Interview with Worker 6, Connecticut Workers and Technology Project, by Martha Detzer, January 19, 1982

Detzer: Maybe we could start off by finding out how long you've worked here?

Worker 6: Twenty years.

MD: Twenty years. You are young. Have you done the same job for the twenty years?

W6: Basically, yes, except for about a year. I worked in watches, and I worked in gyros.

MD: Tell me a little bit about the job that you first started on.

W6: Watches? That was when I first started here. You can't even consider it put together. It was just testing. That only lasted for about a year. And then I went into gyro.

MD: I know nothing about gyro.

W6: A gyroscope is an instrument that's put into submarines, airplanes. It's a stabilizer, basically. It's fantastic work. I really enjoy it. It's also to do with bombs, warheads and all that.

MD: How did you end up here?

W6: Just needed a job, went into a local employment agency, and they were hiring. That's when I started.

MD: Did you go straight out of high school?

W6: No, I'm from New York City. I'm from the Bronx.

MD: You are?

W6: Yes.

MD: So am I. (laughs)
W6: I was married, married in the Bronx. He went to school here, his high school years. A friend of ours got us to move up here. That's where it all started. We just stayed here. He's working here, too. Though we're no longer married.

MD: Did you join the union as soon as you started working?

W6: I don't think so. God, it's so far back. I don't think as soon as I -- No, because at that time I don't think it was mandatory. I think I must have been there over a year or so before I did join.

MD: You're still working on gyro?

W6: Yes.

MD: I bet you've seen a lot of changes in twenty years.

W6: Different types, yes.

MD: For example?

W6: The gyro makes cars. You can't really -- it's all basically the same. It performs almost likewise, but they're different. The one we're work-on now is the first.

MD: When you started working on the gyro, what would be a normal day? Did you work in the day shift?

W6: No, the second shift.

MD: The second shift. Which is what?

W6: Three-thirty to eleven-thirty.

MD: So you would come in at three-thirty and what would you be doing?

W6: At that particular time I was working on motors winding.
MD: That's very intricate little work?
W6: Yes.
MD: With a telescope?
W6: Yes, microscope work. I didn't stick with one particular job. That to me was quite boring. I went to different parts, components, that make up the gyro. I would know it basically from beginning to end as far as my department is concerned.
MD: Were you free to do that or you weren't told by management that you had to be in one specific job?
W6: At the beginning, yes. They tell you, "Learn." And then they see how you work, how you pick up or don't pick up, and they take it from there. Then they'll ask you to do different functions. But when you enjoy learning, you're inquisitive, then I guess they gather that --
MD: So most of your work is with microscopes?
W6: Yes.
MD: And working on very tiny --
W6: Areas. And electrical. We have to put on different tests on the performance of the motor. Perhaps you don't know anything about spaders; what makes it run, operate.
Yes. They're different tests that are performed.
MD: And you do all the testing as well.
W6: Yes. The preliminary testing because then others take it from there. Other components put in other tests.
MD: In the twenty years that you've had this job working
with microscopes and doing electrical testing and all that, how did the job change, so that you were doing something different?

W6: The actual jobs did not really change. For me it was a change. It's not that the jobs changed. They have been basically doing the same thing in all the years I've been there; except the part that I'm working on now. They consider it new, but it's over fifty years old. But it was just introduced here as a production project. It's different, like from a Cadillac to a Volkswagon. They perform the same thing; you're driving, you're shifting, but they're two different cars. That's what a gyro's like. I'm working on a different type of gyro. Performance is --

MD: Do you still do the same kind of function? Do you still work with microscopes?

W6: Yes.

MD: And you still do the electrical work as well?

W6: Yes.

MD: But you just work on a different model.

W6: Exactly.

MD: Do you find that there are more people working on these projects? Or have they increased the number of microscopes used in that kind of thing?

W6: We're not automated at all. We can't. It has to be all an individual, manual -- You cannot work on that automated. You can't. At one particular time really.

MD: If the job hasn't changed in the past twenty years,
(you're working on a different model), has there been a difference in the way you do the job?

W6: Designs have been changed.

MD: Do you have to work faster or slower?

W6: It has increased as far as production. Because when the design is changed, it's designed so you produce more in less time. Like they'll cut corners here and there. But it's not like watches at all, where you can knock out fifty thousand frames in a day's work, eight hours, something like that. It's not like that at all. You can almost say it's like customized really, because every individual piece has to be individually tracked, individually assembled. It's not like watches at all.

MD: You don't feel any boredom or monotony on your job?

W6: Oh, good heavens, no. It's challenging. I love it. (laughs) I really do.

MD: So, then let me ask you a loaded question. When you hear a lot about working with a job that creates a lot of tension and stress, is it the job itself? Do you find that you have any of that?

W6: Oh, yes, but I create my own tension, whereas I'm striving for something, and if it malfunctions, I blame myself. Fifty per cent of the time it isn't. They're not up to par. But I drive myself, in a hurry. You want to get it done, you want to get it done by a certain time, like you yourself set up. I know I have to get this done by a certain time because
it has to be an overnight cure, let's say. If I
don't reach that, I get aggravated with myself.
(laughs) But there are times when things just don't
fall into -- the way they should -- into place.
Naturally, that's going to take time.

