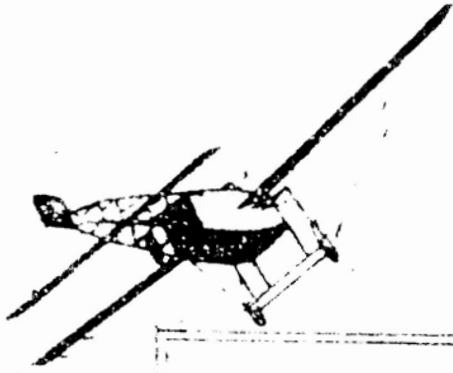


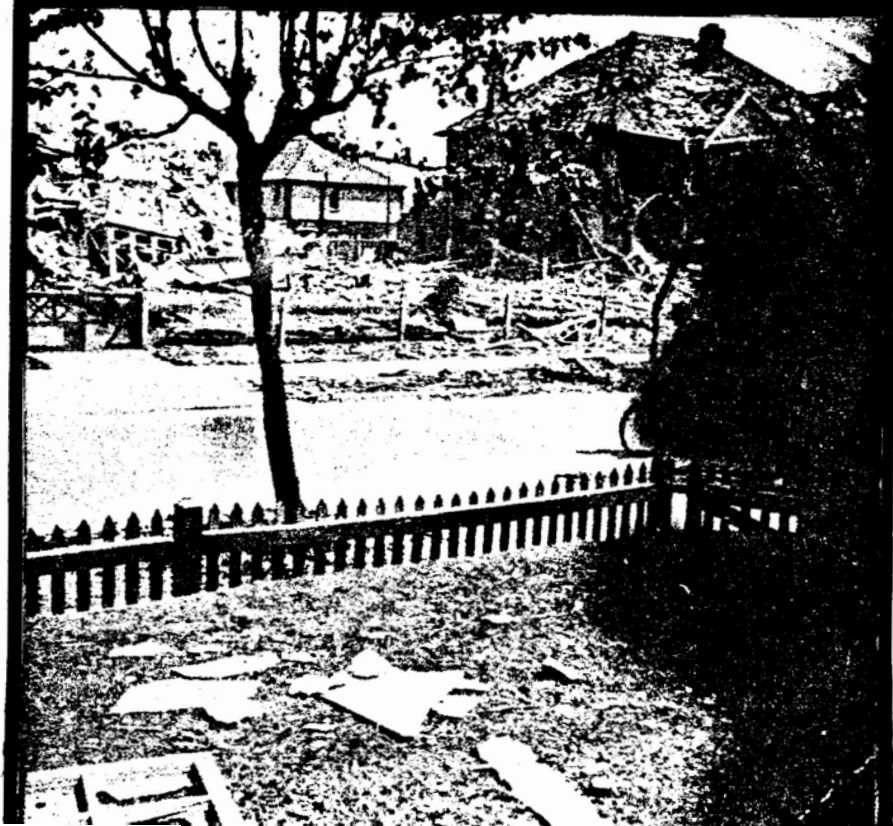
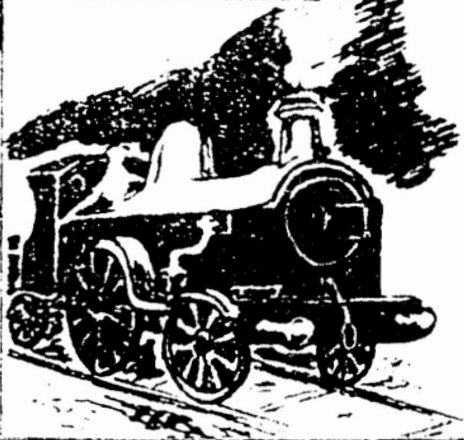
Air raids over Eastleigh. 1939-1949.



