMMWVs and M-16 machine guns. They were posted at the entry gates and were here for a little over a year. The Army funded us to modify a dormitory, kitchen and rec facilities for them out at one the old lead azide areas. They were here for about a year. I can't imagine that kind of duty, just sitting around and looking at a gate. But anyway, I think they did that at most plants after 9/11.

Ms. Pleasant: The lead azide area only produced for a short time period for a prove-out operation you said?

Mr. McLarty: Yes, back in the mid 60s the Army had developed a land mine that used lead azide and mixed it with broken glass and other components. Lead azide is probably the most sensitive explosive that the Army has dealt with in many years. The volume that is going to be needed requires a plant dedicated just to produce the lead azide. The Army funded a contract and E.I. Dupont who was a lead azide producer and built a facility at this plant to produce lead azide strictly for that land mine. About the time it was completed the Army apparently had completed their tests on the land mine. They discovered it was too unsafe to load to store and too unsafe for the troops to use. The plant was almost at a completed stage. They finished and they brought in two drums of sodium azide, which is a preliminary step in the manufacturing process. If the plant were on line they would start with raw products and get up all the way through sodium azide and then turn sodium azide into lead azide. They just went midway and brought in two drums, I understand 180 lbs. of sodium azide, converted that into lead azide, and then closed the plant. That was in 1969 and well that's where we barracked the Army troops when they were here for 9/11, but it's never been used otherwise.

Ms. Pleasant: Were there any distinguished visitors that you remember most or any special visits that stick out in your mind?

Mr. McLarty: Well, just during my time at Kansas we hosted local politicians, State politicians, Bob Dole, the Senator from Kansas who ran for President at one time. Bob Dole was here every year traditionally. Nancy Kassebaum, the other Senator from Kansas wasn't here that often. We were always glad to see him and if you're a contractor you're always glad to have a Senator friendly to you. We've had our congressman come through and also recently Nancy Boyda who is the congressman for the Second District.

Ms. Pleasant: I liked going through all those pictures, but it was interesting to see the ads for the housing. The ad that said, "Wake up late, save your tire treads…" and they're advertising for people to live and work here at Kansas AAP.

Mr. McLarty: Well you know it was before your time and of course before my time. I wasn't born then but tires were rationed as well as fuel and many other things. You had ration cards. So you know that was a little ad that I thought was appropriate. You had limited facilities where you could get tires and so forth so they were encouraging them to come live here in the dormitories for something like $1.00 a week.

Ms. Pleasant: Yes, it was. I wondered because I believe it was almost $3.00 a month but $3.25 to live on the second floor.

Mr. McLarty: I didn't understand that, it was higher to live on the second floor than it was to live on the first floor. The dorms had a housekeeper and the women were separated from the men. The women's facilities had the ironing facilities and so forth that the men didn't have.

Ms. Pleasant: Were there any leaders or Commanders that you remember you would like to mention?

Mr. McLarty: We've always had a Plant Commander, an Army Representative, which has always been a Colonel or a Lieutenant Colonel and they would rotate every two years or so. In my 40 years, I've worked through the contractor under 20 or 25 different Colonels. It's kind of like the movie *Forrest Gump* where you have a box of chocolates, "You never know what you're going to get." We've had Colonels of all makeup, blends, and so forth, and it's been interesting down through the years. One of the Colonels I found to be really interesting. He was at Lone Star. He came to us from Vietnam, a Lieutenant Colonel, he had a chest full of ribbons. When his time was up at Lone Star he put in a request to go back to Vietnam, and I asked him, "Why?" He said, "Well, if your career is the military, two tours of duty in warzone is the best thing in the world for promotion."

Ms. Pleasant: Have you been on a community planning board and what kinds of things do you do for them?

Mr. McLarty: I'm the City Commissioner of Parsons. There are five City Commissioners. We are elected for terms and set policy. We also hire and fire the City Manager that runs the city. Most of all we set policy. We have a minimum of four meetings a month with the city staff. It's open for the public. I've been doing that since 1994. I've also been fortunate to have the opportunity to be involved in other activities. I was chamber president in 1991 and I'm still in Rotary Club. I'm on three boards at the moment, I'm on the mental health board and have been for 25 years. I've been on a class board for 15 years, which works with the developmentally disabled people. All of those except for the city commission of course are volunteer boards. In the city commission you're paid a token amount for your service or for your time. Parsons is a community that you can get involved with and most communities are like that if you're willing to get out and look for something.

End of the interview