

Capt. G.E.Barclay – The King’s Own Royal Lancaster Regiment

George Eric Barclay was born in 1889, the 4th son of Laura Barclay and the late Robert Barclay of Bury Hill. He was educated at Harrow and the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst. He was gazetted 2nd Lt in the King’s Own Royal Lancaster Regiment in February 1909 and was stationed in Jersey. In 1912 he went to West Africa on attachment to the 2nd Nigeria Regiment and served with them through the Cameroon Campaign.



In May 1916 he came home on leave and returned to Nigeria in October to join troops en route to German East Africa. He arrived in Dar es Salaam in December and was attached to the 4th Nigeria Regiment. On 24 January 1917 a column comprising 3/Nigerians and one company of 4/Nigerians under the command of Lieut-Colonel J.Archer left a town called Kibongo and headed south towards the German positions at Ngwembe. That same day Eric Barclay had written cheerfully to his sister telling her that his orderly had given him a lucky charm for protection – ‘*it will be interesting to see if it works*’, he wrote. Hours later he was killed in action near the Rufiji River when reinforcing the firing line with his Company at a critical moment.

The draft of the official history (which was never published) recorded the action:

‘About 5 pm Lieut-Colonel Sargent, advancing with his half-battalion of 4/Nigerians (by way of reinforcements), met the survivors of (a German) flanking force. Realising the dangerous situation, he pressed on along the road, gained touch with Lieut-Colonel Archer and took up position through which he later withdrew his hard-pressed troops. The Germans were pursuing, firing heavily, until driven back by a bayonet charge of one company of 4/Nigerians, gallantly led by Captain G E Barclay.’

An extract from Routine Orders by Lt Col J Sargent, CO 4th Bn Nigeria Regiment dated 27th January 1917 stated:

‘The CO wishes to express his appreciation of the services rendered by all ranks of the Battalion engaged in the operations on 24th-25th January. He particularly wishes to emphasise the gallant actions of No 13 Company, under the Command of the late Captain Barclay, who stemmed the attack on 3rd Nigeria Regiment by their advance.’

Major C.E. Roberts 4th Nigeria Regiment wrote these words in a letter to Eric Barclay's mother:

'Captain Barclay had only taken over the command of No 13 Company that morning, and with half the Company was the first to extend his men in the bush, facing the Germans and covering the first force which had got disorganised. The Germans were barely 100 yards away then, and were fixing bayonets even, but the arrival of fresh troops checked them. Your son behaved splendidly, walking about and encouraging his men, as cool as a cucumber, and quite regardless of his own safety in the critical situation. The Germans were keeping up a very heavy fire from rifles and machine guns, and it was while more of our men were hurrying up to the front that Captain Barclay was shot through the lungs and died soon after.'

Captain Barclay was Mentioned in Despatches (on 30th May 1917 - for service with the East African Force) and was buried in Morogoro Cemetery, Tanzania.