*Eastleigh & District
Local History Society*

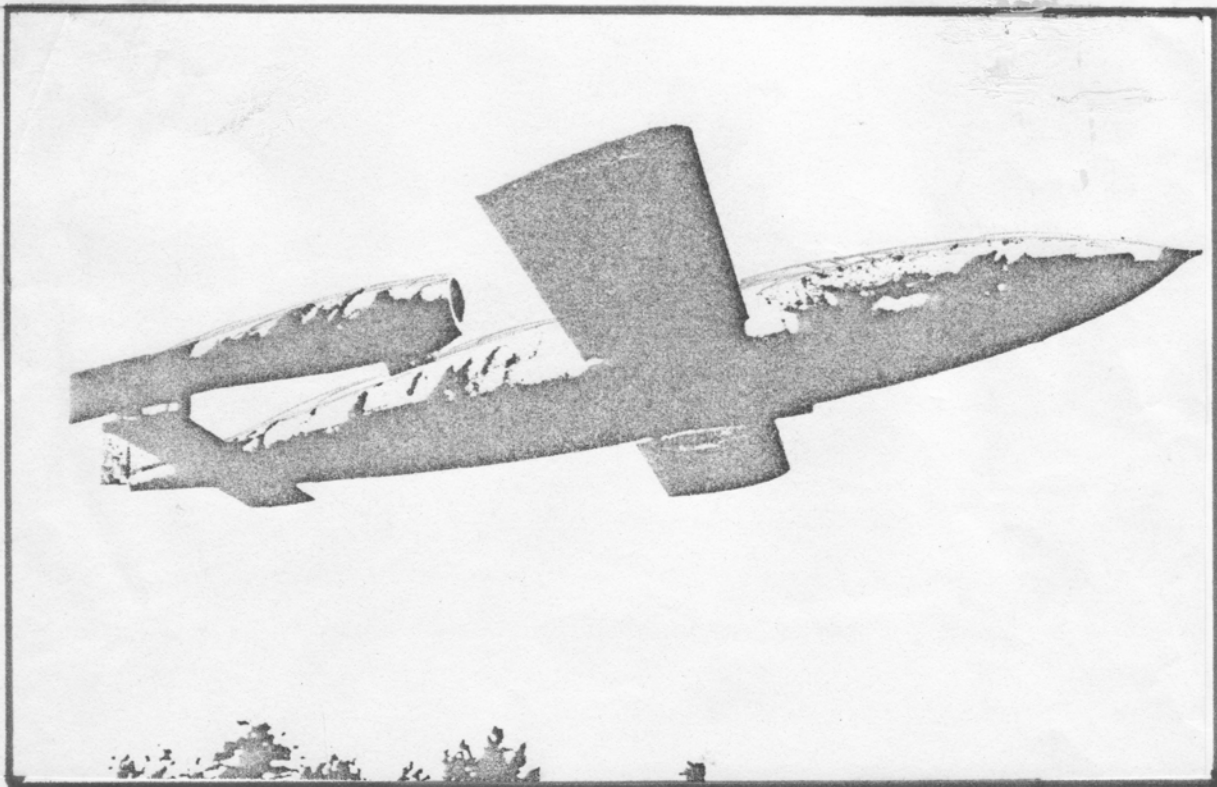
SPECIAL PAPER No. 5

*Ipsse bearric
tenei
Estlere in
damin*





MESSERSCHMITT, 109



V.1. ROCKET PLANE

AIR RAIDS OVER EASTLEIGH

The following brief summary of major incidents that took place in Eastleigh during the Second World War is drawn from the official accounts, a report in the Southern Daily Echo and records kept by a number of people living in Eastleigh at the time.

Mrs. D. Knight recorded the duration of every siren warning that was given and from the first on 7th June, 1940, to the last on 7th November, 1944, she has noted 1,590 alerts, not much different from the official figure of 1,469.

Eastleigh was not considered to be in a danger zone. Sick people and pregnant women were brought here from Gosport and pupils from the Grammar School came for the duration, occupying the new North End School building. Casualties in the town were comparatively light and were mainly due to proximity with Southampton. Death and damage to property were nevertheless harrowing for the families who suffered.

Official figures indicate 23 deaths (12 women, 10 men, 1 child), 21 people seriously injured and 25 slightly hurt. About 190 high explosive bombs dropped on the town, there were 17 incendiary bomb attacks and 4 parachute bombs landed. Over 4,000 houses were damaged, 35 of them beyond repair; in addition, industrial, commercial and public buildings were hit but not seriously damaged.

Mr. Norman Norris has recorded air activity over Southampton and Eastleigh on 13th August, 1940, when it was claimed that 22 enemy planes were brought down, one German pilot landing by parachute in Cranbury Park. Two days later, an English Hudson bomber was taking off from Eastleigh airport as the alarm was sounded. It struck a barrage balloon cable and fell on Council houses in Nutbeem Road, killing Mr. and Mrs. Tom Craig as well as the nine airmen in the plane.

In November, 1940, a plane jettisoned its bomb load at the junction of Church Road and Spring Lane, Bishopstoke, causing considerable damage to property but no casualties.

