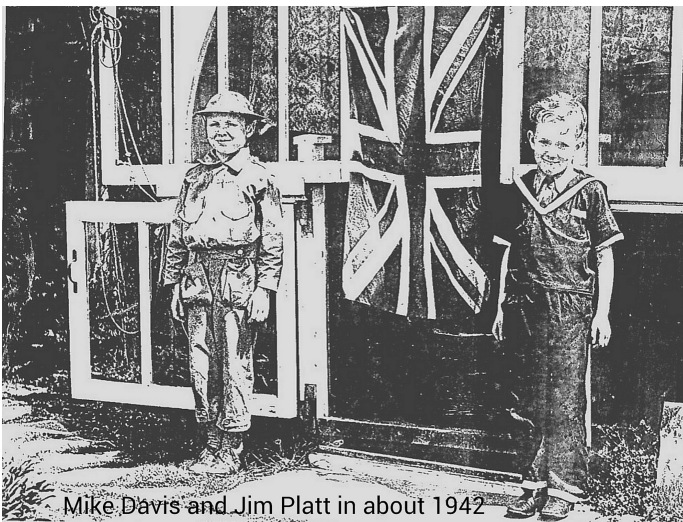


The Bombing of Marlow

Article 1: The V1 Flying Bomb, July 1944

Keith Ray's article in a previous *Newsletter* about bombs dropped on Marlow during WW2 and the various craters, intrigued me and inspired me to find out more. I soon discovered the online map called 'Bombs over Bucks' maintained by the Bucks Record Office in Aylesbury. This is a detailed map of the whole of our county showing bombs, flying bombs and friendly fire incidents eg ack-ack firing. I quickly noticed the entry for the V1 bomb that fell just to the north of our town on Saturday 22nd July 1944 with the laconic description: 'Chalk Pit Lane, Great Marlow, houses damaged and casualties'.

The map informs me that a total of 17 V1s fell within the modern and pre-1974 county boundaries, with 8 falling south of the current line of the M40. Marlow's was the western-most in that area with the nearest one to the east falling at Farnham Common causing no casualties. The nearest one to the north fell in the Hughenden Valley on 7th August 1944 breaking windows at Hughenden Manor and other houses, but again no casualties. **(see note at end of article)*



No V2 rockets fell in Bucks during the final year of the war and the nearest one to us fell at Pinkneys Green at about 10am on 19th March 1945 causing extensive damage and 12 casualties, including the death of an elderly lady who died of shock.

The Marlow bomb fell late on the Saturday afternoon and detonated at the top of Chalkpit Lane about 100 yards down from the *Royal Oak* and on the same side of the road. On the other side of Chalkpit Lane is a short track leading past *Blounts Cottage* (on the right, now called *Blounts Lodge*)

and up to *Blounts Farmhouse*. *Blounts Cottage* was at the time a tied cottage and lived in by Jim Platt's grandfather who was the Farm Manager. He was out working in another part of the farm at the time, but Jim's grandmother was at home. Unfortunately for Jim, he was also in the house, proudly showing off his bicycle which he had decorated with farm produce as part of a "Dig for Victory" display in Higginson Park earlier that afternoon. The effect of the explosion on *Blounts Cottage* was catastrophic and much of the house was demolished. Jim received a serious wound to the temple, probably from flying debris, for which he carries the scar to this day. Although badly injured, he managed to help his shocked grandmother out of the house to safety.

