

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE BRITISH HAD GOT themselves into a position of extraordinary difficulty at Balaclava. High above on the heights, they were encamped before Sebastopol; far below lay Balaclava, as if at the foot of a castle wall, detached, isolated, an outpost.

Yet Balaclava was not only the base but the sole lifeline of the British army. Every morsel the troops ate, every bullet they fired, every item of their equipment must come through it. There was no other avenue of communication with the outside world. Balaclava was the only port, the only storehouse, the only arsenal.

Had Lord Raglan been able to garrison Balaclava with ten thousand men even then its position would have presented grave problems, but when he chose Balaclava he was already short of men and of guns. Merely a skeleton force could be spared, and the British base, inviting attack, was garrisoned only by the 93rd, now the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, 100 men from the Invalid Battalion, and 1,100 Turks.

Some two miles above Balaclava, however, at the foot of the heights, was the cavalry camp.

The main road to Balaclava enters through a gorge, which,

about a mile above the town, opens out into a wide space, known as the plain of Balaclava. On this plain the battle was fought.

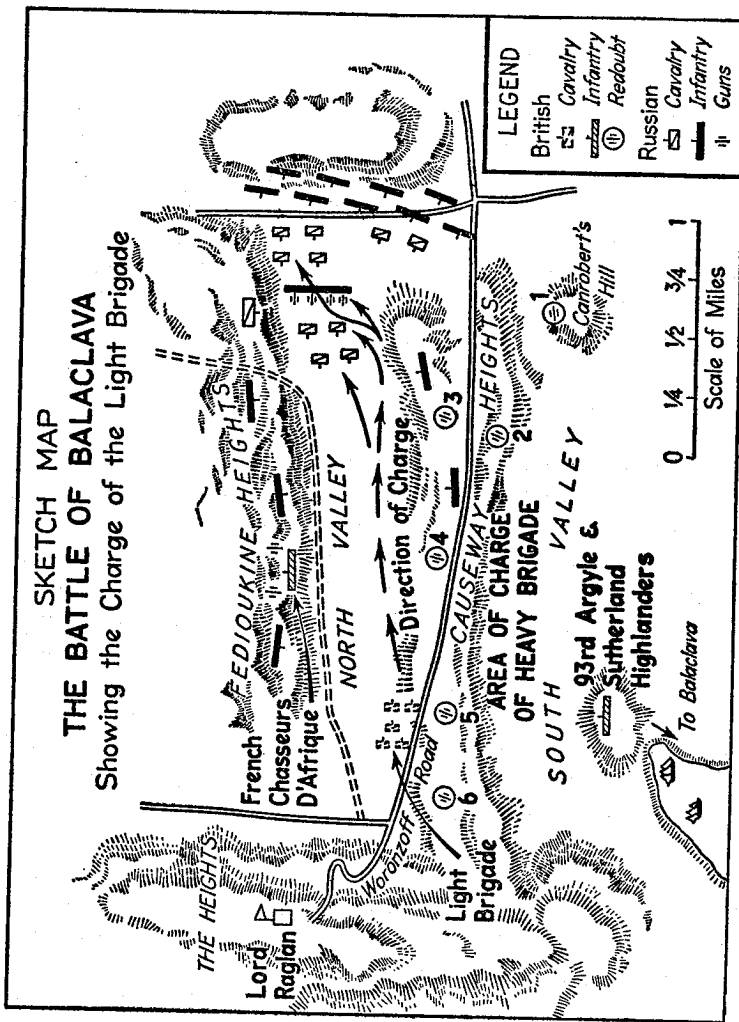
The extent of the plain is some three by two miles; it is a natural amphitheatre enclosed on all sides by hills, and in addition to mounds and hillocks, which here and there break its surface, it is bisected by a ridge, of the kind called in England a hog's back, which runs from left to right and forms a natural causeway. The British had named the ridge, somewhat ambitiously, the "Causeway Heights," and the two valleys on each side of it were called the South Valley and the North Valley. Both valleys were shut in by hills; indeed, the North Valley was so much enclosed as to be a narrow pocket, fenced on one side by the Causeway Heights and on the other by a broken range called the Fedioukine Hills. The North Valley was the scene of the charge of the Light Brigade.

Strategically, the important feature of the plain was the Causeway Heights, because the only road connecting Balaclava with the camp on the heights ran along the top of the Causeway Ridge. The possession of this road, the Woronzoff Road, was vital to the British; it was their sole line of communication, and, deprived of it, they would have to clamber to and from their camp by rough mountain tracks. Recently an attempt had been made to protect the Woronzoff Road and provide a line of defence for Balaclava by throwing up a half-circle of six redoubts on and near the Causeway Heights. These redoubts contained twelve-pounder naval guns, and were manned by Turks. Though Lord Raglan was forced in his extremity to rely on Turks, his contempt and dislike for them were intense. There were men in the British Army with experience in handling Oriental troops, and in their opinion much might have been made of the Turks; only four months ago, under the command of officers from the Bengal and Bombay Armies of the East India Company, they had fought supremely well at Silistria. However, to Lord Raglan Turks were bandits, and officers of the Bengal and Bombay Armies only one degree more acceptable. The Turkish troops had been treated with contempt, their commissariat arrangements were almost non-existent, they were half-starved, and their morale was low.

