

“THE SIGHTING OF THE FIRST V1 on 13 JUNE 1944”

By Lawrence Holmes

1/M2 Dymchurch Post was in the thick of the flying bomb activity and, as the following extract from its log shows, was the first Post to report a flying bomb. The Observers on duty were middle aged Mr E E Woodland (a Grocer) and Mr A M Wraight (a builder). They were very experienced observers having served in the Corps tracking aircraft in the Battle of Britain, the Blitz, Tip and Run raids, and on D-Day.



Extract from M2 Post Log (From ‘Forewarned is Forearmed’ by T E Winslow :-

00.35 - Special vigilance off.

00.50 - Force of heavy bombers flying south.

02.00 - Local alert tested.

03.42 - Air Raid Warning. Raiders passed 04.00.

04.05 - First light 04.28 and Last light 23.18.

04.08 - A Diver was seen, heard and identified. N. West at 1000 feet. Plotted until lost.*

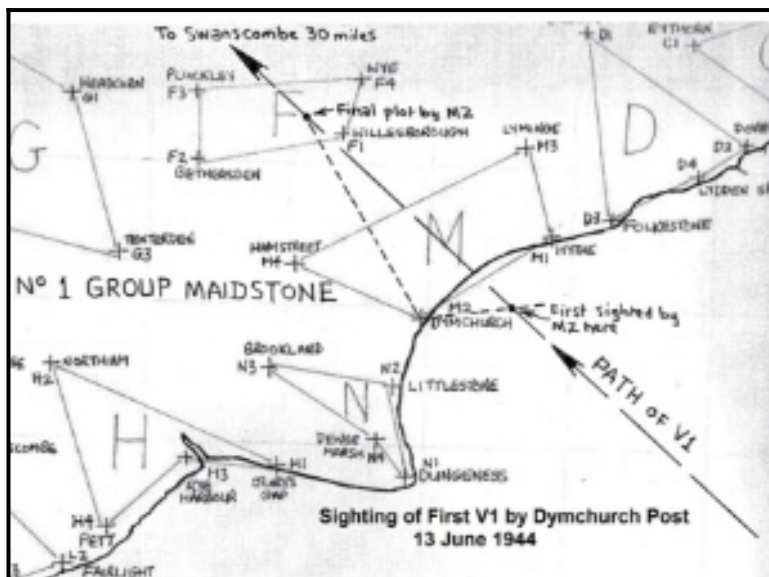
04.10 - Air Raid Warning. Raiders passed 04.40.

04.15.—The Divers as seen through the binoculars show a long red rocket shape with yellow flare and sparks leaving the tail end. The speed seemed to be that of a fighter plane. We were lucky enough to be the first Post to identify these as Divers.

The last entry which we will reproduce above occurred at 07.07hrs on the same morning and runs as follows :-

07.07 - Diver cancelled. This means the previous Diver raid is over. In the event of others approaching shout “Diver” like Hell !

* On Tuesday 13 June 1944 two observers were on the night shift duty at Dymchurch ROC post. Some four hours into their uneventful shift it was still dark and dawn was 30 minutes away. The sky was lightening slightly. In such conditions it was difficult to pick up aircraft unless it was exhibiting some sort of light. Obs Wraight was No 1 Obs, looking out for aircraft with a pair of high powered US Navy binoculars. But he may well hear the plane before he saw anything ? Obs Woodland was No 2 Observer wearing the head and breast set telephone to send reports to Maidstone Centre and he also operated the post plotting instrument.



Britain, the ROC, and post observers knew about the possible V1 threat and had issued a special Ops Instruction No 51 to deal with the reporting of V1s by Post observers. But no one knew exactly when the first V1s would be launched ? On the morning of 13 June 1944 between 0330 and 0400hrs, ten V1 terror weapons were launched from sites in France targeted in a north westerly direction for London. Four V1s failed on launching but six took off satisfactorily heading out over the Channel. Two then crashed in mid channel. But four continued on course. In the lead was a V1 due to cross

the English coast between Dymchurch and Hythe. The time was 0407hrs.

That first V1 was picked up by Obs Wraight through his binoculars out to sea to the north east. It was seen by the two post observers as an extraordinary apparition. It was like a rocket with flames and sparks coming out of the rear end giving the whole craft a red glare. It was low, maybe 1000ft above the waves Obs Wraight estimated, it was fast like a fighter. He told Obs Woodland, who swung the post instrument round until it was pointing to the fast flying fiery image. Then the sound hit them. It was like a Model T Ford going uphill. Both observers knew it was a – V1 ! A 'Diver'.

Wraight estimated the V1 was 4 to 5 miles from the post, almost in a due easterly direction. It was going in a north westerly direction and looked as if it would cross the coast roughly half way between Dymchurch and Hythe. Wraight told Woodland this in micro-seconds, and little realising he would be making himself famous, Woodland raised the telephone mouth piece to switch it on and yelled 'Mike Too – Diver, Diver, Diver – one four – north west – one at one'. It was 0408hrs.



(‘Diver’ was to identify the aircraft as a V1 ; ‘one four’ was the minute bearing the V1 was from the post, this was almost due east ; ‘north west’ was the direction in which the V1 was flying ; ‘one at one’ was one V1 at 1000ft height).

Woodland’s report started off a massive chain of events. On hearing his Diver report, the plotter at Maidstone was momentarily stunned. Quickly recovering she bellowed out ‘Diver – Diver’ across the Ops Room. This was the call made every time the report went all the way up the chain of command to HQ 11 Fighter Group and thence to Bentley Priory. As the V1 crossed the coast north west of them and went inland, Woodland gave his ‘out report’ on the V1 as ‘Mike Too – Diver – five three – north west – one at one’. Other posts in M and F clusters, had been warned and they too picked up the V1 as it crossed their area, heading for London. As the V1 neared Gravesend it’s engine cut and it suddenly dived to earth and blew up at Swanscombe between Gravesend and Dartford. The time was 0418hrs.



Top photo shows Obs Woodland and Obs Wraight on duty at the M2 Dymchurch Post. Below shows a 1949 photo of Martello Tower No 25. Note what appears to be a WW2 type ROC aircraft reporting post in the top of the tower, including instrument pedestal and flat laying glass panels.

But the observers at Dymchurch were not finished with V1s just yet. At 0414hrs they plotted another Diver and yet another at 0500hrs. All Divers were travelling north west. It is significant to note that at this stage in WW2 , the British defence forces had modern electronic warning devices available yet all of them failed to pick up the first robot bomber attack on the UK. This was left to a 30ft high structure built 215 years ago and two pairs of human eyes and ears of the members of the Royal Observer Corps.

(The V1 explosion at Swanscombe on 13 June 1944 at 0418hrs, killed 13 people, injured 22 and rendered 150 people homeless).

Sources

‘Attack Warning Red’ by Derek Wood ; ‘Forewarned is Forearmed’ by T E Winslow.

Britain at War Magazine ; Various internet sites ; Lawrence Holmes Archive.