MD: Do you find that your equipment is kept up?

W6: No. You have to take it apart.

MD: So that's an irritant for you.

W6: Oh, most definitely. There are setbacks because of
that, because we don't have the sole cooperation from
those that can really be more helpful. This I see.

MD: So if you were trying to indicate to me what the
stresses are on your job, what would you say they
were?

W6: For beginning tooling. Lack of good quality tooling.
It involves gauges, and of course money.
You do the best work that you can with what you can.
This is it.

MD: Sometimes it doesn't work that way.

W6: And like they say, if we do have perfect parts, anyone
can build for gyro. So it's like, if this isn't
just so, try to fix it so you can deal with it. Try to
make it work.

MD: Is that what tooling is?

W6: No, that's what we do.

MD: What is tooling?

W6: Tooling is actually equipment that you have to use.
Fixtures that are needed, gauges that are needed. This
is all fine tooling. There are different gauges that one needs for particular jobs gyro. If they're just thrown together, like the quality isn't there, you're going to have a great deal of trouble, naturally. Because if what you're using isn't up to par, you can't produce anything that's A work. You mention that to those that should listen and do something about it. They hear you but they're not really listening. But as soon as they walk out the door, you're tracing them and asking them about two weeks later, "Have you looked into this? Why don't we have it back from the vendor's or whatever." "Well, I'll check, I'll be back." And you don't hear. I feel like I'm a haunt. You can't get no cooperation. You know how I deal with it? "It's men." (laughs) "You're a woman and what does she know." This company is like that.

MD: Are most of your supervisors males?

W6: Yes. They just started -- I'm a supervisor. They just started about six years ago, and it's still just a token thing. If you really looked into this company and into who has a higher position, who has the better paying job, it's still men. Any which way you look at it, they'll make titles to benefit the men. They did pass a law that people are equal, that get equal pay. But they still make up titles, they still cover themselves. You can see it up there; I see it up there. This is what I feel they haven't changed at all. I don't know if it's because men are making -- I'm
getting off the track about gyros, but -- making more money, they're kind of smug -- that adds extra income, and they get lazy. They get like distant with the workers and what they need. I talk up, believe me. At work, I talk up. (laughs) As a matter of fact, the boss says, you're not going to believe me, "You have a big mouth." (laughs) And I say, "You know what it is, it's they don't really care." That stays with them. What I state, it's fact because it's seen; it's not anything that I'd bring up at work or anything that's just to hear myself talk. It just falls on deaf ears. We're not up to perhaps other standards, other companies, I don't know. It's because the people that are up there, that can make changes, just don't. It's just like sitting back and you're fat and lazy, or what it is, I don't know. As far as women go, I don't see a change at all. They say they have made women lead people

I can count on one hand how many are up there. These are changes I haven't seen. It seems that women have to strive that much harder. Perhaps better qualifications, but you still have to strive harder than the fellow next to you in order to get the better pay or get a title, or whatever the case may be.

**MD:** If you and a guy were doing the same job, the gyro, would you have to produce more?

**W6:** No, not produce more, just be more, like, how can I put it?
MD: I gather there's a lot of responsibility in your job.

W6: Yes. Not really produce more -- I can't even pin it down. A guy can slack off, take his time about it, and get away with it, because perhaps he might have excuses. The boss, "Well, all right." But you have to have a damn good excuse or none at all. That's the whole idea. Because it's basically a man's job. It was, and it is, and it always will be.

MD: Even twenty years ago when you started?

W6: Oh, yes. There was only one woman boss. She was my boss, as a matter of fact. She was the only one, the only female. She was fabulous, a fabulous lady. After that, like I said, it's been six years, because I was one of the first ones to get a supervisor's time. Because you know, when it started, minority, being a woman, being Puerto Rican. So it's combination of both. Make her supervisor, shut her up or have her

But also what I knew. (laughs)

MD: If I could sort of put this in a nutshell, and tell me if I'm wrong, the job that you do, the actual performance of the job, shows me that you like the work that you're doing, it's not automated, it won't be able to be more automated in the future. You have a lot of responsibilities so you feel like when you're working on a component, that component is your responsibility, and you almost feel like a craft worker, more than just an assembly line worker.

W6: Oh yes.

MD: So that the real problems that you're having with the
job are basically the problems of management --

W6: They don't acknowledge really what the worker's doing. In gyro, I'm talking about.

But here we're dealing with few gyros. We don't deal in hundreds of thousands, like watches. So each one in their own way is working, like putting themselves into that one particular unit. It's not like, "I have to make up quite a few," and just kind of throw things together. Everyone really cares what they're putting into it.

MD: How long would it take you to work on one unit?

W6: The one we're working on now, three days, from beginning to end.

MD: One person works on a unit or several people?


MD: You do it yourself.

