

Major T.H.Barclay – The Surrey (Queen Mary’s Regiment) Yeomanry)

Thomas Hubert Barclay was born in 1884, the second son of Laura Barclay and the late Robert Barclay of Bury Hill. Known as Tom, he grew up at Bury Hill. Educated at Harrow and Cambridge he joined the Surrey (Queen Mary’s Regiment) Yeomanry and was gazetted 2nd Lieutenant on 17 July 1908. He landed in France with 1/1st Surrey Yeomanry on 22 December 1914 and his Squadron saw service with the 27th Division in France, Belgium and Salonika.



In April 1917 Tom Barclay, by then a Major, came home on leave and was returning to Salonika on the troopship *ss Transylvania*, escorted by the Japanese destroyers *Matsu and Sakaki*. The ship left Marseilles on 3 May and at 10.00 am the following day was hit by a torpedo fired by the German U-boat *U-63*. At the time the ship was about 2¹/₂ miles south of Cape Vado near Savona, in the Gulf of Genoa. The *Matsu* came alongside the *Transylvania* and was able to take on a substantial number of troops while the *Sakaki* circled to force the submarine to stay submerged. Twenty minutes later a second torpedo was seen coming towards the *Matsu* which saved herself by going astern at full speed. The torpedo hit the *Transylvania* which sank very quickly.

Major Barclay got clear of the ship. He was a good swimmer and could have saved himself but chose to stay in the water to help others. He and Captain R.A.Hill swam alongside a raft bearing three men who could not swim. They tried to support the men; twice the raft capsized in the very rough sea and they were able to right it, but it capsized again and this time the men disappeared. Capt Hill was picked up unconscious. Major Barclay was rescued by an Italian tug after being in the water for 3¹/₂ hours, but died from exhaustion. He was posthumously awarded the Board of Trade Silver Medal for Gallantry in Saving Life at Sea.

The *Transylvania* was carrying some 3000 officers and men at the time of the incident; 29 officers and 373 men were lost. Major Barclay was buried with full military honours at Savona. His grave is inside the church next to that of the Captain of the *Transylvania*. The cemetery has a special plot containing the graves of 82 other victims whose bodies were recovered and a memorial to 275 others who were lost but have no grave.