On 9th November, 1941, bombs fell on Chamberlayne Road and Nutbeem Road, causing the death of Mrs. A. Hiscock and seriously injuring three others. Ten days later, a plane which appeared to have been hit unloaded eight bombs, five of which landed on railway premises, killing Messrs. R. Gillingham, Godfrey, L. Gaiger, Henbest and F. Ball, all members of a Southern Railway first-aid party.

On 25th February, 1941, a single plane suddenly appeared over Chandlers Ford and dropped bombs on a house in Winchester Road, which killed Mrs. Elizabeth Smith, aged 82, and her grand-daughter, Isobel, aged five. Three others were seriously hurt. During March and April, bombs fell mainly in woodland areas with no casualties, but two houses were demolished. During June of that year, parachute mines were dropped, one close to Green Lane lifting all the roofs in Locksley Road and another causing the deaths of a number of service personnel.

On 18th April, 1942, bombs fell on houses in Wilmer Road. Casualties included Mrs. McCormack, aged 86, who was killed. Eastleigh's most serious raid was on 22nd June, 1942. Numerous flares were dropped over Eastleigh and Southampton to light up the whole area. Planes then dive-bombed to drop high explosive and incendiary bombs. There was considerable damage to residential, commercial and industrial property. Tognbee School, the Town Hall and the Police Station were also damaged. Mrs. Hart and twin brothers Francis and Leonard Hart of Leigh Road were killed as were Mr. E. Kent, Mrs. A. Kent, Mrs. E. Oakley and Mrs. Winnell of Owen Road. Three others were seriously injured.

Eastleigh endured no further serious enemy action, although sirens were sounded and aircraft were shot down. But, in 1944, the nerves of the whole country were set on edge by the unpredictability of the so-called V-Bombs, nicknamed Doodlebugs. These long range rockets, sort of miniature pilotless planes, were safe until the engine cut out; then they fell in silence with devastating effect as they hit the ground. Although most of these were meant for London, some were mis-directed or went astray over other parts of southern England. Four are officially recorded as falling in the Eastleigh area, in a field at Middle Street Farm, on a house in Fair Oak Road, in Merdon Avenue/Hiltingbury Road and in Pine Road/Hiltingbury Road.

The first part of this paper has attempted to give factual information. The second part consists of extracts from accounts by some of those who remember the incidents, which took place over 40 years ago. In some cases, the impressions are deep and unforgettable; others admit frankly that their recollections are hazy, especially concerning dates. However, it is not difficult to link these memories with with appropriate occasions listed in the first part summary.

"At the outbreak of war, I lived at Holt Farm, between Bishopstoke and Fair Oak below Stoke Park Wood. The first air raid I remember was on Marchwood...Another time I was looking out of a downstairs window when I saw four planes flying low over Eastleigh where they dropped a number of bombs. Also I remember when Cunliffe-Owen's near the airport was bombed... It was the day after the official opening."

"There was a Saturday night when parachute bombs were dropped over a considerable period. Most of them exploded in the open fields between here (Velmore Road) and North Baddesley; some ended up hanging in trees unexploded. Two nights of the big Southampton Blitz provided a sad experience; it was heart rending to watch the glow of the fires. Also, I remember a low-flying raider who sprayed Eastleigh with his machine gun and dropped some small bombs, most of which failed to explode."

"One afternoon early in the war the sirens went and almost at once there were dog-fights overhead. Two mothers and their children were desperately trying to get to shelters in the school playground...but the gates were locked...We took them into our shelter...We could hear the noise overhead and the occasional rattle of shrapnel as it hit the dustbin."

"I was returning from the library along Desborough Road when a German plane came over very low with its machine guns firing. I was very frightened, so I ran to the doorway of a house...Fearing for my safety, the lady of the house let me in. It appeared the German plane followed one of our planes in and over the airport."

"I can clearly remember one air raid which took place in daylight one evening. I was standing on the corner of Factory Road and Cranbury Road with some young friends when we saw an R.A.F. plane flying low over the roof tops as it prepared to land at the airport. On hearing more planes we looked to see some German bombers flying in low; then we saw sparks coming down Cranbury Road. They must have been bullets striking the ground."

"It was summer, 1940. I was on my bike at the junction of Cherbourg Road and High Street when I saw these three planes coming towards me, low over High Street, in the direction of the airport. I noticed red flashes on the nose part of these planes. I then suddenly realised that they were enemy planes and that the red flashes were their guns firing. I dropped my bike in the middle of the road and ran to the nearest wall to hide."

"I was at the kitchen sink and looked out of the window in the direction of the Railway Works when I saw planes and noticed flashes coming from the front of them. I realised that their guns were firing...I turned, grabbed the children and ran and hid under the living room table until everything was quiet once more."

