

# **World War I**

**Explosion at the National Filling Factory, White Lund  
Started on 1st October, 1917**



**Childhood memories of this event by  
Anne ('Nan') Spencer, née Harrington (above)  
b. 30th December 1906  
Recorded in her own handwriting in 1969**

We went to live at  
Preston early in 1916. On  
1st October 1917 I was wakened  
shortly after midnight by my  
parents, who told me we would  
have to go into the cellar, as  
there was an air raid (this was  
of course during the 1st War).

However, as I got out of bed  
there was a sudden flare and  
a terrific explosion and my  
father realised it was the  
munitions factory that was  
on fire and not an air raid.  
He was on the staff there and  
thought it his duty to go and  
see if there was anything he  
could do to help. We were  
about a mile from the  
factory and by the time my

mother, brother and myself had put coats on over our night clothes, the girls who worked nights at the factory were running, terror stricken, past our house. My mother tried to persuade some of them to come into the house but they were much too scared and some of them ran right round Morecambe bay and as far as Kendal. Eventually we joined them and made our way towards the sea front. Every time there was a flare we knew there would be an explosion and dropped to the ground, covering our heads with our arms, as the blast shattered shop windows when we

reached the town and glass  
flew all round us. Many  
people were badly cut but we  
escaped, luckily. We came  
at last to the old stone pier  
and could go no further; the  
pier was made up of huge  
stones and there were hundreds  
of people sitting there. Fortunately  
the shells, as they exploded,  
just cleared us, whistled  
over our heads and fell into  
the sea. It was absolutely  
terrifying and to add to our  
misery, bitterly cold, and we  
had very little on. Also, we  
wondered what had happened to  
father and were sure he must  
have been killed. It was  
a night of full moon, almost

as light as day and the shells were visible as they passed over us, huge things about 6 ft. long.

Father had been unable to reach the factory because of blast, which blew him off his bicycle, the only means of transport. Eventually he gave up, returned home to find us gone, so collected warm clothing and came in search of us. He must have passed us on the pier but did not see us as there were so many people milling about.

At daylight mother decided we should go along to the Police Station to see if there was any news and the

Inspector there, Mr. Eddley, told us father had been in twice for news of us. They gave us a warm drink and advised us to wait there, as father was sure to call again. After an hour or so he did return and we were so thankful to see him and to put on the clothes he had brought. - We went home to find the house in a terrible state; every ceiling down and all window frames at the back of the house blown in, oddly enough with the glass unbroken. The one in my bedroom was lying across my bed.

Fortunately, the room

least damaged was the kitchen and mother was able to put a meal together for us. Father then decided to make another effort to get to the factory and this time succeeded. The fire was still raging and Fire Brigades were there from as far away as Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Bradford, Halifax and many others. The extraordinary thing was that only ten people were killed but my Aunt and Uncle in Manchester were frantic because they could see the fire and hear the explosions (almost 80 miles away) and were told that the whole of Morecambe and

Lancaster were in ruins and they were walking on the dead.

Father returned to us as quickly as possible and said we might as well spend the night in the house, as the shells were still going overhead. What he didn't tell us then was that the fire was only a few yards from the section where the Russian magazines were housed and that these were monsters and lying on their sides, so that had the fire reached them nothing could have saved us from complete devastation. Thanks to the bravery of the firemen,

the fire was extinguished on  
the third morning and we  
were safe.

We stayed with relatives  
in Haydock Grove until the  
house was patched up but  
left Morecambe the following  
May.