

The Hoe Street Flying Bomb

During WWII, Walthamstow suffered and endured a total of 776 bombings and 1449 air raid warnings. Many died and many more were injured. The day by day stress that this situation caused to residents was immense. From the middle of June 1944, Germany unleashed a new 'terror' weapon that added a new dimension to the misery on the British public. These were pilotless flying bombs known as V-1's.

Buzz Bombs, Doodlebugs & Flying Bombs

The 'V' came from the German word *Vergeltungswaffen*, that means 'weapons of reprisal' and the V-1 flying bomb was developed by German scientists at the Peenemünde research facility on the Baltic Sea, under the direction of *Wernher von Braun* and *Walter Dornberger*.



The V-1 Flying bomb was an unmanned gyro guided plane that delivered a tonne of high explosive each time one hurtled into the ground. 2,419 were to explode in London between June 1944 and March 1945.

They were nicknamed 'buzz bombs, doodlebugs' and flying bombs' by the British due to the distinct buzzing sound made by the pulse-jet engines powering the bombs, which overall resembled a small aircraft. Each V-1 was launched from a short length catapult then climbed to about 3,000 feet at speeds up to 350 miles per hour.

As the V-1 approached its target, the buzzing noise could be heard by persons on the ground. At a preset distance, the engine would suddenly cut out and there would be momentary silence as the bomb plunged toward the ground, followed by an explosion of the 1,870 pound warhead.

Blast Damage

The V-1 caused blast damage over a wide area. It exploded on the surface, and a huge blast wave rippled out from the epicentre. As it did so it left a vacuum, which caused a second rush of air as the vacuum was filled. This caused a devastating pushing and pulling effect.

At the impact site houses or buildings were totally demolished. In London suburbs where terrace houses were packed together, sometimes up to 20 houses would totally collapse. Brick walls were pulverised into small fragments.

Further out from the epicentre walls, roofs and window frames were ripped out exposing the contents and innards of the house. Further out still, all the windows were blown out and roofing slates blown off. Every time a Doodlebug landed hundreds of houses were damaged. With the damage ranging from demolition to slight damage.



The blast area of a V-1 extended across a radius of 400 -600 yards in each direction.

Anyone close to the impact site would be blown apart or suffer crush injuries from falling masonry. Others would be trapped below collapsed buildings and have to be dug out. Further away from the impact site awful injuries were inflicted by shards of flying glass.

Terror Attacks

The first V-1s were launched against London on June 13, 1944, a week after the D-Day landings. During the first V-1 bombing campaign, up to 100 V-1s fell every hour on London. Over an 80 day period, more than 6,000 persons were killed, with over 17,000 injured and a million buildings wrecked or damaged.

Unlike conventional German aircraft bombing raids, V-1 attacks occurred around the clock in all types of weather, striking indiscriminately, causing suspense and terror among the population of London and parts of Kent and Sussex.

Marilyn STROUD nee KING tells us: <http://www.walthamstowmemories.net/html/Postbags/postbag12.html>

“Mum later told me that one time when the doodlebugs were in use she and my Dad sat on the backstairs waiting for it to pass over but the engine of the doodlebug cut out and there was just silence. That was the worst sound if you can call it that. Mum had hysterics and my Dad had to slap her across the face to bring her out of it. Where that doodlebug fell is anyone’s guess. Apparently a doodlebug had fallen in Hoe Street just by the Granada and those killed were laid out in Hoe Street. Mum said there wasn’t a mark on any of them. The blast from the doodlebug had probably killed them.”

This is the story of one incident.....

The Location



Above: The post war Arcade site



The Hoe St / Church Hill post war development

Probably the most graphic location for reminding present day Walthamstow residents generations the horrors of WWII is the area around the junctions of Hoe Street, Church Hill and the High Street. Today, on the High Street side,



there is the old Arcade site, now a large empty space that is waiting long overdue development. On the Church Hill side there is a classic 1960/70's development of a parade of shops with a undulating concrete awning over and a clock tower on the end faced with various Walthamstow heraldic armorials.

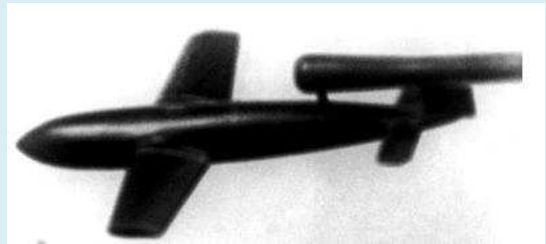
Near to the end of WWII, in 1944, it was a lot different. On the Church Hill corner with Hoe Street was Livermore Brothers (No 141) an old established drapers shop. Next door at no 139 was a *Hitchman's Dairies* milk distribution centre. On the other side of the road on the corner of Hoe Street and the High Street was *Montague Burton's* the tailors with a snooker hall above and *Harry Stoffer's* fish shop. Further along were *Henry Taylor's*, four drapers shops (Nos192-198) and the *Granada cinema*.