"During a daylight raid on Eastleigh, an enemy plane came in so low that a bomb it dropped in Market Street did not explode. It passed through a front bedroom window of No. 180 tearing down the curtains. As it careered across the room its fins left scratches on the furniture before it crashed through the dividing wall of the bedroom next door, leaving the curtains it had collected across the hole. It ended up on the bed of No. 182."

"My boyfriend and I were talking to the man next door and his wife in the garden of a house in Chamberlayne Road. The husband was stacking sand bags up against the shelter when three enemy fighters came over. He grabbed his wife and shouted, "Get into the shelter!" She was fat and couldn't get through the gap, so, placing his hand on her bottom, he pushed her in, just in time for the rest of us to follow as the fighters zoomed overhead. When we came out, we found the sand bags riddled with bullets."

"I was a teenager living at 210 Southampton Road. There was a daylight raid and my mother and I were taking cover in a cupboard under the stairs, when I decided I wanted to use the toilet which was outside. My mother told me to be quick and get back to the shelter. As I went out into the backyard, I stood and looked up as a large plane with a black cross swooped low, firing rapidly. My mother instinctively shut the door, leaving me outside. I saw a dome shape with a helmeted man inside. He appeared to be laughing as he fired his gun. It happened so quickly, but I remember it so clearly. After the raid, a neighbour extracted a bullet from the floorboards of our back bedroom. It had come through the roof and ceiling. I still carry it today on my keyring."

"I was walking along Southampton Road to go to the Post Office when a large plane came towards me...I noticed the man in the nose part lining up the gun...I ran for the nearest front door. Noticing the key in the door, I turned it and ran in. I suddenly felt awful as I did not know the occupants, but a lady invited me to come to the shelter until the raid was over."

"A plane came down over Chestnut Avenue. I could see the face of the nose gunner quite clearly as he opened fire. I dived into my passage as a bullet passed through the front door of the house next door... I heard our Ack Ack guns open up. Then I heard someone cry, "They've got him. He's coming down." The plane passed by again trailing flames and smoke and it crashed in a field at the back of Dutton Lane."

The ladies who saw the man in the plane all tend to say that he had a little black moustache!

"It was summer. A small crowd of us children were playing football in the field near Ruskin Road. Three bombers came in from the direction of Southampton. They were Dorniers and were so low you could see the crews. One fired a burst from a machine gun at us but no-one got hit. They went on to drop bombs which landed in the river between Allbrook and Stoke. One blew out the old lock gate and another made such a large hole in the river that it became deeper and has been like it ever since."

A nanny of Chandlers Ford states, "I was pushing a pram up King's Road into Winchester Road when bombers came in from the direction of Winchester. A woman came out of a large house and shouted, "In here!" She grabbed the pram, pulled it inside, shut the door and left me outside!"

On another occasion, "I was pushing a baby past a bungalow on the corner of Chalvington Road when the sirens sounded. I grabbed the baby and put it in the nearest shelter. Then I heard a little boy screaming outside. I picked him up and ran straight into the bungalow as the planes came over with their guns firing."

"I was on duty with the A.R.P. at the Shelter Base where Hendy's is now when a bomb fell in the garden of a house in Shaftesbury Avenue, leaving a massive crater. Luckily no-one was killed although a few people were trapped in their house."

"Five enemy bombers came in very low from the direction of Allbrook. The first bomb fell on a house in Newtown Road, did not explode and was found in a bedroom. The second made a direct hit on the Co-op bakery in High Street, causing much damage. The third hit the main Co-op building, did not explode, rolled down the stairs, out through the main door and lay in the gutter...Bombs dropped on the Railway yard, killing John Rendell. Months later an unexploded bomb was found in the coal stacks...Once I was really frightened because after the biggest daylight raid on Southampton the planes, 30 or more, were heading for Eastleigh with ack-ack going from all angles and shells bursting everywhere. One of our fighters zoomed up amongst them but soon came spiralling down with one wing missing and disappeared in the direction of Woolston...Once a damaged plane came swaying over Eastleigh but fortunately cleared the town and crashed on Shawford Down."

"It was about 5 p.m. and we were in a shelter near the Co-op corner... There was gunfire but an old lady went out to get something she had forgotten. Later, despite our appeals, her husband went to find her. When the all-clear sounded and we came out, we found that a plane had crashed on houses opposite killing the crew and the elderly couple."

