

However the RAF were developing their own rockets and Snodland was in the forefront of storing and using them, revealed in a letter from James Partridge which Snodland Historical Society received in the summer of 2016:

I was in the Royal Air Force during World War II as NCO armourer (Guns and Bombs) and Gunnery Instructor. In June 1944, together with another NCO I arrived at the RAF's Maintenance Unit in Snodland in charge of a large team of armourers, on an unknown mission. On arrival the mission was revealed and why it was veiled in secrecy. Stacked in avenues were hundreds of 60lb armour piercing rockets. These were new because I knew that they weren't on an armourer's training course. Our job was to fit another component part in the fusing system. Delicate and fine skill was required, hence the team of highly trained armourers.

Germany had swept through Europe with its Panzer Divisions comprising of Tiger Tanks with their 88mm guns. They were unstoppable. The allied fighter aircraft fitted with .303 and 20mm machine guns found that this ammunition was useless against the Tiger Tanks. The rocket was born, obviously the work of the Boffins. Fitted to the fighter aircraft they were highly successful in destroying the Tiger Tanks, railway Engines and railway yards, so vital to the German war effort, so played a major part after D day in the allied successful advance through France, etc,

On the 13th June, the Germans launched their first V1's. These monstrous flying bombs were designed for indeterminate bombing and to create terror.

On the 15th June I was in charge that night of the unit's fire picket and several V1's flew over the unit. Next morning, while engaged on the job, I heard the familiar two-stroke engine and a V1 appeared travelling in the direction of Snodland, followed by a Typhoon fighter aircraft. The pilot tipped the wing of the V1 and it began a shallow dive towards the town. I soon lost view, but was informed that the V1 had appeared to go in the direction of the brickyard. I went to the scene and found it had landed on what I now know was the Knob; no-one was injured.

Eventually we did the job and returned to our own unit. I would suggest that it was of historical interest that

Snodland was one of the first, if not the first, to store the rocket.

I do not know how long a RAF maintenance unit was in Snodland, but if new, or fairly new, I have often wondered how many citizens of Snodland knew of its existence and what it was housing and later realised, that considering the amount of explosives stored in the unit, that Snodland came very close to suffering such a massive explosion that it would have been, in all probability, declared a disaster area.'

(Another who worked in the unit was John Hamilton, whose own memories of his time there provides an apt conclusion to this whole account of Snodland at War.)

There he was, in uniform of blue, getting off the train at Snodland station, complete with kitbag, double pack gas mask and water bottle. It was an early July day and the year 1940. He had been posted to an Air Ammunition Depot in the Holborough Chalk Pits and Lee's old cement works.

He was a storekeeper by trade, but didn't expect his stores would consist of 250 lb and 500 lb bombs, tail units galore, detonators and 303 ammunition for the many different aircraft of the Royal Air Force, including of course the Spitfire and the Hurricane. Serving places like West Malling, Detling, Eastchurch, Manston, etc.

The sergeant handed him a rifle and 20 rounds of ammo. and ordered him to carry it everywhere. So - it went to the pictures - Wardona ([later] Savoy Snooker), the only Church Parade attended at All Saints, the Chip Shop (Baldwin's), the odd dance (Catholic Church), and if you went courting the rifle went too.

He was a poor marksman, but thought he might be able to shoot two or three Jerries if invasion came.

Part of his duties was to visit Detling and was there during a raid when he still sees the tracer bullets of an ME 110 just passing over the roof of the lorry he was travelling in.

Overhead the real battle was being fought. The sky was frequently filled with vapour trails. The odd plane would come crashing down to earth - ours and theirs. Such was life around Snodland that summer and autumn, with Air

Raid Alerts sounding most days.

The people of Kent were steadfast in their resolve to survive. Bombs began to fall indiscriminately around the village. Windows were shattered by the blast, shrapnel from the ack ack guns rattled on the rooftops.

So, young Stagers, when you look at or remember your grandparents who lived in Bomb Alley during this period - they were also heroes during the Battle of Britain.

I take my hat off to them even now.

Signed himself.'