A Sunny August Saturday

Saturday, August 16th 1944 was a warm summer's day. After years of being battered by German bombs, the British had now taken the initiative and with their allies had invaded Normandy. But ordinary life had to go on and in Walthamstow, because it was Saturday, many housewives went to the High Street to do their shopping in the market.

Just before 10 am, people heard a buzzing noise that was like a loud rude raspberry. Most knew the dreadful news that this foretold. This was a V-1 flying bomb. As long as you could hear it buzzing you were OK because that meant it was still flying. The minute the noise stopped you were in trouble. People rushed into shops and buildings trying to take cover.

Those that looked up saw what looked like an aeroplane with short stubby wings and a drain pipe on its back. The noise stopped and there was a short deathly silence before the flying bomb fell and exploded. There was a double detonation followed by shock wave blast of air and an awful silence. Shortly after, a pall of dust filled the air and settled on everything.



The flying bomb was a direct hit on *Hitchmans Dairy depot* and *Livermore Draper's* shop. The blast weakened the buildings beside the blast site and on the other side of the road blowing out the windows. The blast damage was so severe that it damaged the roof and foyer of the *Granada Cinema* and forced its closure for three months. A little further down the High Street, the force of the blast severely weakened the spire of *Marsh Street Congregational Church* that later had to be removed.



Councillor *Ross Wyld*, later a Mayor and Justice of the Peace in Walthamstow, is one of a number of people who were instrumental in the making of Walthamstow as a progressive Borough that cared for its residents. During WWII he was in one of those in charge of the Borough's Civil Defence and his special responsibility was Air Raid Precautions.

This is *Ross Wyld's* own account of the incident.

"The Hoe Street Fly Bomb (August 1944)

Hoe Street's real trouble came later with the bomb which fell in daylight outside *Hitchman's* distributing Centre in *Hoe Street* near *Church Hill*.

The approach of the bomb was heard and people shopping in the vicinity took such shelter as was available; some dived into shops and doorways, others into an archway between two shops which led to a motor coach garage at the rear. By the

worst of bad luck the bomb burst practically opposite to this archway collapsing the two floors above and burying people in the debris. The Incident was complicated by the fact that the bomb dropped just before 10 a.m. when shopping was in full swing, and it was not until after midnight that we were able to say just how many people were reported to be missing.

The Rescue Service worked throughout the day and night and by 7 o'clock the next morning the last body had been recovered from the archway, the wall of one side of which was threatening all the time to collapse and bury the rescuers. On the other side of this same wall a lad of 15 was trapped by debris to the waist, and at the risk of their lives the Rescue men, a doctor and the Casualty Staff Officer worked for some four hours before the lad was rescued at about 2.45 p.m. uninjured, but suffering from shock. The last body (that of an office cleaner) was recovered from the iron staircase buried under the debris at the back of some office buildings at the bottom of Church.

The casualty list at this Incident was our worst for Fly Bombs, there being 19 dead bodies recovered in addition to three other deaths which occurred in hospital subsequent to rescue. The total of casualties recorded for this one Fly was 144.

Zone of Silence

One local resident who was shopping in Hale End heard nothing although she was only 200 yards away. This so-called "zone of silence" was a marked feature of Rocket Incidents, persons within a range of even up to 250 or 300 yards not hearing the explosion although they would, of course feel the earth tremor when the Rocket burst on the ground. The zone of silence was apparently caused by the terrific speed of the out-rush of the blast driving the air before it and in the temporary absence of air, there being a practical vacuum, no sound could travel across that zone."

Dick Langstaff writing in <http://www.oldmonovians.com/old-monovians/memories/dick-langstaff-s-memories.html> tells us:

One Saturday lunchtime we heard the sound of a V1 approaching and Mum and I went into the shelter. As it went over its engine stopped, we expected the worst but it re-started, having apparently been damaged by AA fire, only to stop finally and drop on Hitchman's Dairy depot in Hoe Street causing many fatalities. Aunt Dora had a lucky escape; having mistaken a whistle blown at the Baths for the local warning of imminent attack, she took shelter, otherwise she would have been in the dairy.

Comprehending The Disaster

For today's generation, it is very difficult to comprehend the scale of the disaster that threatened to overwhelm the sparse Walthamstow war-time resources. Perhaps the best comparison that I can make, is that of the terrible effects of the Israeli bombing of Gaza that presently fills our TV screens, where we see the bodies of the victims, the devastation and despair of the families and the destruction of property.

We know that the *Walthamstow Rescue Service* worked throughout the day and night until the last body was removed at 7 am the following morning. On that awful day in 1944, the scale of the disaster created the need for a temporary makeshift morgue and the bodies of the victims were taken to the *Granada Cinema*.