SKETCH MAP

THE BATTLE OF BALACLAVA

Showing the Charge of the Light Brigade



At eleven o'clock on October 24 a Turkish spy came to Sir Colin Campbell's headquarters at Balaclava with intelligence that twenty thousand Russian infantry and five thousand Russian cavalry were marching on Balaclava from the east and south-east. Sir Colin Campbell called in Lord Lucan, and they examined the man together and were convinced that the information was correct; the blow was about to fall. Sir Colin wrote an urgent report to Lord Raglan, and it was immediately taken the six miles up to headquarters by Lucan's son and aide-de-camp, Lord Bingham. The Commander-in-Chief being in conference with the French Commander-in-Chief, Lord Bingham gave the letter to General Airey, who received it without comment. Presently, however, Airey went into the conference and showed the letter to Lord Raglan, who remarked "Very well." No acknowledgment was sent to Colin Campbell, but later Lord Raglan happened to meet Bingham, who was still waiting, and told him that "If there was anything new it was to be reported to him."

Unfortunately only three days before precisely similar intelligence had come in from the Turks. The report had been believed, and preparations made to meet an attack; the 4th Division, under Sir George Cathcart, had been marched down from the heights, and Lord Lucan had turned out the cavalry. But the Russians did not attack, the 4th Division was marched up the heights again, arriving, to Sir George Cathcart's fury, in a state of utter exhaustion, and the cavalry division were kept at their horses' heads from 5 P.M. until 7 A.M. The night was bitterly cold, and Major Willet of the 17th Lancers died of exposure.

The state of the army before Sebastopol was causing Lord Raglan intense anxiety, for so many were sick that those on their feet were having to do double turns of duty, and he was most unwilling to wear out his troops in another wild-goose chase. The letter from Sir Colin Campbell was put aside.

Before dawn on the next day, October 25, the cavalry were already "standing at their horses," in accordance with Lord Lucan's unpopular practice of turning out his division an hour before daybreak. It was so dark that Lucan and his staff were hardly visible as they jogged along on their usual morning ride of inspec-

tion. As they passed the Light Brigade, Lord George Paget joined the cavalcade—Cardigan slept late in his yacht, and at this early hour Lord George usually found himself in command.

Some distance to the east of the cavalry camp was a hillock called Canroberts Hill, on which the first of the six redoubts had been placed and a flagstaff put up. As they approached, Lord George noticed first that darkness was turning to the first grey light of dawn, then suddenly that in the half-light he could make out something extraordinary—two flags hung from the flagstaff. A conversation followed which, he said, he would remember to the day of his death. "Holloa! there are two flags flying. What does that mean?" "Why that, surely, is the signal that the enemy is approaching." "Are you quite sure?" asked Lord George. As he spoke there was a sudden startling crash, the guns in the redoubt fired, and the battle of Balaclava had begun.

Captain Duberly of the 8th Hussars was on duty at headquarters as Lord Raglan's escort, and sent a note down to his wife, who was living in the harbour in the *Southern Star*. "The battle of Balaclava has begun and promises to be a hot one. I send you the horse. Lose no time, but come up as quickly as you can. Do not wait for breakfast." Mrs. Duberly mounted and hastened to headquarters, and witnessed the battle from the heights.

As daylight brightened, Lord Lucan and Sir Colin Campbell saw that the Russians were advancing towards them in enormous strength; two great columns of Russian infantry with artillery, numbering some eleven thousand men and thirty-eight guns, were converging on the Causeway Heights, and Lucan sent an aide-de-camp to inform Lord Raglan that an attack on the redoubts was imminent. Lord Raglan, however, could do nothing: no assistance could be sent in time, since two hours at least must elapse before a division could be brought down from the heights. Nor could Sir Colin Campbell or Lord Lucan help: Highlanders and cavalry must be kept for the defence of Balaclava itself. Once the Causeway Heights were carried, only the 93rd Highlanders and the cavalry stood between the Russians and Balaclava. The Turks must be left to do the best they could, and for this unfortunate situation Lucan blamed Raglan.

Lord Raglan not having acted on the communication sent him the day previous by Sir Colin Campbell and myself informing him of the approach of a considerable Russian Army, and leaving us altogether without support, we considered it our first duty to defend the approach to the town of Balaclava; and as this defence would depend chiefly upon the cavalry it was necessary to reserve them for the purpose.

Lucan, however, decided to see if he could accomplish anything by a feint, and, placing the Light Brigade in reserve, he went forward with the Heavy Brigade and the Horse Artillery, "making threatening demonstrations and cannonading as long as my ammunition lasted." The impatience and fury of officers and men of the cavalry division were not to be described. It was their belief that the Russian advance could be checked and, in the hands of a general experienced in war, would have been checked; or at least the Russians would have been worried, harassed, and thrown into confusion. The Russians, not deceived by threats, came steadily on, and in order to avoid an engagement, Lord Lucan was forced, inch by inch, to withdraw.

At this point the 1,100 Turks in the redoubts on the Causeway Heights looked out and saw advancing upon them, without any opposition from their British allies, an overwhelming force of infantry with numerous guns, while from the south-east a battery of thirty guns opened a furious fire on Canroberts Hill and redoubt No. 1. At this moment the British cavalry had just been halted near Canroberts Hill, and presently a crash was heard, "splinters of broken guns, horses' legs etc." wrote Lord George Paget, were seen "shooting up into the air." By ill fortune a shell had fallen into a troop of Horse Artillery; Captain Maude, its brilliant officer, was desperately wounded, and the troop had to be withdrawn.