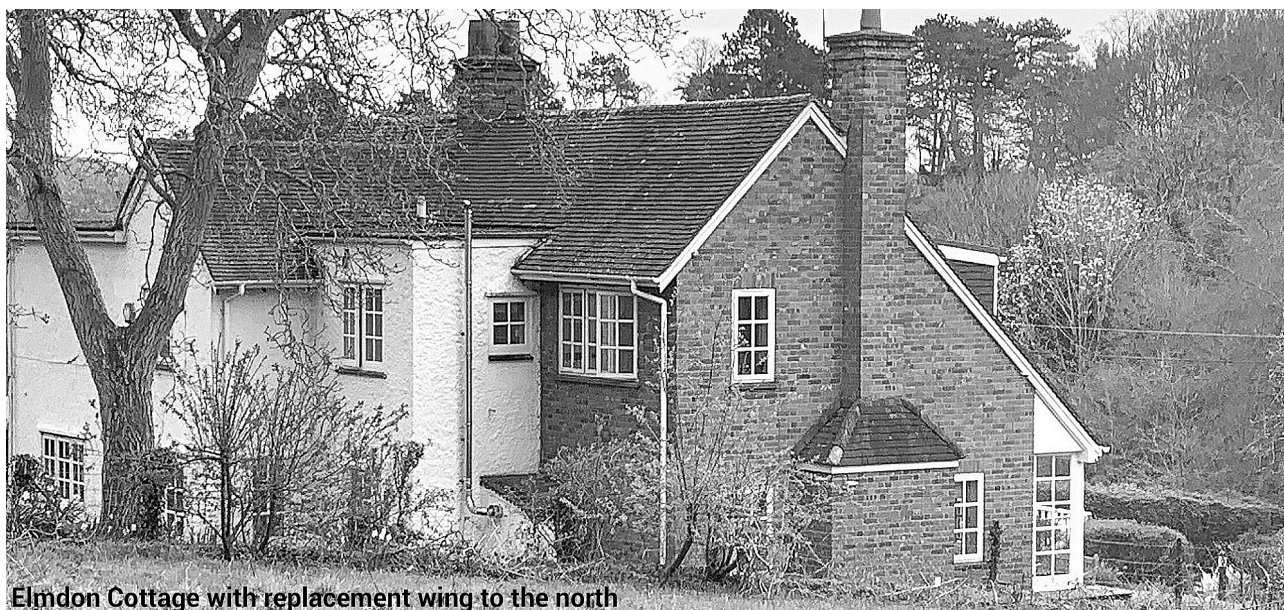
A local policeman arrived first on the scene followed shortly by Dr Henry who drove up from his house in Station Road. Chalkpit Lane was completely blocked by fallen trees and Dr Henry had to drive up Spinfield Lane and through Bovington Green. Dr Henry took Jim to Marlow Cottage Hospital where he was operated on and spent the next month recovering, which must have felt particularly distressing since it was a waste of his school summer holidays. Pam Johnson (née Nottingham) who lived in Glade Road at that time, remembers being told that Jim arrived at the hospital still wearing his Cubs uniform and cap! Jim believes that he was one of the first people in this country to be

treated with the new wonder drug, penicillin, administered as an ointment applied to the wound.

Jim's childhood friend, Mike Davis (see photo above), was at home with his mother in Bovington Green when they heard the explosion and saw the black plume of smoke. Disobeying firm instructions from his mother, Mike remembers cycling round to *Blounts Cottage* whereupon he was told by the policeman to "clear off". He then joined a crowd standing on the blocked Chalkpit Lane and managed to pick up part of the fuselage as a souvenir. Mike doesn't say whether this trophy (now long gone) was worth the clipped ear from his mother when he got home!

Jim's sister Pauline was driving home to Forty Green with her mother when they first heard and then saw the bomb falling from the sky. She remembers well the characteristic throbbing sound of the engine, the fear as the noise cut out, and the strange acrid smell after the explosion.

Contained within Maidenhead's records of wartime incidents is the description of a Mr Wakefield in Cookham who remembers seeing a V1 overhead on that day at about 500 feet and heading northward. He heard the engine cut out and then "it seemed to glide on a long way before I lost sight of it". Was this the Marlow bomb?



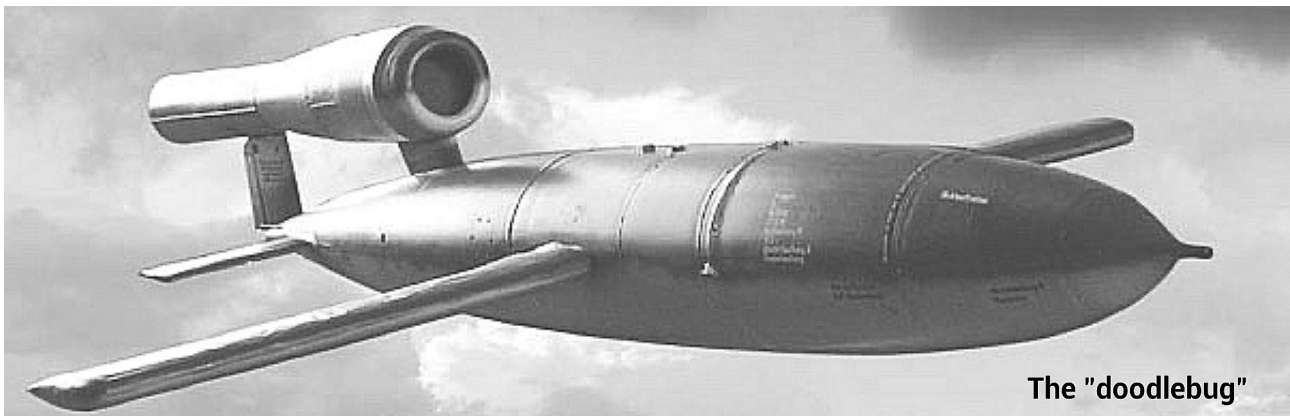
Elmdon Cottage with replacement wing to the north