THE 1942 RAIDS Three ladies who were children when war broke out recall their experiences. "It was on a Saturday afternoon. As we were leap-frogging along Chadwick Road a German bomber dived down low and started firing a machine gun...A bullet bounced along the pavement, straight through our legs. A man came running out of his house and took us inside to shelter. That night there was an air raid and we were terrified when an explosion rocked our shelter. When we came out we saw a massive crater where our neighbour's shelter had been. People were in hospital and a lady died."

" I lived in Tennyson Road. After the raid, we came out of our shelter and walked round in our night clothes to see some of the damage. Several houses in Coniston and Grantham Roads were on fire and the house where I now live was bombed to the ground. My sister and her mother-in-law were in one of those indoor shelters. When my sister opened the front door she found there was an incendiary bomb burning on the door step."

"I remember the night bombs fell on Pirelli's and on a pair of houses on the corner of Owen Road and O'Connell Road. A lady was killed. We spent the night in the shelter. The following morning when we came out, we found not a window broken in our house but every ceiling was down."

MIDSUMMER'S DAY, 1942 "Sirens wailed, ominous sounds of planes and anti-aircraft gunfire and criss-crossing searchlights filled the sky. Like most teenagers, I was reluctant to leave my bed and my father came back to hurry me along. As we ran down the path towards the shelter steps, there was a blinding flash and an ear-splitting explosion which threw us down into the dug-out, taking the door with us. Then it was quiet. I was lying on top of my father and feared he was dead. I could hear water rushing from fractured pipes and choked in the thick cloud of dust. We took a roll-call of the shelter occupants, but it wasn't until the A.R.P. team arrived that we realized our neighbours at 138 Leigh Road had received a direct hit. We emerged to see the three bodies being taken from the debris."

" My husband and I have every reason to remember that night as we lost everything. Our house at 26 Coniston Road and our neighbour's at 24 were destroyed by incendiary bombs. A bomb dropped so close to Mr. Smith's shelter that his wife died within a week. I shall never forget the eerie light the flares made, as well as the incendiaries."

" Many houses in Owen Road were damaged, Nos. 4 and 6 being completely demolished; Nos. 28, 1 and 2 O'Connell were also flattened. Around six people died. Electricity supplies were cut off on one side, but not on the side that suffered most damage. We were taken by bus to Northend School for breakfast. Furniture that had survived in the damaged houses was stored in Toynbee School."

1944 - V.1's over Eastleigh. "The haunting drone of these missiles was quite frightening and when the engine powering the bomb cut out I can remember sitting in the shelter and counting (I think it was up to three) before the bomb exploded. Not a very good waiting game!"

Most witnesses refer to a sound like that of a motorbike and a flame coming out high up over the tail of what appeared to be a plane.

"Early one morning, I heard this noise; then it cut out and faded away. It fell in the Romsey area. Another came down in the Sandy Lane area. A third fell on a bungalow on the corner of Weavels Road and Fair Oak Road, killing the old lady who lived there. Lastly, on another occasion, I remember (and I was really frightened at the time) one cut out while passing right overhead and came down in Stoke Park Wood."

"One came over one night while we were in the shelter in the garden. It passed right above us, then suddenly cut out. We lay face down on our bunks, as advised, plugs in our ears, hands reinforcing them, mouthfuls of blanket between our teeth, waiting for the bang. It was some way off either in Bassett Avenue or Chandlers Ford."

"It was still dark and I had got up to go to work. The sirens sounded, followed by Ack-Ack guns... I saw what I thought was an enemy plane that had been hit as it was trailing a flame. Then I noticed that it was intermittent and the flame eventually went out. A couple of minutes later there was a loud bang. It had fallen in the Chandlers Ford area."

"On a beautiful summer morning in 1944, I returned home after an eight hour night guard duty at the Chamberlayne Road Drill Hall. An air raid had been in operation most of the night and the all-clear had still to be sounded...I looked up and saw what I realised to be my first, and thankfully my last, doodlebug, the dreaded V.1.Rocket Plane, which carried a pay-load of high explosive. As it passed almost overhead at about 400', I could see quite plainly its shape and size. With an uncanny suddenness its engine stopped, the noise being replaced by an eerie silence, save for the slight sound of its slip-stream. Then came the unmistakable noise and thud of an explosion. Later, I learned that a fairly large house, called, I think, "The Hayes" in Pine Road, Chandlers Ford, had been demolished by the rocket and some, if not all, the residents, who were in their Anderson shelter, killed. The adjacent house lost most of its roof and suffered other superficial damage."

The extracts in this paper are taken from information gathered by Lee Welch in 1985.