The concentrated fire of thirty guns did not take long to silence the twelve-pounders of No. 1 redoubt, and the Russian infantry came on in overwhelming strength—five battalions with six in support, eleven battalions in all, against one battalion of Turks. The Russians flooded across the ditch and over the parapet; there was firing, a moment's suspense, followed by a shout, "By God they've taken Canroberts Hill!" and the Turks were seen to be in flight, tumbling helter-skelter down the steep slope.

Nevertheless, in this the No. 1 redoubt there had been a stiff resistance—casualties approached 50 per cent—but the spectacle of their comrades being pounded and slaughtered, without a company or squadron being launched in their support, was too much for the Turks in redoubts 2, 3, and 4. Some faint show of resistance was put up in 2, but the defenders of 3 and 4 fled without firing a shot and ran in a rabble towards Balaclava shouting “Ship, ship!”

The Russians had now gained possession of four out of six redoubts, and dismantling No. 4, which was nearest the British, they established themselves in 1, 2, and 3, taking possession of the twelve-pounder guns.

The position of the cavalry division now became highly vulnerable. Not only were they within musket shot of the captured redoubts, but they were directly in the line of fire from the 93rd drawn up before Balaclava. On Colin Campbell’s advice, Lucan withdrew the cavalry division along the length of the South Valley and took up a position on the slopes of the Causeway Heights, just beyond the dismantled redoubt No. 4, where he would be able to attack the flank of the Russian force as it advanced. The withdrawal, though necessary and well advised, was not understood by the cavalry division.

Our painful retreat across that plain by alternate regiments was one of the most painful ordeals it is possible to conceive [wrote Lord George Paget] seeing all the defences in our front successively abandoned as they were, and straining our eyes all round the hills in our rear for indications of support.

The retreat of the cavalry marked the end of the first period of the battle. The situation could hardly have been more serious; the Causeway Heights were lost, the road from the base to the camp on the heights was lost, the Russians were coming on in overwhelming strength, and it seemed as if Balaclava must very shortly be lost too. It was now about half-past nine, and at this point Lord Cardigan, coming up from his yacht, took over the command of the Light Brigade from Lord George Paget.

The chilly, misty morning had now, as happens in autumn, turned into a day of extraordinary brilliance and clarity, and the group of watchers, standing with Lord Raglan and his staff on the

verge of the heights, had an astonishing experience. Six or seven hundred feet above the plain they watched the battle as if from a box in a theatre. Alma had been a confused and straggling battle, fought over a wide front and obscured by broken ground and drifting smoke; it had been impossible at the Alma to see the action as a whole; but Balaclava was fought on the enclosed plain with its two valleys as on a stage. Observers were conscious of an extraordinary effect of theatrical unreality. The mountain ridges, the azure sky, the waters of Balaclava harbour flashing in the sun seemed a back-cloth, the wheeling squadrons of cavalry, the artillery, the Highlanders in their kilts and red coats part of a spectacle—impossible to believe that they were in deadly earnest. So still was the air that sounds carried long distances—the champing of bits, the clink of sabres, shouted orders, the yells of the Turks as they fled from the redoubts were audible on the heights. As the cavalry retired, individual officers could be identified through glasses and a clamour broke out. "There's Lord George Paget!" "That's Low!" "Douglas," "Jenyns," "Morris."

There had, it seems, been an idea in Lord Raglan's mind that the advance on Balaclava was a feint and the real intention of the Russians was to sally out of Sebastopol in force and attack the besieging British army. He now had had incontrovertible evidence to the contrary, and all that stood between a Russian army and his base at Balaclava was Sir Colin Campbell with 550 93rd Highlanders, 100 invalids, rather less than a battalion of Turks, who had been rallied during the flight to the harbour from the redoubts, and the cavalry division.

Two divisions of infantry—the 1st under the Duke of Cambridge and the 4th under Sir George Cathcart—were now ordered to descend into the plain. But Sir George Cathcart refused to move. The false alarm only three days ago was fresh in his mind, his men were exhausted, having only just returned from duty in the trenches, and the unhappy arrangement of the Dormant Commission was preying on his mind; he was irritable, suspicious, and considered he should have been consulted earlier. Some time passed before he could be persuaded to move, and it was after ten o'clock by the time both divisions had begun to march down from the heights.

Meanwhile General Canrobert, who was on the heights with Lord Raglan, had ordered two brigades of French infantry to take up a position at the foot of the heights immediately below him, and with them—an important decision—were sent two cavalry regiments of the celebrated Chasseurs d'Afrique, who had recently disembarked at the French base.

It was now evident that an action on a large scale was about to be fought, and Lord Raglan made up his mind that the action must be an infantry action. In face of the enormous superiority in numbers of the Russians, not only in infantry but also in cavalry, it seemed to him inevitable that his small division of cavalry, if engaged, must by sheer weight be pushed backwards into the sea.

