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## Battle of Balaklava

SGM Trevino  
M06

MSG Brown  
MSG Campbell  
MSG Chandler  
MSG Walters

“Half a league, half a league, Half a league onward, All in the valley of Death Rode the six hundred. 'Forward, the Light Brigade! Charge for the guns!' he said: Into the valley of Death rode the six hundred. 'Forward, the Light Brigade!' Was there a man dismay'd ? Not tho' the soldier knew Some one had blunder'd: Their's not to make reply, Their's not to reason why, Their's but to do and die: Into the valley of Death Rode the six hundred. Cannon to right of them, Cannon to left of them, Cannon in front of them Volley'd and thunder'd; Storm'd at with shot and shell, Boldly they rode and well, Into the jaws of Death, Into the mouth of Hell Rode the six hundred. Flash'd all their sabres bare, Flash'd as they turn'd in air Sabring the gunners there, Charging an army, while All the world wonder'd: Plunged in the battery-smoke Right thro' the line they broke; Cossack and Russian Reel'd from the sabre-stroke Shatter'd and sunder'd. Then they rode back, but not Not the six hundred. Cannon to right of them, Cannon to left of them, Cannon behind them Volley'd and thunder'd; Storm'd at with shot and shell, While horse and hero fell, They that had fought so well Came thro' the jaws of Death, Back from the mouth of Hell, All that was left of them, Left of six hundred. When can their glory fade? O the wild charge they made! All the world wonder'd. Honour the charge they made! Honour the Light Brigade, Noble six hundred!”<sup>1</sup> Slightly more than two hundred men returned from that valley were six hundred plus had trod a half an hour earlier. No other words have captured and immortalized the Crimean war and more specifically the Battle of Balaklava more eloquently than Lord Alfred Tennyson's epic ballad the “Charge of the light Brigade” He addresses the depth and spectacle of this most famous battle, however the genesis appears more illusory. The very nature of the Crimean War lends itself to retrospection in the areas of Intelligence preparation of the

battlefield as well as the potential for individual agendas to assuage tactical superiority. The requirement for timely and accurate information is critical to the tactical success of any mission the requirement for trust amongst brother in arms is absolute.

One of the most famous battles in history, the Battle of Balaklava was a remarkably disjointed and diminutive affair for the immeasurable attention and analysis that has been proffered in its aftermath. The battle itself consisted of little more than three separate actions: the unsuccessful Russian cavalry charge against the "thin red line" of British Highlanders, the successful charge of the British Heavy Cavalry Brigade into the Russian cavalry, and the disastrous charge of the British Light Brigade "into the mouth of hell" against the massed Russian artillery, infantry, and cavalry.<sup>2</sup> These were preceded in order by the Russian capture of redoubts from their Turkish infantry defenders and the emplacement of impeccable artillery positions, and were succeeded by the success venture of the French Algerian cavalry in clearing the ridge line north of the "valley of death."

The town of Balaklava lies in a very narrow inlet on the southern coast of Crimea. It is surrounded by steep hills that block easy access to the interior. The main transit route passes through a narrow ravine, the Col de Balaklava, and then across a plain to the northwest. This plain is closed at the west by the Sapoune Heights and bounded on the north by the Fedukhine hills, but it is open on the east. From west to east along the center of the plain there is a low ridge, called the Causeway Heights, which divides the plain in two and blocks observation between the southern and northern parts. The ridge is about two miles from Balaklava harbor. Initial British campaign plans were modified to include

securing the determined strategic route in order to provide for an easily accessible means moving necessary logistics forward to the maneuver elements.

During the summer and early fall of 1854 the Allied armies, specifically the French and British continued to reinforce their initial quartering contingents in an effort to dislodge Russian forces from the port city of Sevastopol. The British strengthened their heavy cavalry with an additional 4,000 and French supplemented with another 7,700 troops.<sup>3</sup> The Russians brought up the 12th Division of General Liprandi, from General Dannenberg's IV Corps, which was also on its way from Odessa. As the allied plans to liberate Sevastopol became apparent, Russian Field Marshall Menshikov maneuvered forces to relieve the pressure on Sevastopol he positioned approximately 25,000 men at Tchorgun, just north of the Chernaya River valley, six miles northeast of Balaclava. This vital British supply base and port was not within the current sphere of influence of main allied forces the town was laterally separated and nearer to Sevastopol. Until this point minimal notice had given to the possibility of a Russian offensive. The British cavalry failed to provide any viable reconnaissance, and because of distinctly British contempt for Russian military strategy no covert operations were employed as intelligence gathering measures.<sup>4</sup> The reports of Russian artillery entrenched in specific redoubts, brought in by local inhabitants and Polish deserters from the Russian army were discounted or ignored. Unfortunate as it would become, five redoubts had been constructed a half-mile apart along the Causeway Heights and a sixth was on Canrobert's Hill at the right of the British line along the axis with, but not including Tchorgun. The Allied battlements along this axis were insufficient and were wholly incapable of

