

Ashville Cenotaph: **SPENCER W**

Ashville Memorial Hall: Walter Spencer, Royal Air Force

A Walter Spencer served in the Royal Flying Corps but he survived the war.

The 1911 Census Return for Elmfield College includes a William Spencer aged 12. A William Spencer served in the Royal Flying Corps and was killed in action on 10th May 1918 aged 19. So we have William Spencer the schoolboy and William Spencer the aviator born about the same time. Records show they were both born in Hollinwood, Oldham and in my opinion are one and the same. Thus the Walter in the Memorial Hall would appear to be incorrect and the plaque should read **William Spencer**, Royal Flying Corps.

Date & place of birth: 30th January 1899 at Hollinwood, Oldham, Lancashire

War: When William enlisted, probably soon after his 18th birthday, he was initially assigned to the 6th Training Reserve Brigade as a Cadet. On 1st August 1917 he was transferred to the Royal Flying Corps and underwent training at Winchester and Oxford. On 11th October he was made a Second Lieutenant and joined the 27th Squadron of the Royal Flying Corps.

The Royal Flying Corps People Index list flights he participated in where there were recorded incidents. There are records of six such flights. They are all in two seater planes and his name is given second suggesting he was not the lead pilot.

The two planes he flew in were the De Havilland 4 (DH4) and the Armstrong Whitworth FK8 (AW8).

12th March 1918. On returning in a DH4 from bombing Bavay Railway Station, the plane over-turned on landing. 2nd Lt F Carr & William were both reported to be "OK".

10th April 1918. During a reconnaissance flight in an AW8 the plane developed engine trouble and they had to make a forced landing in a field. 2nd Lt N C Simpson & William were both reported to be "OK".

12th April 1918. During a bombing raid near Ruisseauville their DH4 developed engine trouble and they had to make a forced landing but they managed to take off again and return to base. 2Lt G E Ffrench & William were both reported to be OK.

12th April 1918. Whilst in an AW8 near Gentelles they were brought down by an offensive patrol and crashed. The plane was unsalvageable but 2nd Lt H P Schoeman & William were both reported to be OK.

3rd May 1918. On returning from a bombing raid in a DH4 they were unable to flatten out for landing and crashed. 2nd Lt H P Schoeman & William were both reported to be "OK".

10th May 1918. Behind enemy lines on a bombing raid near Peronne their formation was attacked by 20-30 enemy aircraft. Their DH4 was seen to make a crash landing but William was observed to already be dead. Capt G B S McBain survived the crash landing and was taken Prisoner of War but died shortly afterwards on the same day.

William and Captain McBain DSC were buried side by side by the Germans in their cemetery at Hyencourt-le-Grand. In 1923 their remains were exhumed and they were reburied in the Assevillers New British Cemetery.

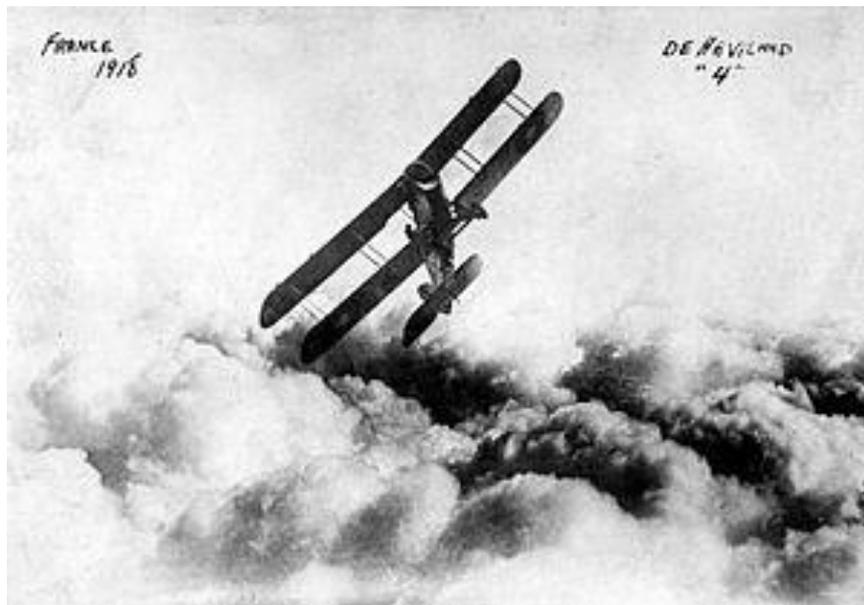
Peronne, Hyencourt-le-Grand & the Assevillers New British Cemetery are about 18 miles WNW of Saint Quentin in France.

Family life: Williams parents were William Spencer and Sarah Jane Paton, both were born in Oldham. William ran an iron founding and machine making business. The 1911 census return shows that William was the fifth oldest of children. Whilst William was at Elmfield College the three eldest brothers were all working for their father in various capacities. The family lived in an 8 room dwelling called The Knowle and they had a live-in servant.

The business William senior ran would have largely supplied machinery to the local cotton mills. Trade directories list a number of iron founders and machine making firms in the Oldham area including one called Suthers Charles and Spencer located in Mount Pleasant about 3 miles from Hollinwood.

No connection with Methodism has been established but the family were obviously well to do and funding William junior's education at Elmfield should not have been a problem. If he attended from age 11 to 16 he would have been there from 1910 to 1915.

David Redhead, April 2018



The Airco DH.4 was a British two-seat biplane day bomber of the First World War. It was designed by Geoffrey de Havilland (hence "DH") for Airco, and was the first British two-seat light day-bomber to have an effective defensive armament.