The position taken up by Lord Lucan on Sir Colin Campbell's advice was excellent. The cavalry covered the Highlanders, drawn up before the gorge which formed the entrance to Balaclava, and could attack the Russian flank as it advanced. But they would engage the enemy as an independent force, and this Lord Raglan refused to allow: the cavalry must wait and act in conjunction with the infantry divisions marching down from the heights. He ordered Lucan to withdraw to a position at the foot of the heights on the extreme left of No. 6 redoubt. This order, known in the controversy which arose between Lord Lucan and Lord Raglan as the "first order," ran: "Cavalry to take ground to left of second line of Redoubts occupied by Turks."

Lord Lucan received the order with anger and despair. Once again the cavalry was to be immobilised and useless, and—far more important—by removing the cavalry from their covering position, the small force under Sir Colin Campbell, the only defence of Balaclava, was left open to the Russian attack. So reluctant was Lucan to execute the order that he requested the staff officer who had brought it to wait until the movement was carried out, so that afterwards it might not be said that he had misunderstood Lord Raglan's meaning.

Meanwhile a second Russian force with artillery had appeared from the east and established itself on the slopes of the Fedioukine Hills, which fenced the North Valley on the north.

And now, from their point of vantage on the verge of the heights, the watchers witnessed an extraordinary episode. A great

square of Russian cavalry, supported by artillery, began to move slowly up the North Valley. On they came, three or four thousand men strong. But the British cavalry took no notice. They sat motionless in their saddles. The mass of Russians came nearer and nearer, approached to within a few hundred yards; still the British were oblivious and, it was borne in on the watchers, the Russians were equally oblivious. The two forces were invisible to each other: they could neither see nor be seen. Only to the watchers above, looking down, did the plain appear flat and the movements of the enemy clear; the troops engaged in the battle had their view obscured by hillocks, by rises in the ground, and, above all, by the ridge of the Causeway Heights. Unless Lord Raglan could put himself in the place of his generals 600 feet below and could perpetually bear in mind when issuing orders that what was clear to him would by no means be clear to them, his position high above the battle was dangerous indeed.

Slowly, formidably, unseen, and unopposed, the Russian force came on. Suddenly a body of some four squadrons detached themselves, galloped over the ridge of the Causeway Heights, and bore down on Sir Colin Campbell's little force barring the way to Balaclava. A moment or two later the main mass slowly swerved to the left and also began to cross the Causeway Heights into the South Valley.

The Russians had now advanced far enough to bring Sir Colin Campbell's force within range of their guns, and they opened fire with considerable effect. Sir Colin had drawn up his force on a hillock at the entrance to the gorge leading to Balaclava, and he ordered his men to lie on their faces in a line two deep on the far slope. Lying helpless under artillery fire is notoriously a strain, and at this moment the four squadrons came into view, bearing rapidly down from the Causeway Heights, while behind them, just becoming visible, was the main body of the Russian cavalry. The sight was once more too much for the Turks; they leapt to their feet, and officers and men fled for the port, again crying "Ship! ship! ship!" As they passed the camp of the Highlanders, a soldier's wife rushed out and fell upon them, belabouring them with a stick, kicking them, cursing them for cowards, pulling their hair, and boxing their ears, and so pursued them down to the harbour.

Five hundred and fifty men of the Highlanders and one hundred invalids were now left to stand between the Russian army and Balaclava, and Sir Colin rode down the line telling them, "Men, remember there is no retreat from here. You must die where you stand."

To the Russian cavalry as they came on, the hillock appeared unoccupied, when suddenly, as if out of the earth, there sprang up a line two deep of Highlanders in red coats—the line immortalised in British history as "the thin red line." Every man in that line expected to be killed and, determined to sell his life as dearly as possible, faced the enemy with stern steadiness.

The Russians were taken aback. Their intelligence service was quite as inadequate as the British; they had no idea of the strength and disposition of the British troops, and they suspected once more that they had fallen into an ambush. Indeed, the gorge ahead would have been perfect for that purpose had the idea of an ambush ever occurred to the British command.

The Russian cavalry checked, halted, and from the thin red line came a volley of the deadly musket fire, every bullet aimed, which formation in line made possible. The Russians wavered, steadied, advanced, and a second volley was fired. Once more the Russians wavered, and such was the eagerness of the Highlanders that there was a movement forward: the men wanted to dash out and engage the cavalry hand to hand, and Sir Colin Campbell was heard shouting sternly, "Ninety-third! Ninety-third! Damn all that eagerness." The British line steadied, a third volley was fired, and the Russians wheeled and withdrew in the direction of the main body of their cavalry. The Highlanders burst into hurrahs. Balaclava, for the moment, was saved.

This episode, however, famous though it became, was only a side action: the important feature of the battle at this point was the movement of the great main body of the Russian cavalry over the ridge of the Causeway Heights. Neither the British nor the Russians had thrown out scouts or kept any look-out, and each side remained perfectly unconscious of the other's presence. They were, however, now to collide.

One of the drawbacks to Lord Raglan's position on the heights was his distance from the action in point of time. After he had

given an order, more than half an hour could elapse, depending on the horsemanship of the aide-de-camp concerned, before the heights were descended and the order delivered to the general concerned in the plain. From this fact resulted the first great cavalry engagement of the battle.