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providing mutual support and untrained Turkish militia of pitiable quality garrisoned them. Additionally the Allied artillery had strengthened what it must have perceived as a most enviable volley influence with three 12-pounder naval guns located in the Canrobert's Hill redoubt and two each in the next three redoubts to the west. Each gun had a single British gunner. Bearing in mind that Russian artillery had utilized the reverse slope of Canrobert's Hill as an artillery position.

The direct defense of Balaclava was entrusted to a single infantry battalion with a single field artillery battery stationed at Kadikoi. This placed the direct fire assets at too great a distance to provide supporting fire for the redoubts along the "thin red line". This contingent was none other than the immortal 93rd Regiment, The Sutherland Highlanders, some 550 men strong under Sir Colin Campbell (this regiment found itself 700 yards and collapsed left flank from denying Andrew Jackson the victory at the Battle of New Orleans). The 93<sup>rd</sup>'s only infantry support would have to come from the main British army to the west, but it would be unable to reach them in time. The British cavalry division, commanded by Lord Lucan was in camp just below the plateau about a mile south of the Causeway Heights near the western end of the valley. The British commander in chief, Lord Raglan, established his headquarters in a farmhouse by the road just above the Col de Balaclava and Canrobert placed his headquarters a short distance along the same road. Lord Lucan was with his cavalry, but Lord Cardigan slept on his yacht in the harbor.

The initial Russian assault was led by General Liprandi with four columns of infantry that crossed the Chernaya River an hour before sunrise. Major General Gribbe led three

battalions of the Dnieper Regiment, a regiment of Uhlans, a company of Cossacks and ten guns to seize Kamara to protect the left flank. In the center General Semiakin led the assault on Canrobert's Hill with five battalions.<sup>5</sup> This was subdivided into two columns; General Scuderi had the Odessa Infantry Regiment and six guns and General Rykoff had a cavalry brigade, the Ural Infantry Regiment, and two horse artillery batteries. To his right General Levontski had three battalions of the Ukraine Infantry Regiment and ten guns and General Semiakin had the Azov Infantry Regiment, the Dnieper Chasseurs, and sixteen guns for the attack on Redoubt number two.<sup>6</sup> The cavalry followed the infantry in support. On the Russian right was the 1st Brigade of the 16th Infantry Division with three battalions of the Vladimir Regiment, four battalions of the Suzdal Regiment and fourteen guns under General Jabokritski. These were stationed on the Fedukhine Hills to protect the Russian right flank.<sup>7</sup>

For some reason Lord Lucan apparently sensed trouble was coming, and was riding toward Canrobert's Hill before dawn. He immediately noted signals from the redoubts ahead that indicated the Russian approach. The alarm was given at 0600. Raglan reached a position close enough to see the action shortly after 0700, but it was almost 0800 before he could reach any elevation conducive to proper to appropriate observation of the battlefield. By that time the redoubt on Canrobert's Hill had already fallen, despite a very hearty Turkish resistance. After the encapsulation of the flank redoubts the Russians were in advantageous position to leverage the adjacent redoubts through a concentration of their artillery. At this the remaining Turkish garrisons began to retreat from their

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somewhat fortified positions into the town of Balaclava, thus negating any protractable protection along the entirety of the “thin red line”. The only fortuitous effect of this withdrawal by the Turks was in the fact that the Russian cavalry gave chase. In so doing, The Turkish gallantry in retreat bought the Allies precious time necessary to react and prepare hasty defenses.

The initial response to the Russian came from Lord Lucan, who positioned his 1,500 cavalrymen across the valley at a right angle to causeway ridge with their left flank between Redoubts four and five. Lord Raglan hurriedly ordered the Duke of Cambridge to bring the 1st Division and General Cathcart to bring his 4th Division down from the plateau to the plain.<sup>8</sup> He pulled Lucan's cavalry back, closer to the heights. Raglan also alerted Canrobert, but the French commander considered the Russian effort a diversion and would not disrupt his siege operations. He did, however, order part of the Chasseurs d'Afrique to support the British cavalry.<sup>9</sup>

