

LORD RAGLAN PLAYED BY ROGER WARE

Members of the House, thank you for giving me the opportunity to give my account of the Battle of Balaclava. As the Commander in Chief of the British Expeditionary Force to the Crimea the tragic events of the 25th October must ultimately be my responsibility but nevertheless my conscience about the Charge of the Light Brigade remains clear. Let me start from the beginning.

As a 66 year old lieutenant general I was looking forward to retirement when the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS) at Horse Guards sent for me and told me that I had been selected to lead the British Expeditionary Force to the Crimea. I reminded the Chief that most of my military career had been spent either as an ADC (aide de camp) or as a staff officer and that I had had no command experience.

The Chief thanked me for my candidness and then went on to remind me that the army had been allowed to run down since Waterloo, something of which you are all fully aware, and forty years later we were suffering the consequences. "But only you Somerset" he said, "had served alongside Wellington and surely that must stand for something. Secondly, you speak fluent French and in this war you will have at least one division of French Infantry and two French cavalry regiments with whom you will need to communicate. Third, you have that happy knack of getting people to work together as a team and with Cardigan and Lucan as two of your subordinate generals, believe me you will need every ounce of that skill".

The Chief then briefed me on the troops allotted to the task and the embarkation details. I was shocked to learn that all regiments were only about 50 percent of their war establishment

Before inviting me to meet my staff the Chief said "To overcome your concerns about your lack of command experience I have taken special care to select your Chief of Staff, Brigadier General Harry Faversham. A splendid fellow who also served with the Guards at Waterloo as a cornet.. I know you will be happy with him so listen to his advice". Suddenly, I felt a new lease of life as the adventure began.

The Crimea proved to be a dreadful place. In the first few months of the campaign our overall strength was reduced even further by cholera. A man could be diagnosed in the morning and pronounced dead by the late afternoon. The casualties from this included Faversham, a man I would sorely miss. I appointed young Brigadier General Airey the Quarter-Master General in his place who I hoped would grow into the job.

Despite this and other difficulties we trapped the Russian garrison in their base at Sevastopol and established our own base at Balaclava. Unfortunately, the main Russian Field Force escaped our entrapment and withdrew across the Chernaya River to the northwest

At about 0630 hrs on 25th October I was awakened by cannon fire and subsequently arrived at my observation point on the Sapoune Heights at about 0730hrs. I then sent for Airey who had not yet appeared. It soon became clear from reports coming in from our cavalry pickets that the Russian Field Force was planning to attack and capture the line of redoubts on the Causeway Heights. Of the 6 redoubts, only the first three were occupied, all by our Turkish Allies, with a battery of British artillery on Redoubt 3 providing close support.

The Russian plan soon became clear. Phase 1 would be to secure the line of redoubts on the Causeway Heights prior to launching Phase 2, which would be an attack to capture our base at Balaclava, Balaclava was presently defended by only the 93rd Highlanders and a small force of Royal Marines. As the remainder of my infantry were besieging the Russians in Sevastopol this was a dangerous situation and one I should possibly have foreseen.

I immediately dictated four orders to Airey, to restore the situation.

First. I ordered the Cavalry Division to withdraw from their present vulnerable position in the South Valley to the West end of the South Valley closer to the Sapoune Heights and out of range of the Russian artillery.

Second. I ordered the 1st and 4th Infantry Divisions to move from their siege positions at Sevastopol to the Western end of the Causeway Heights just short of Redoubt 5. Once there they were to concentrate prior to recapturing Redoubts 3, 2 and 1 in that order. In this attack they were to be supported by the Cavalry Division. Their line of march was to be via the Col.

Third. I ordered the 93rd Highlanders to advance North from their defensive position at Balaclava to a new defensive position just west of the North South Road about 2000 metres South of the Redoubts with a view to intercepting any Russian force advancing along that route towards Balaclava.. They were to have 8 squadrons of the Heavy Brigade and a battery of artillery in direct support.

Fourth. I ordered Lord Lucan to send 8 squadrons from the Heavy Brigade to support the 93rd Highlanders once they were in their new defensive position

By about 0830 hrs Redoubts 1,2 3 and 4 had been captured by the Russians. The cavalry had withdrawn to the West end of the South valley, the 93rd Highlanders were close to their new position and the 1st Guards Division had started to move.

Heavens knows what was delaying the 4th Division, which received their order to move earlier.

By 0900 hrs the 93rd Highlanders were in position and many of the surviving Turks joined their thin red line.

As the 8 squadrons of the Heavy Brigade were moving to link up with the Highlanders I saw a Russian cavalry force concentrating on the Causeway Heights. This could be disastrous for us because the Heavies were now open to an attack on their left flank. But for some inexplicable reason the Russians hesitated to charge which gave Brigadier Scarlett the opportunity to quickly change from Column of route formation into battle line formation to attack the Russians.

From our high vantage point on the Sapoune Heights we could see the Heavy Brigade going into action uphill against Russian cavalry positioned atop the Causeway Heights. Everyone cheered as the majority of the Russian cavalry broke up and tried to escape either behind the three captured redoubts or down the North valley right in front of Lord Cardigan who inexplicably just sat there and watched the Russian cavalry trot back down the North valley.

Then, at about 10.45 hrs I saw the enemy attaching ropes to our guns left behind on Redoubt 3 obviously with the intention of hauling them away. Losing one's guns was tantamount to losing a battle. They had to be recovered and quickly. Where were the infantry I thought ?

I immediately ordered Airey to write my fourth order to the cavalry that morning, which was for the Cavalry Division to prevent the Russians from removing the guns from Redoubt No 3. The written order which Airey wrote and which I read before he signed it said " 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 is on your left. R Airey Immediate."

At this point Airey ordered Calthorpe, the next ADC for duty, to convey the message to Lord Lucan. But I said "No, give it to Nolan, the faster horseman", Nolan who had been watching the battle was standing close by. Airey spoke to Nolan and then handed him the written order. As Nolan leapt onto his horse I shouted "Tell Lord Lucan to attack. Attack immediately."

We watched Nolan literally charge down the escarpment and come alongside Lord Lucan in about 7 minutes. After a few minutes, which seemed like an hour, I saw Lord Lucan ride over and speak to Lord Cardigan. I then heard the Light Brigade bugler sound the advance and the light Brigade advanced at the walk down the North Valley at 1110 hrs. I thought, Lord Lucan is obviously going to direct his attack on Redoubt No 3 from the left flank rather than proceeding on the direct route along the Causeway Heights. But to my astonishment the Light Brigade continued on down the North Valley.

Meanwhile the enemy battery on the Fedioukine Heights opened up. The noise was deafening and the Light Brigade was incurring casualties. I then realised that Lord Lucan who was now following up with the Heavy Brigade, was intent on engaging the guns at the end of the North valley and not the enemy on Redoubt No 3 as I had ordered. As the groans from the onlookers atop Sapoune Heights grated in my ears I thought to myself "Lucan, what have you done. You are about to sacrifice the Cavalry Division"