When the Russians began to bear down on Sir Colin Campbell's little force, Lord Raglan saw that the Turks were uncertain, and he sent down to Lucan what is known as the "second order." "Eight squadrons of Heavy Dragoons to be detached towards Balaclava to support the Turks, who are wavering." Owing to the time taken to deliver the order, the action of the thin red line was over before the squadrons had moved, but they were now trotting down towards Balaclava with the Causeway Heights on their left; two squadrons each of the 5th Dragoon Guards, the Scots Greys and Inniskillings, followed by two squadrons of the 4th Dragoon Guards, led by their Brigadier-General Scarlett.

Though General Scarlett was bent only on reaching Sir Colin Campbell, his route, as it happened, took him straight across the front of the advancing Russian cavalry. His aide-de-camp gave an exclamation; General Scarlett looked to his left, and there, a few hundred yards away on the slopes of the Causeway Heights, a gigantic mass of horsemen was bearing down on him.

The Hon. James Scarlett, brigadier-general of the Heavy Brigade, was a stout, red-faced gentleman with a large white moustache and large white eyebrows, fifty-five years of age, and as destitute of military experience as Lord Lucan or Lord Cardigan. He had, however, two qualities which his colleagues conspicuously lacked: he possessed modesty and good sense. Conscious of his military ignorance, he had provided himself with men who knew what fighting was, and there was only one place where, at that period, experience in the field could be gained. General Scarlett had two aides-de-camp, or, rather, advisers, on whose recommendations he openly relied, and both these men were "Indian" officers of brilliant reputation. One was the celebrated "Indian" cavalry commander, Colonel Beatson, whose services had been rejected by Lord Raglan, Lord Lucan, and Lord Cardigan. When General Scarlett attached Colonel Beatson to his staff, Lord Raglan and Lord Lucan

had strenuously opposed the appointment, and officially Colonel Beatson was without status or recognition. General Scarlett's other adviser, Lt. Alexander Elliot, had served throughout the Gwalior Campaign and had commanded a troop of the Bengal Light Cavalry at the battle of Punnar. At the great battle of Ferozeshah he had successfully led a desperate cavalry charge, and as a reward for his service had been given a command in the Commander-in-Chief's bodyguard and made an honorary aide-de-camp. He had also been brilliantly successful in military administration. He held the rank of lieutenant only because he had been forced to leave India on account of his health and start again from the bottom in the British Army.

In character General Scarlett was brave, good-natured, and unassuming; his men thought themselves fortunate in their commander, and his two advisers were greatly attached to him. Lieutenant Seager, contrasting him with his own commander, Lord Cardigan, wrote, "Good kind old fellow that he is, they are all very fond of him and will follow him anywhere."

General Scarlett, in command of the Heavy Brigade, assisted by his two advisers, was now to perform what has been called "one of the great feats of cavalry against cavalry in the history of Europe."

The Russian cavalry were three to four thousand strong, and the effect of such a body of horsemen in a disciplined mass is overwhelming. They were only a few hundred yards away, and they were on the slope above General Scarlett. Nevertheless, Scarlett gave the order to wheel into line. Though his eight squadrons numbered only about five hundred troopers, he intended to charge the thousands before him, and charge uphill.

On his left, however, were the remains of a ruined vineyard—fallen walls, tangled roots, concealed holes—the worst possible ground for a charge, and he was forced to pause and take ground on his right. At this moment Lord Lucan rode up and ordered him, with the utmost urgency, to do what he was already in course of doing; and charge the enemy. It was Lord Lucan's conviction ever afterwards that he had originated the charge.

By this time the whole body of Russian cavalry had crossed

the ridge ; they, too, wheeled into line ; trumpets blew, and, shaking the ground as they went, the huge mass, at a measured trot, began to descend the hill.

The British had not yet been able to start their advance. The extremely difficult nature of the ground had broken the troops into two sections, and the line had to be restored.

With extraordinary composure, Scarlett sat in his saddle waiting quietly, the great mass of Russian cavalry descending steadily towards him, while behind him the troop officers dressed and redressed the line with as little sign of haste as if they had been on a parade.

To the watchers on the heights the delay was all but unendurable. Three hundred troopers only formed Scarlett's first line, and they were occupied moving a few feet this way or that while a grey torrent of horsemen, appearing all the more irresistible for its deliberate, measured pace, descended upon them. In a moment the line of British troopers must, it seemed, be swept away, helpless as straws before a tidal wave. Suddenly the unbelievable happened once again: Russian trumpets sounded, the great mass of horsemen came to a halt and proceeded to throw out two wings from the central square, with the object of outflanking the British line. Cavalry who receive a charge when halted sustain a far greater shock than when they are in motion, and it is an elementary maxim of cavalry tactics that troops should be in movement when receiving a charge. The astonishing opportunity offered by the Russians must instantly be seized, and Lord Lucan ordered his trumpeter to sound the charge. But the line was not yet accurately dressed, and the charge was sounded twice again before the troop officers were satisfied and ready to advance. After the war Russian officers said that the extraordinary unhurried deliberation displayed in the movements of the tiny British force had done much to shake the Russian morale.

