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## Billy Barker

### *Not All Heroes Die In War*

Publish Date: Wednesday, 3rd of November 2010  
 by *Ronald Wolf*

Barker was a fighter pilot and was born on this day at Dauphin Man. in 1894.

Fast forward 22 years and we find Barker applying for pilot training in Nov. 1916. He was wounded in Aug 1917 in the head. By way of recuperation, he was assigned as an instructor in Sept., 1917.

During this stint, he first flew the aircraft that would become the most successful British fighter of war, the Sopwith Camel. He also began flying Camel #B6313, which for First World War pilots, he would fly for a year and decorate with kill markings. This aircraft would become the most successful fighter plane in the history of the British flying services.

He went back to the Front in October, with No. 28 Sqd., a close support unit, flying Camels. On Oct. 20, he flew his first combat patrol in a Camel; within a week, he had downed three Albatross scouts.

When most people ate themselves sick with a traditional Christmas feast, or opened homemade gifts Barker fought for his life and country.

On Christmas Day, Barker and Steve Hudson, staged an unauthorized raid on the aerodrome at Motta, even dropping a mocking holiday greeting to their foes, along with liberal machine gun fire and twenty-pound Cooper bombs.

On the morning of the 26th, a ragged, disorganized collection of Austrian planes approached the British air base at Istrana. A few dropped bombs and then turned for home. Barker and the other British Camel pilots scrambled and tore into the Austrian machines, destroying a dozen of them.

He continued his celebrating the holidays by destroying another Albatros on New Year's Day, 1918. He was escorting R.E.8 recon planes when the unwary Albatros made after them. Barker waited until the Austrian was committed to his dive, and then he opened fire, sending the Albatros plunging down. A few days later, he received the Distinguished Service Order (DSO), second only to the Victoria Cross among British military decorations.

Barker became one of the top British *Balloon Busters*, credited with destroying nine gasbags; seven of these claims, he shared with his frequent aerial hunting companion Lt. Harold B. Steve Hudson. Barker shot down two in Dec. 1917.

Barker's historic feasts were not confined to the skies; it included dropping spies behind enemy lines. Flying an Italian bomber it was rigged with a trapdoor and packed the spy into the fuselage. The trap door allowed Barker to drop the spy at the right place and the time, without the spy's active participation. On one mission, he and Wedgwood Benn flew in low, alone, and in the dark, to drop a crate of homing pigeons to the spy below. For these missions, Italy's King Victor Emmanuel III awarded Barker the *Medaglia al Valore Militare d'Argento* (Silver Medal for Valor).

He had downed four enemy planes, taken several bullets, and survived to be awarded the Victoria Cross. He lay unconscious in the hospital in Rouen for two weeks. He received telegrams from King George V, the Prince of Wales, fellow ace *Billy Bishop*, and many others. Only his amazing constitution pulled him through; even so, he was partially crippled for the rest of his life.

In 1919, he returned to Canada and founded the short-lived Bishop and Barker Company, serving routes between Toronto and the Muskoka country in the north. The following year, he helped form the Royal Canadian Air Force; one of his early assignments was as liaison with the RAF, flying in Iraq and Palestine.

In 1930, he was back in the private sector, President of Fairchild Aviation Company of Canada. He died while test flying a new Fairchild two-seater at Rockcliffe Aerodrome, outside Ottawa.  
 Any and everyone who served in the First World War have gone to greener pastures. Soon, those who served in the Second World War will be just a memory also. Give thanks to the living for the dead can't hear but they can be honoured.

Sincerely,  
 Ronald Wolf

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