

## **William Alfred BARNES**

**Born:** 1886, Parkhurst

**Parents:** William Barnes and Mary Jane Spencer

**Last known address:** Parkhurst Prison staff quarters

**Last known occupation:** Baker's boy

**Service numbers:** [1] 18094 (ASC) [2] 61925 (RFC)

**Regiments:** Army Service Corps and 25 Squadron Royal Flying Corps

### **Service history summary:**

- enlisted: April 1901
- promoted : Sergeant; date unknown
- transferred: Royal Flying Corps - 1916
- decorations: 1914 Star, Meritorious Service Medal, British War Medal and Victory Medal

**Died:** 13<sup>th</sup> April 1917

**Age:** 30

**Buried:** [Noyelles-Godault Communal Cemetery](#)

**Family:** William Alfred Barnes was born on August 10<sup>th</sup> 1886 at Parkhurst to William Barnes, Assistant Warder at Parkhurst Prison, and his wife Mary Jane Spencer. William was the second son born to the couple who had married at St John the Baptist Church, Northwood, on July 17<sup>th</sup> 1883. William senior was born in Portsmouth and had been a professional soldier before joining the Convict Service. Mary Jane was a Northwood girl. Her father, Edwin James Spencer, is described on her marriage certificate as a baker of Northwood. He was also married at St John the Baptist, Northwood in 1863 to Fanny Forehead, daughter of John Forehead, a Northwood labourer.

Brothers: Edwin Francis (1884) and Percival John (1888)

Sisters: Fanny Florence (1890) and Winifred Louisa (1892)

**Northwood/Gurnard connection:** in 1891 young William Alfred was living with his parents, brothers Edwin and John Percival and sister Fanny Florence at Dale View Villa, Horsebridge Hill. In 1901 his father had been promoted to Warder and was living in quarters at the Prison itself (Block 3) with his family. Young William, then aged 14, was already working as a baker's boy, possibly employed by his Spencer grandfather. Large numbers of soldiers were stationed at Albany Barracks next door to Parkhurst Prison (which had been converted from part of the original Albany Barracks site) which encouraged many local youngsters like William to sign up. William may also have been influenced by his father's military experience. That same year, 1901, he enlisted in the Army Service Corps. His elder brother, Edwin Francis, enlisted in the Isle of Wight Rifles (date not known)

**War record:** at the time of the 1911 Census William, then aged 24, was serving in Egypt under Major General Sir John Grenfell Maxwell. The British Army's role in Egypt was to protect the Suez Canal which was crucial for maritime links with India. He also served in Khartoum in the Sudan. William had been posted back to England when war broke out in August 1914.

In October 1914 he was sent to France where his unit formed part of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division. His excellent work and valuable services were further recognised by the award of the Meritorious Service Medal (*London Gazette* 18/10/1916 page 100041). After several attempts the now Sergeant Barnes finally succeeded in securing a transfer into the Royal Flying Corps. After the appropriate training he was given his Observer's Wing in November 1916. He next enjoyed a brief leave at home visiting his two brothers and his sisters who were then living at Avenue Lodge, Parkhurst. Finally William was sent to join 25 Squadron in France on 1 April 1917.



He lasted less than two weeks. The official account states that

On 13th April 1917 at 18.40 hrs 9 aircraft were sent to bomb Henin-Lietard. The German Jasta pilots were too late to prevent the bombing but an air battle commenced at 19.30 hrs. The FE.2b crews claimed four German Albatros D.III aircraft but lost three FE.2b aircraft in doing so. The German fighter ace von Richthofen shot down the aircraft (serial no 4997) piloted by 2nd Lt A H Bates, with Barnes as Observer. The aircraft crashed at 19.35 hours hitting a house at Noyelles-Godault.”

William was 30 years old.

William was buried with Lieutenant Bates in a remote corner of the equally remote Noyelles-Godault cemetery (south end). In his will he left effects valued at £189 14s (a considerable sum in those days) to his father who was now Chief Warder, living at Avenue Lodge, Parkhurst Prison. William's elder brother, Edwin Francis, was wounded at Gallipoli where the Isle of Wight Rifles sustained appalling losses.