Six of Scarlett's eight squadrons were now drawn up in two lines: the first, two squadrons of the Scots Greys and a squadron of Inniskillings; the second, another squadron of Inniskillings and two squadrons of the 5th Dragoon Guards. Two squadrons of 4th Dragoon Guards and the Royals were coming up but had still some distance to cover. Five hundred yards away was the huge Russian

mass, drawn up in a square so dense that to penetrate it seemed impossible, with two wings far outflanking and enclosing Scarlett's little force, waiting to squeeze and crush, like the tentacles of an octopus. Nor was Scarlett's only difficulty the fact that he was fantastically out-numbered. The Greys were on the site of their own camp, and until they were clear of it must advance over ground encumbered by picket ropes and sick horses; moreover, though the Russians were halted, the approach to them was uphill.

However, Scarlett, with his staff and his trumpeter immediately behind him, placed himself in front of his first line, drew his sword, and ordered his trumpeter to sound the charge.

Between the Scots Greys and the Inniskillings, who formed the first line, a traditional friendship existed, and it happened that the last time each regiment had been in action was together at Waterloo. They had galloped side by side in the first line of Lord Uxbridge's celebrated cavalry charge, and, by a further coincidence, the Greys on that great day had ridden, as they were riding now, on the left of the Inniskillings.

For a few minutes the pace seemed intolerably slow, as the Greys picked their way over the camping ground and the Inniskillings held back to wait for them; then they were clear and riding headlong, stirrup to stirrup, up the slope to the Russians. The maddening events of the day—the capture of the redoubts under their very eyes, the retreat of the cavalry without striking a blow, the final delay while their line was dressed with finicking precision—boiled in their blood: they crashed furiously into the Russian mass, and the wild sound of their battle cries floated up to the heights, the Irish yell of the Inniskillings and the fierce growling "moan" of the Scots Greys.

Hard as they had ridden, Scarlett was first. Fifty yards ahead of his first line, he had galloped straight into the Russian mass and disappeared.

And now the watchers on the heights saw an astonishing sight. First Scarlett and his staff, then the three squadrons of the first line, were swallowed up, lost, and engulfed in the great grey Russian mass, and then suddenly they had not disappeared. Red coats were visible, bright specks of colour against the Russian grey: the men of the Heavy Brigade were alive, fighting, their sword arms

moving like toys, and through field-glasses individual officers could be distinguished; Scarlett in particular with his red face and big white moustache, fighting like a madman. Now the great Russian square began to heave, to sway, to surge this way and that, but it did not break, and the two great wings began to wheel inward to cut off the three squadrons, close over them, and crush them. "How can such a handful resist, much less make headway through such a legion?" wrote Lord George Paget, who witnessed the charge. "Their huge flanks lap round that handful, and almost hide them from our view. They are surrounded and must be annihilated! One can hardly breathe." But now it was the turn of the second line. Wild with the rage of battle, yelling madly, the second squadron of Inniskillings and the 5th Dragoon Guards crashed into the Russian mass on the left; a few seconds later the Royals, who had come forward without orders, flung themselves in on the right. Once more the great grey square heaved, and up on the heights a roar like the roar of the sea could be heard, made up, said those who were near the battle, of the violent and ceaseless cursing of the British troopers hacking at the thick Russian uniforms—the Russian coats were so thick that they turned the points of the swords, the shakos so stout that they could not be halved with a hatchet. It was an engagement of a thousand hand-to-hand fights; pistols and carbines were not used—men hacked and chopped at each other, cursing at each other. When their swords broke, they tore at each other, streaming with blood. The roar of battle was accompanied by the sharp clatter of sword on sword and sword on helmet, and punctuated by sudden wild yells as the Russian mass, heaving, surging, swayed this way and that, but still did not break.

Meanwhile where was the Light Brigade? They were only 500 yards away from the Russian flank, in full view of the action, indeed looking down on it, chafing, swearing, devoured by impatience, but not attempting to move. Lord Cardigan rode restlessly up and down declaring, "These damned Heavies will have the laugh of us this day"—but to act on his own initiative never occurred to him. He had, he wrote, been "ordered into a position by Lieutenant-General the Earl of Lucan, my superior officer, with orders on no account to leave it, and to defend it against any attack

of the Russians; they did not however approach the position." Lord Lucan's version was somewhat different: he had, he asserted, said to Cardigan, "I am going to leave you. Well, you'll remember you are placed here by Lord Raglan himself for the defence of this position. My instructions to you are to attack anything and everything that shall come within reach of you, but you will be careful of columns or squares of infantry." In Lucan's opinion when before Cardigan's eyes the Russian cavalry proceeded to become engaged with the Heavy Brigade, they came within the category of "anything and everything that shall come within reach of you," and should have been attacked.

The intention of Lord Raglan, however, was to keep his cavalry in hand and prevent their becoming entangled in any engagement until the two divisions of infantry should arrive down from the heights. He issued no further order to the Light Brigade, and, swearing and cursing, the Light Brigade remained inactive.

Suddenly from the swaying, heaving mass tightly locked together—so tightly locked that men found themselves paralysed by dead bodies of their enemies falling across their saddles and into their arms—there came a new sound: the sound of British cheers. The mass was no longer surging to and fro, but swaying in one direction, and that uphill: the Russians were almost being pushed back. At this moment Lord Lucan ordered the 4th Dragoon Guards, who had been held back almost dying of impatience, to charge. Wheeling into line, they bore headlong down on the Russian right, crashed in, and went through the Russian force from flank to flank.

