

GUNNER PERCY WILLIAM BARNES

3739, 213th Anti-Aircraft Section, Royal Garrison Artillery

Died aged 21 on 18 May 1918

Buried with honour in *Abbeville Communal Cemetery Extension, France*; IV A 28

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross and in the Abbey
and in Cheltenham on the Borough Memorial and in All Saints Church



*Abbeville Communal Cemetery
Extension, France*



Gunner P.W. Barnes
[D&S CG 23/12/1916]



*Royal Garrison
Artillery*

PERCY WILLIAM BARNES has a tenuous connection with Tewkesbury in that he was the son of Lambert Barnes, landlord of the Odessa Inn, of the Hoo, Deerhurst, from 1917 to 1923. Born in Cheltenham in 1897, in 1901 he was a patient in the Home for Sick Children, Winchcombe Street, Cheltenham. In 1911, however, he was back with the family of ten children, when his father was landlord of The Grapes Inn, Gloucester Place, Cheltenham.

Still a resident of Cheltenham, he volunteered in August 1914 at the age of 17; he was allocated to the 3rd Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment, possibly because he was too young to be sent abroad to fight (this was a reserve battalion). In 1916 he was photographed with two of his brothers who had also enlisted.

Percy was subsequently transferred to the Royal Field Artillery as a Driver and then to the Royal Garrison Artillery. In this regiment he was assigned as a Gunner to the 213th Anti-Aircraft Section, an arm of the artillery which had not existed at the outbreak of the war and which evolved progressively to address a new menace of warfare – aircraft. The 213th was part of the organisation known as the ‘Lines of Communication’, a term used to describe the supply lines from port to front line, and the camps, stores, dumps, workshops of the rear areas.

The role of the 213th Anti-Aircraft Section was to defend key locations on the supply lines such as bridges, railways, depots and the like from attack by enemy aircraft. It was a unit of some 40 men with two 3-inch anti-aircraft guns

under their control and they operated within the Southern Group AA Area in the Somme sector.

According to the *Tewkesbury Register*, Percy was killed by a bomb dropped from an enemy plane on 21 March 1918, since when he had been posted as missing. However, this report was incorrect; the casualty records confirm that he died of wounds in Abbeville on 18 May although it is quite likely that he was wounded on 21 March. This date is significant in that it was the opening day of the campaign which became known as the German Spring Offensive or *Kaiserschlacht* (Kaiser’s Battle), which started in the Somme sector. It used significantly different weapons: attacks by aircraft on key targets on and behind the British lines would have been a crucial part of the German strategy.

Percy may well have been discovered as wounded in the chaos of that first day and transported to Abbeville, the natural evacuation point from the Somme battlefields. He would have been evacuated along a well-established chain of medical units until he reached one of the Stationary Hospitals based in Abbeville on the River Somme, near the French coast. For much of the First World War, Abbeville was headquarters of the Commonwealth Lines of Communication and a number of hospitals were stationed there.

Gunner Percy William Barnes did not recover from his wounds and he is buried in the adjoining *Abbeville Communal Cemetery Extension*. As well as at Tewkesbury, his death is commemorated in Cheltenham.