

LORD LUCAN

PLAYED BY JAMES WARNER

Members of the House. I welcome this opportunity to address you to clear my good name and reputation for being held responsible by Lord Raglan for the Charge of the Light Brigade down the North Valley on the 25th October. If anyone should be held accountable it is Lord Raglan himself for his inability to communicate his orders clearly. But first some background.

Early in my military career I was given the opportunity to purchase the 17th Lancers for the sum of 25,000 pounds. This caused some concern at the time because of my preferment by Horse Guards over a senior contender from within the regiment. A major, who had fought throughout the peninsular campaign and then distinguished himself at Waterloo, but my selection was obviously the right choice as I had the means to equip the regiment with all its necessary accoutrements and the local contender did not.

On the one hand I was delighted to learn that the 17th would go to the Crimea with the Light Brigade and be part of my Cavalry Division but on the other I was most concerned that it would be under the command of my brother in law, the Earl of Cardigan. I found it difficult to understand why Horse Guards would appoint such a clearly inadequate man to lead 1500 men and horses into battle when his only claim to fame was his nefarious reputation for having more officers tried by court martial and more men flogged than any other commanding officer in the entire British Army. I cautioned myself that I needed to keep a tight rein on him if the Light Brigade was to be saved from a disaster in the Crimea.

Frankly I was disgusted with Lord Raglan's weakness for permitting Lord Cardigan to bypass the chain of command prior to and since our arrival in the Crimea. How can an army possibly function in that manner? My warnings to him about this were not appreciated until the Russians attacked and captured the four redoubts on the Causeway Heights at 0730 hrs on 25 October. Actually, Lord Cardigan's continued absence in bed on his yacht when the remainder of us were standing to at 0500hrs each morning was a blessing in disguise as it gave me the opportunity to work alongside Colonel Paget a most able second in command. Paget's actions on the morning of the 25th gave me confidence in his obvious capacity to command the Light Brigade should anything untoward happen to Lord Cardigan.

At about 0900 hrs on the 25th, I received another questionable order from Lord Raglan which asked me to move 8 squadrons of the Heavy Brigade into the South Valley opposite Redoubt 3 to support the 93rd Highlanders which had moved North from Balaclava into a new defensive position about 2000 metres south of Redoubt 3. Why Lord Raglan did not leave the actual allocation of cavalry sub units for this task to me was just another example of Lord Raglan's over meddling in the judgement of his commanding generals.

Before joining the Heavy Brigade I rode over to Lord Cardigan who had since been moved into the North Valley by Lord Raglan to inform him of the situation and reminded him that whilst Lord Raglan had placed him in this

defensive position he was to attack any targets of opportunity in the North Valley that might come about as a result of our pending engagement in the South valley. I then rode back to the South Valley where Brigadier Scarlett, commander of the Heavy Brigade, had taken the initiative and was preparing to attack a superior strength Russian Cavalry force that was then forming up on the Causeway Heights. The speed with which his squadrons went into action threw the Russians off balance and in the ensuing melee many of the Russians retreated into the North valley where they would have presented a fine target of opportunity for the Light Brigade.

It was now about 1100 hrs and the Heavy Brigade had resumed its former position astride the Causeway Heights between 5 and 6 redoubts and to the right of the Light brigade. Suddenly Captain Nolan, ADC to General Airey, galloped up to me. Nolan saluted and thrust a written order, into my out stretched hand. This was the fourth order I received from Lord Raglan on the 25th. I still have a copy of it and it reads “ 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 of Horse Artillery may accompany. French Cavalry on your left. Immediate. R Airey.”

This order was just as sloppily constructed as the three previous orders I had received that morning. Airey really had a lot to learn about staff work and Lord Raglan had a lot to learn about his command responsibilities.

Now what was I being asked to do? This was completely at variance with the previous order which had directed me to wait for the infantry to arrive at my position on the Causeway Heights before attacking redoubt 3 and I could see over my shoulder that the advance elements of the 1st Guards Division were now only a few hundred metres away from me. Was I now being asked to dash away and attack without them? And if so to where? And what guns were we to prevent being carried away. From my position the only guns I could see were those to our extreme left on the Fedioukine Heights and those at the eastern end of the North Valley. There was no mention of the Causeway Heights or of my regaining any of the redoubts in this order.

Was my Cavalry Division to advance uphill against an entrenched enemy without infantry support? Could Lord Raglan really mean this? The whole thing was nonsensical. It obviously needed clarification.

Nolan who had been watching my deliberations was by this time seething with impatience and adopted a most hostile attitude towards me, which bordered on insubordination. Nolan seeing my hesitation and doubt said “Lord Raglan wishes you to attack immediately my lord?” Previously quite calm but now quite frustrated I said to Nolan with obvious agitation. “Attack sir, attack what? What enemy? and what guns? Nolan’s response was to throw back his head and to gesture insolently by flinging out his right arm and pointing tauntingly, not at any of the redoubts, which were to our right front but directly to our left front down the North valley to the enemy and guns at the eastern end of the North valley. He then said, “There my lord is your enemy.

There are your guns". Even though I was flabbergasted there was nothing more to say. This man not only delivered a written order from the Commander in Chief but he would also have been briefed verbally before being sent with it. With my face undoubtedly drained of all colour I rode over to Lord Cardigan accompanied by my ADC and Nolan. When Lord Cardigan and I faced one another he saluted me with his sword. I then ordered him to attack the guns at the eastern end of the North Valley in two lines and advised him that the Heavy Brigade would provide support. I left Lord Cardigan, who accepted my orders in the calmest of manner. As I rode back to prepare the Heavy Brigade for its support role I had no doubt that Lord Cardigan had sufficient stomach to face up to this unenviable task which when all was said and done was tantamount to a death sentence. I reflected that perhaps I might have misjudged the man somewhat. In any event I doubted very much I would ever see him again alive.

We then watched the Light Brigade start their advance at the walk at about 1110 hrs. After moving about 300 yards the Brigade went into the trot in perfect formation. They were sufficiently far ahead now for me to lead the Heavy Brigade to a position just to their right and to their rear in which position we remained for several minutes while we watched the Light Brigade being decimated by round shot and shell from the battery positioned on the Fedioukine Heights. Very soon they would also come within effective range of the guns to their right on the Causeway Heights. It was carnage. I halted the Heavy Brigade, which was now also sustaining casualties. Without hesitation I ordered the Heavy Brigade to turn about and withdraw to our start line. Lord Raglan may have sacrificed the light Brigade but I would not sacrifice the Heavy Brigade.