The Effects Of The Tragedy

The physical effects of the tragedy were apparent for many years after the war.

Rodney Silk advises: <http://www.walthamstowmemories.net/html/Postbags/postbag12.html>

"For six years just after the war I would pass this spot on a bus on my way to school. It took many years before the damaged area was eventually cleared and a new development built on the site. I clearly remember seeing the badly damaged Burton tailors building on the corner of the High Street with the snooker tables still in place on the upper floor which was all open to the elements."

This is echoed by Derek Everett who writes:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/leeds/content/articles/2005/07/05/local_history_montague_burton_feature.shtml *In the 1940s most of the Burtons in East London had snooker halls above them. After a V2 rocket partly destroyed the one at the top of Walthamstow High Street snooker tables hung half out of the remains for several years.*

In the 1960's, Marsh Street Congregational Church that had been badly damaged by the Hoe Street flying bomb blast, was demolished.

In the 1960', the severely affected areas on both sides of Hoe Street were demolished and redeveloped. On the High Street side, this was as the 'Arcade' site with shops and housing above. On the Church Hill side as a the parade of shops and clock tower that we see today. Appropriately, part of the development contained a public hall facility named *Ross Wyld* Hall.

However, the most important effects of the tragedy were in how it affected the lives of the many Walthamstow people who had been caught up in the events. The grief of the families who had lost loved ones, the enforced change to the lives of the maimed and disabled victims and the long term emotional trauma of those who witnessed the events which affected them and their families.

The Future

After many years of failed development plans and difficulties in securing finance capital, a new development scheme and financial package have been put in place to redevelop the *Arcade Site*. As a result *Waltham Forest Council* together with *Hill Residential* and the *Islington & Shoreditch Housing Association* will provide:

A new development that will be called '*The Scene at Cleveland Place*'. It will comprise a nine-screen Empire cinema, five new restaurants and shops as well as 121 homes, 50 of which will be a mix of flats and houses for families who need social housing.



Above: The existing site in Hoe Street & High Street. Above: An artist's impression of the new development

Waltham Forest Council is investing over £4.5 million in the public realm around Cleveland Place. This includes: a new public space to link with the Town Square and gardens as well as shop front improvements in Hoe Street. They believe that this development, together with the creation of the new Travelodge Hotel by Walthamstow Station will help stimulate the economy.

Bill Bayliss
July 2014

Addenda

One family whose lives were changed by the disaster was David & Mary Williams.

On the fateful day, David and his wife were working for the owner of the Fish and Chip shop that he rented at the top of the High Street opposite the Baths. This was a very profitable business because fish was not rationed and there were always a long queue of people outside of the shop. On the morning of the V-1 attack, the shop owner left the shop to do some shopping in Hoe Street. While he was out, the V1 flying bomb exploded.

He never came back to the shop and it was assumed that he was one of the unidentified people who had died. David and his wife continued to operate the business. After several months, when there still hadn't been any word from him, David Williams successfully applied to the owner to rent the shop himself and to carry on running the business

After the war, the profits they made enabled them to buy a car hire business for their oldest son when he was demobbed from the RAF. Later, they were able to finance their daughter and her husband to set up a fish and chip shop in Leyton and to do the same for his own brother-in-law who opened a fish and chip shop opposite Lloyds Park.

In 1959, I married their grand-daughter and we later ran and lived over the High Street shop.

Manned Flying Bombs

This is the secret weapon which Hitler hoped would help destroy London during World War II. Although 5,000 V-1 rockets were launched by the Germans from France and Holland to bomb



London, the aim of the flying bombs were random - the bombs dropped when they ran out of fuel . As a result 150 of them were modified with a small cockpit so they could be flown accurately into targets.

The intent was that the pilot would guide the flying bomb to the target and bail out of the rocket at the last moment. It was ultimately a suicide mission as the airspeed would have been 550mph. However, none of the piloted rockets ever flew in anger because with the exception of a few Hitler fanatics, there was a lack of airmen willing to volunteer. This manned version of the fearsome flying missile, that was effectively a suicidal bomb experiment by the Germans, has been owned by a British museum for over 40 years.

The piloted flying bomb was sent back to Germany to be restored by experts to the condition it was in when it was found and seized by the Allies at the end of World War II. Only six of them

exist today, including the one that has undergone restoration that is in a museum in Kent.. The other five are in museums in France, Holland, Canada, the US and Germany

Resources

The principal resource for this article is *Ross Wyld's 'War Over Walthamstow'* that can be read on-line at: http://www.rainbowcircle.f2s.com/Walthamstow/4_1_1.html

Readers may well also want to read Alan Miles well written account '*Living In The Love Of The Common People*' at: <http://www.walthamstowmemories.net/pdfs/Alan%20Miles%20-%20Living%20in%20the%20Love.pdf>

The following is a decription of the proposed site development:

<http://www.hill.co.uk/files/brochures/the-scene.pdf>