There must have been extensive damage to the *Royal Oak* and to some of the houses down the hill, such as *Elmdon Cottage* (then *Chalkpit Cottage*) on the north side of the road, and also to the nearest houses on the south side such as *Hillside* and *Hillcrest*. The photo of *Elmdon Cottage* as it is today clearly shows that the northern part of the house, which would have taken the brunt of the blast, to have been rebuilt at some point. Sadly much time has passed with consequent changes of ownership and I have been unable to find out any more. In his 2011 book *A Pictorial History of the Last Century at Wethered's Brewery*, Ray Evans records that the Wethered-owned *Chiltern Cottages* at the top of Oxford Road and the *Duke of Cambridge* all had their windows blown in by the blast.

Certainly, the V1 contained almost a ton of high explosive (1,700 lbs) capable of inflicting crushing blast damage over 400 to 600 yards. Most German high explosive bombs dropped from planes weighed about 550lbs.

The Wehrmacht first launched the V1 to target London on 13th June 1944, one week after the successful D-Day landings in Europe. At the peak, more than one hundred V1s a day were fired at south-east England, 9,521 in total, decreasing in number as launch sites were overrun until October 1944. The simple Argus-built engine pulsed 50 times per second, and the characteristic buzzing sound gave rise to the colloquial names "buzz bomb" or "doodlebug" (a common name at the time for a wide variety of flying insects). They could fly at just over 400mph and could outpace Hurricanes and Spitfires, even when they dived. The British only came up with a counter-measure with the Tempest fighter in late 1944 which could outpace the bombs, and they successfully destroyed hundreds.

Why then were V1s coming down so far west of London? Two words - deception and diversion. In order to correct settings in the V1 guidance system, the Germans needed to know where they were impacting. Therefore, German intelligence was requested to obtain this data from their agents in Britain. But all German agents in Britain had been turned and were acting as double agents under British control. It is now well documented that from June 1944, double agents were requested by German controllers to send back information on the sites and times of impacts. The British decided that the double agents would report the damage caused by V1s fairly accurately, but minimise the effect they had on civilian morale and avoid giving the times of impacts.



A certain number of the V1s fired had been fitted with radio transmitters, which had clearly demonstrated a tendency for the bomb to fall short. The commander of the regiment which was responsible for the offensive compared the data gathered by the transmitters with the reports obtained through the double agents. Fortunately, when faced with the discrepancy between the two sets of data, he concluded that there must be a fault with the radio transmitters, as he had been assured that the agents were completely reliable. It was later calculated that if he had disregarded the agents' reports and relied on the radio data, he would have made the correct adjustments to the V1's guidance, and casualties in London might have increased by 50 per cent or more. The policy of diverting V1 impacts away from central London was controversial within the War Cabinet. However Sir Findlater Stewart of the Home Defence Executive took responsibility for starting the deception programme immediately, and his action was approved by Churchill when he returned.

Geoff Wood

To produce this article, I have interviewed various Marlow residents who lived here during the war. I am very interested in talking to more local people about their experiences at that time. If you were around or if you know anyone who was around, please get in touch with me by either emailing: tmsheritage@marlowsociety.org.uk or phone: 01628 475475. -G.W.

*Correction July 2023:

Since writing this article in November 2020, I have discovered on the “Bombs Over Bucks” map another V1 bomb which fell at Lane End on or about Wednesday 5th July 1944. The bomb dropped during the day on the Chalkey Lane allotments just to the west of the B 482 Marlow Road. It wrecked the old telephone exchange and badly damaged several of the nearby houses, but caused only minor injuries to residents. - G.W.