

TOWER LINE—WINTER OF 1917

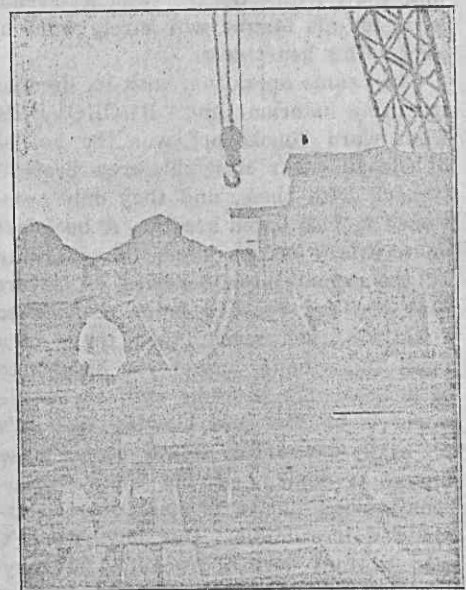
had gone on. All the equipment in the building was damp, but we tried to get started without taking time to "dry out." Then, to make matters worse, our operating force was on pins and needles so to speak. Billy Crow, Russell, Cline, and Shipwash had been sent to Maryville a short time previously, to be initiated into the mysteries of rotary station operation. They got an eyeful, an earful, and just about a b—ful of rotary station operation while they were over there. They saw lots of fireworks, and I guess the fellows at Maryville stuffed them to the gills with tales of more fireworks and the terrible things that went on around a rotary station. When they got back, they were "Rotary shy." If you snapped your fingers behind one of their backs while he was in the station he'd jump three feet in the air and be half way to the door before he realized that he wasn't really injured. It didn't take much of that sort of behavior (and they told some good tales, too) to get the other boys skittish; and the night we started things turning there were a good many pairs of weak knees wabbling around the place.

We had a pretty good audience to see the start-up. Most all the Big Bugs were hanging around, lots of inquisitive persons of all sorts, and even some ladies. It had just gotten dark enough to make fire show up well, and about the second switch we threw the fireworks started. Not many of the assembled watchers had ever seen real fireworks before, and they began to thin out immediately. Most of the trouble was caused by the failure of damp insulation in minor places that didn't do any serious damage, but for awhile we had the biggest humming, spitting, and flashing you ever heard, with an occasional boom and roar that would rattle the windows and cause hearts to quake worse than ever. Then when Billy Crow got mixed up with a switch that closed at the wrong time, and was carried home with his head and arms swathed in bandages (he wasn't seriously hurt, just singed up a bit), all the audience left that didn't have to stay—and some of those left, too.

Then we had it, all that night, the next day and night, and the next day, drying out apparatus and fixing parts that had gone down and trying them out again. It was right funny seeing Mr. Beers in his undershirt working away on a field rheostat at two a. m. None of us got much sleep those two nights, and the whole gang was just about all in. I afforded the boys some amusement

by getting the colic or something, and thinking I was poisoned. They carried me to the first aid, and then started to take me home in a car, but on the way I got all right, so we turned around and came back. Then I got shot in the ear with a fire extinguisher. Something had caught fire behind a switchboard. I stepped behind to put it out, and just as I emerged from behind the board, still looking back, Mike Foley rushed up with a J. M. extinguisher pumped up to bursting point, and let drive squarely in my ear, not a foot away. It knocked me down flat, and there I lay, mad as the Dickens, for I could taste the stuff in my mouth, and was sure it had shot right on through my ear drum. I guess it would have made a goat laugh to see me writhing around on the ground with Zipp pouring ice water in my ear out of a dipper, Janitschek rushing all the way from the Laboratory with a bottle of sweet oil, Dr. Rainey rushing up with a gripful of tools and medicine, and about thirty men standing around in a circle wondering if I'd live through it. However, we soon decided that I wasn't injured, and we all got back to work again.

There was a whole-souled sigh of relief at noon the third day, when we choked the Pot Room breaker, and sent the juice to 22 without blowing the roof off of it. Not that our troubles were over by any means, but we had started making aluminum, so the main excitement was transferred to the Pot Room,



UNLOADING ONE OF THE BIG ROTARY CONVERTERS—SPRING OF 1916, STATION NO. 19

sticking out. We were getting along finely, and out of the eight stacks of "pie pans" (there were more than a hundred pans in each stack) we had all filled but one, when what was our consternation to find that the last bottle of electrolyte had been cracked in its crate, and all the juice had leaked out—it was dry as William Jennings' cellar. Well, there was no time to be lost, and the only way to fill the last stack was to get a little out of each one of the pans we had already filled. It was a puzzler just how to do it and be sure that it was done right, for too little in just one pan meant that the whole job was spoiled. The way we did it was to take a rubber tube, just long enough to hold the right amount, stick one end in between two pans (they set so close into one another that you couldn't see the liquid in them), and suck on the tube until you tasted something, pinch the tube, pull it out, and blow the stuff into a bottle. Pete had the job of sucking, and he was so sleepy (it was almost morning then, and most of us had lost quite a bit of sleep in the last ten days anyhow) that he must have wasted about a quart of the stuff swallowing it; but we got enough to finish.

Then came the starting up. That was right in line with everything else that