W6: Because the project is basically -- but, no, the other gyros, it's like kind of on an assembly line. This particular girl takes a particular operation and she does maybe forty, thirty, twenty, whatever that operation -- They are timed; you know, time studies, and they do have to produce a certain amount per hour. This is the other type of gyro. But I'm talking about my own bit; it doesn't work that way, because it is very technical. It's very involved.

MD: It sounds to me that you feel very good about the work you're doing.
W6: Oh, yes.

MD: That's very unusual.

W6: I really do. I do. It's a challenging thing, maybe perhaps because I'm on it from the beginning to the end. It's like dealing with a child, that you plant or you nurture it, you see it develop and then when you see it's not working once you test it, you get exasperated, and you say, "Why not?" and you try to reason it out why not. Go back and check parts and everything. when you do create something good it gives you a boast and a half. (laughs)

MD: Let me go to a different section now. About your work environment -- do you find that physically you handle job very well? You said you work with microscopes a lot. Are you worried about things like eyestrain? Do you feel any sort of fatigue, any physical stress?

W6: The only thing I feel that this is where this company is not up to, is working conditions as far as we work with very caustic solvents to clean our --

MD: Caustic solvents?

W6: Yes. It's supposed to be well ventilated. They do put up things and I believe they're all for show, as far as things like vents and hoods, supposedly to draw out these fumes that are quite dangerous. They're not up to standard. Also we work under conditions that are -- there's a hood, and it's dust particle count. We do have that. It has to be as dust-free as possible. It makes such a noise. It sounds like you're in Niagra
Falls all day. That's impairing to the ears. Between the fumes -- like now, we're all hot (shouted) You cannot talk, because that's louder than vocal conversation between two people. So that in time is impairing.

MD: You wear white?

W6: Yes.

MD: You work under these hoods and you can't hear each other talk?

W6: No, you have to raise your voice.

MD: Has that ever been inspected by OSHA?

W6: I've talked to them about it. In fact I've asked them, Because this creates a vibration and we have to solder under the mike. It's like our hair; that's how thin We have to be under the mike and you have to solder and that thing is going like this, because of the vibrations filtering

MD: What about eyestrain? Do you find that working under --

W6: Myself, not. My eyestrain is due to old age creeping up. (laughs)

MD: Are you in a position of constantly bending over? Do you have backstrain? Do you feel really exhausted after a day of work?

W6: Not really. The only thing is mentally fatigued when things don't go right. Or if there is friction amongst the girls or something like that. It would involve me because I have to be like intermediary. But outside of that, no.
MD: So some of the things that you would work with in your working environment that might be a potential problem for you would be the solvents that you need to use --

W6: Oh, yes, the fumes.

MD: The fumes from the solvents and the noise.

W6: I wish they would come in with

MD: Has your union dealt with these problems with management?

W6: I myself dealt with people that are supposed to look into that. I really don't go to the union, to be honest. I do my own, either speaking out, or fighting, whatever. I just go to the people I have to talk to. No, they say nothing can be done. I say, "Can't a muffler be put on for the sound?" Something, or something to stabilize. I said, "We need a gyro for to stabilize the vibrating." Nothing, so they say. just money, they don't want to put the money out.

MD: Twenty years ago, when you started, did you have the same kind of noise problems?

W6: No, I didn't work on then. It was open --

MD: Were there a lot of dust particles around then?

W6: No, because at that time, just motors were built under the hoods was different. The room that was set up before was different. It wasn't as noisy. It was . This is all like being under Niagra Falls. (tape unclear)
MD: Is there anything else that you deal with in your job that you feel that has changed over the last twenty years that you've dealt with some of the work here?

W6: The only time is building up and tearing down departments. has expanded; gyro has expanded; watches is now they're in gyros just like a side thing. No, now gyro is really moving up. That has increased quite a bit. So there are many more gyros than when I first started here.

MD: And that has been good?

W6: Yes.

MD: That hasn't produced any problems?

W6: Yes, it has been good. More jobs. But now that watches are starting to -- because haven't kept up; other companies, like Texas Instruments, producing better. It's still a good watch.

MD: Let me just ask you one last question. As a result of the work that you do, have you suffered at all any physical impairments that you may have gone to a doctor for or that you have taken care of yourself?

W6: No.

MD: No burns from soldering or anything.

W6: Oh, yes, that you get, but that happens. That's just natural. You just go to reach or something and hit the iron by mistake, or you cut yourself with the X-acto blade, or you slip with one of the tools. Nothing major. Just a few stitches, that's all. (laughs) It never fails. As soon as you put a new blade in an X-acto knife, you
always slip. It never fails. Ask anybody that works with that. As soon as you put a new blade, something always happens, where you either get pricked by it or you accidentally slip and you get sliced. It's just one of those things.

MD: That doesn't cause you any undue concern.

W6: Oh, no. (laughs) That's like being a mother. Playing with the kids you get hurt.

MD: Well, I appreciate your talking to me --

W6: Oh, this has been fun.

MD: -- and I thank you for dealing with the cold and the uncomfortable situation, and good luck.

W6: Thank you.

End of Interview