The great Russian mass swayed, rocked, gave a gigantic heave, broke, and, disintegrating it seemed in a moment, fled. A great shout went up: from the troops fighting the battle, from the Light Brigade looking on, from the heights, where the watchers hurrah-ed, flung their hats into the air, and clapped their hands; and Lord Raglan sent an aide-de-camp galloping down with the message "Well done, Scarlett." So great had been the tension, and so swift the change, that men who only a moment before had been fighting like madmen steeped in blood burst into tears.

The enemy was now in full flight, streaming away up the ridge of the Causeway Heights to the north; but there was no pursuit. The regiments of the Heavy Brigade, mixed during the

battle into confusion, were busy re-sorting and re-forming, men were seeking their officers and officers their men, and though isolated groups made efforts, no organised action was taken. The brilliant victory was not completed: the great host of the Russian cavalry was suffered to escape; and, though the escape was taking place before their eyes, still the Light Brigade did not move.

In the 17th Lancers there was one of those "Indian" officers whom the cavalry generals and their Commander-in-Chief united in despising, and owing to sickness and to the recent death of Major Willet from exposure, he was in command of the regiment. Captain Morris at thirty-four had taken part in three campaigns, and had charged with cavalry in four battles, including the famous battle of Aliwal in 1846; then, returning to England, he had passed with great distinction through the Senior Department of the Royal Military College at Sandhurst. Short, stocky, immensely powerful, nicknamed "the pocket Hercules," Captain Morris was a popular regimental character, who shared Captain Nolan's fanatical enthusiasm for cavalry and was his intimate friend.

Captain Morris was now seen to move out and speak to Lord Cardigan, "My lord, are you not going to charge the flying enemy?" "No," replied Cardigan, "we have orders to remain here." "But, my lord," pressed Morris, "it is our positive duty to follow up this advantage." "No," repeated Cardigan, "we must remain here." In a frenzy Morris implored him to allow the 17th Lancers to pursue the enemy. "Do, my lord, allow me to charge them with the 17th. See, my lord, they are in disorder!" But Cardigan would only repeat, "No, no, sir, we must not stir from here," and in a rage Morris turned to the officers near, "Gentlemen, you are witnesses of my request."

Private Wightman of the 17th Lancers, in common with the rest of the Light Brigade, saw Captain Morris speaking "very earnestly" to Lord Cardigan in front of the Light Brigade and heard Cardigan's "hoarse, sharp" words, "No, no, sir." As Captain Morris fell back, he wheeled his horse in front of Private Wightman's squadron and, slapping his leg angrily with his sword, said loudly, "My God, my God, what a chance we are losing!"

Had Lord Cardigan pursued, the heavy cavalry action at

Balaclava might, in the words of a military historian, "have taken its place as a classic in military literature, and the host of the Russian horse might have suffered a discomfiture with few parallels in the history of war." As it was, the Russian cavalry crossed the ridge of the Causeway Heights with their artillery and, unlimbering the guns, established themselves at the eastern end of the North Valley.

At the close of the action Lord Lucan sent Lord Cardigan an angry message by his son, Lord Bingham. He expressed himself as being extremely disappointed at not having had the support of the Light Cavalry Brigade, and he desired that Lord Cardigan would always remember that when he (Lucan) was attacking in front, it was his (Cardigan's) duty to support him by a flank attack, and that Lord Cardigan might always depend upon receiving from him similar support. Afterwards Cardigan hotly denied that he had ever received this message, and the controversy between the two generals was fought out in the columns of *The Times*. Lord Cardigan also denied that he had ever been urged to pursue by Captain Morris. In both these cases independent evidence shows that his recollection was at fault. Though Cardigan was an efficient "drill-book soldier," he was not only without experience in the field, but without the instincts of a cavalry leader. "The tactics of cavalry," Nolan had written, "are not capable of being reduced to rule. . . . With the cavalry officer almost everything depends on the clearness of his *coup d'œil* and the felicity with which he sizes the happy moment of action." Smartly as Lord Cardigan could handle a brigade of cavalry on a field day, these were qualities he did not even remotely possess.

Lord Lucan angrily rejected the suggestion that he might have, and indeed should have, ordered the Light Brigade to pursue. It was the fault of Lord Raglan's order that the Light Brigade remained inactive.

I know [he wrote] that it has been imputed to me that I did not pursue the routed enemy with my Light cavalry as I should have done. To this I will not allow myself to say any more than that they had been placed in a position by Lord Raglan, that they were altogether out of my reach, and that to me they were unavailable.

The charge of the Heavy Brigade ended the second period of the battle. The aspect of the action had been entirely changed by Scarlett's feat. There was no longer any question of the Russians penetrating to Balaclava; they had been pushed away from Balaclava, even out of the South Valley altogether, and at the moment their position presented difficulties. They held the Causeway Heights and the redoubts, and they had infantry and artillery on the Fedioukine Hills on the other side of the North Valley, but between them the North Valley, one thousand yards wide, was empty of troops. The troops holding the captured redoubts on the ridge of the Causeway Heights had therefore little support, and Lord Raglan saw that this was the moment to recover the redoubts, the Causeway Heights, and, with the Heights, the Woronzoff Road.

The two divisions of infantry ordered down two hours earlier should now have come into action, but though the 1st Division under the Duke of Cambridge was present, the 4th Division under Sir George Cathcart lagged behind. He was still in a bad temper, and as he unwillingly left the heights, General Airey had brought him orders to assault and recapture the redoubts. So! he thought, his division, straight from the trenches and exhausted, was to attack, while the Guards were merely marched in support along the valley below. He refused to hurry.

Lord Raglan's anger was evident; indeed, William Howard Russell noticed that Lord Raglan had lost his usual marble calm and seemed fidgety and uneasy, continually turning his glasses this way and that and conferring with General Airey and General Estcourt. He now sent Lord Lucan a third order, of which two versions exist. The copy which Lord Raglan retained in his possession runs: "Cavalry to advance and take advantage of any opportunity to recover the Heights. They will be supported by infantry, which have been ordered to advance on two fronts." The order as it reached Lord Lucan and was retained by him is slightly different. The final sentence is divided into two. After the word "ordered" there is a full stop and "advance" is written with a capital "A," so that the final words read "They will be supported by the infantry which have been ordered. Advance on two fronts." The change does not affect the issue. Lord Raglan expected Lucan to understand from the order that he was to advance and recapture the

redoubts at once without waiting for infantry support, but that infantry had been ordered, and could be expected later.

Lord Lucan read the order in precisely the opposite sense. He was to advance when supported by infantry. Not only did the words of Lord Raglan's order seem to him to have this meaning, but Raglan's treatment of the cavalry throughout the campaign made it highly improbable that he would order an attack by cavalry alone. Again and again, at the Bulganek, at and after the Alma, on October 7, the cavalry had been restrained, recalled, forbidden to take the offensive, prohibited from engaging the enemy. Only an hour or so ago Lord Raglan had withdrawn the cavalry from their position at the entrance to Balaclava, where they were preparing to engage the Russian cavalry, and placed them in an inactive position under the heights. It never crossed Lucan's mind that he was expected to launch an attack by cavalry with the prospect of being supported at some future time by the infantry. He mounted his division, moved the Light Brigade over to a position across the end of the North Valley, drew up the Heavy Brigade on the slopes of the Woronzoff Road, behind them and on the right, and waited for the infantry, which in his own words "had not yet arrived."

Ten minutes, a quarter of an hour, half an hour passed, and the infantry did not appear. Three-quarters of an hour passed, and still Lord Lucan waited. The attack which Lord Raglan wished the cavalry to make appeared to border on recklessness. Redoubt No. 1, on the crown of Canroberts Hill, was inaccessible to horsemen, Nos. 2 and 3 would have to be charged uphill in the face of infantry and artillery. The Heavy Brigade had earlier come within range of the guns in No. 2 and had been forced to retire. However, Lord Raglan, with his power to divine the temper of troops, perceived that the whole Russian army had been shaken by the triumphant and audacious charge of the Heavy Brigade and that, threatened again by British cavalry, they would retire. Conversations with Russian officers after the war proved Lord Raglan to be right. A feeling of depression had spread through the Russian army as they saw their great and, as they believed, unconquerable mass of horsemen break and fly before a handful of the Heavy Brigade. For the moment the British possessed a moral ascendancy, but the moment must be swiftly turned to account, and up on the

heights there were murmurs of impatience and indignation as no further action followed the triumph of the Heavy Brigade, and down below Lord Lucan and the cavalry continued to sit motionless in their saddles.

Suddenly along the line of the Causeway Ridge there was activity. Through glasses teams of artillery horses with lasso tackle could be made out; they were coming up to the redoubts, and a buzz of excitement broke out among the staff. "By Jove! they're going to take away the guns"—the British naval guns with which the redoubts had been armed.

Captured guns were the proof of victory; Lord Raglan would find it difficult to explain away Russian claims to have inflicted a defeat on him if the Russians had not only taken an important position, but captured guns as well. The removal of the guns must be prevented, and, calling General Airey, Lord Raglan gave him rapid instructions. General Airey scribbled an order in pencil on a piece of paper resting on his sabretache and read it to Lord Raglan, who dictated some additional words,

This was the "fourth order" issued to Lord Lucan on the day of Balaclava—the order which resulted in the Charge of the Light Brigade—and the original still exists. The paper is of poor quality, thin and creased, the lines are hurriedly written in pencil, and the flimsy sheet has a curiously insignificant and shabby appearance. The wording of the order runs: "Lord Raglan wishes the cavalry to advance rapidly to the front—follow the enemy and try to prevent the enemy carrying away the guns. Troop Horse Artillery may accompany. French cavalry is on your left. Immediate. (Sgd.) R. Airey."

Captain Thomas Leslie, a member of the family of Leslie of Glaslough, was the next aide-de-camp for duty, and the order had been placed in his hand when Nolan intervened. The honour of carrying the order, he claimed, was his by virtue of his superior rank and consummate horsemanship—the only road now available from the heights to the plain, 600 or 700 feet below, was little more than a track down the face of a precipice and speed was of vital importance. Lord Raglan gave way, and Nolan, snatching the paper out of Captain Leslie's hand, prepared to gallop off. Just as Nolan was about to descend, Lord Raglan called out to him, "Tell Lord Lucan the cavalry is to attack immediately." Nolan plunged over the verge of the heights at breakneck speed.