If the Russians had continued to advance, they surely would have captured Balaclava. But they halted at the line of captured redoubts. When they resumed their movement, the main Russian cavalry began moving slowly up (west) the northern valley parallel to the Causeway Heights. Four squadrons then turned south and crossed the Heights between Redoubts three and four. They continued across the southern valley toward Kadikoi and Balaclava. The British infantry consisted of the 93rd Highlanders, a few invalid Guardsmen and others who were rushed up from Balaclava, and two Turkish battalions. They were positioned initially under cover on the rear slope of a rise to shelter from

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Russian artillery, but when the Russian cavalry began its approach, Campbell ordered them to form a line on the crest above the entrance to Balaclava. Here he told them they must stand until they died, as no retreat would be allowed.<sup>10</sup>

The Russian cavalry marched forward, then began its galloping charge. The British first volley was delivered at 600 yards with no effect. The second volley at 350 yards and the one artillery battery's fire caused the Russians to wheel toward its left flank and the third volley at 150 yards broke the cavalry charge. They turned about in the thick smoke and retired across the Causeway, leaving no casualties on the field. The moral effect, however, was significant. There were plenty of Russian casualties, but they all managed to remain in the saddle until they reached their own lines. While the four squadrons were attempting to drive off Barker's battery, the main body of 3,000 Russian cavalry continued up the north valley, observed by Lord Raglan and his staff from the height at its end, but unseen by the British cavalry in the south valley. As the Russians came abreast of Redoubt four, they came under heavy French artillery fire and then they also turned left to cross the ridge into the south valley.

Meanwhile, in the south valley the Heavy Brigade under command of Brig. Gen. James V. Scarlett was moving east to assist Campbell's Highlanders. As the Russians topped the crest the two cavalry forces suddenly saw each other at less than half a mile distance. Both were surprised, but the British were at a distinct disadvantage from the terrain. The lead column contained a squadron of the 6th Inniskilling Dragoons and two squadrons of the Scots Greys . On the right, a second column was composed of another Inniskilling Dragoon squadron and the 5th Dragoon Guards. The 4th Dragoon Guards



remained stationary to the rear. Scarlett had only about 300 of his troops under direct control in the left column.<sup>11</sup>

Instead of launching an immediate charge down hill into the British flank, the 3,000 Russian cavalymen sat on the hill crest amazed and fascinated as they watched the British 300 methodically wheel left and form front in parade ground fashion some 300 yards below them. Lord Lucan rushed up and ordered Scarlett to launch an attack, but Scarlett would not do so until he had dressed his lines as if at Horse Guards Parade. Then, as the Russians extended their front to envelop him and began to advance, Scarlett ordered the charge to sound and assumed his post ahead of the leading rank. Within minutes the British had smashed into the center of the Russian formation and both forces were wildly slashing each other in a chaotic melee. It was now that Lord Lucan ordered the 4th Dragoon Guards to attack the Russian right flank and the 5th to attack the center. As the fresh blows hit the Russian mass, the Greys and Inniskillings burst through. The Russian formation collapsed and individuals fled in disorder. Within a period of eight minutes the British took 80 casualties and the Russians 200.<sup>12</sup> As amazing as this result was, the more remarkable event is that the Light Brigade sat motionless in line less than 500 yards away as the routed Russian cavalry streamed past their front. If Lord Cardigan, at that point had exercised even a modicum of initiative, the Russian cavalry would have been destroyed and the entire Russian force driven back across the Tetchenia. But, Lord Cardigan, being a pedant for the specificity of his orders; interpreted "hold the ground" as a preventative from engaging the enemy in their current position. Nevertheless, he was highly irritated by the success of the rival brigade and his hated brother-in-law, Lord

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Lucan's orders. This contributed enormously to his demeanor a mere two hours later when he would make his fateful charge.

From Raglan's hill-top view point it now appeared that the Russians were reforming, bringing up more infantry, and possibly preparing to remove the Allied artillery that they had captured mere hours before. His supplementary orders to the infantry were being carried out. The 4th Division was taking up positions near the Vorontsov road (Causeway) and the 1st Division moved down the steep ridge to the south and extended its line to join the left of the 93rd Highlanders.<sup>13</sup> With the Russian forces in a state of disarray Lord Raglan ordered Lord Lucan to prepare the cavalry for a combined arms attack on the Causeway with the First Division of infantry. Lucan shifted his brigades to the head of the northern valley and waited the arrival of the infantry. After nearly an hour of watching nothing happen, Raglan became increasingly more impatient and definitely more concerned with the French staff's (who were watching the entire spectacle beside him) perception of his military prowess. If the Russians managed to take his six guns from the redoubts, his inaction would provide grist for his French counterparts. He hastily issued an order to Lucan to attack and prevent the loss of the guns and sent it via a messenger, Captain Nolan. When Nolan reached Lord Lucan, who was in the valley seated on his horse between his two brigades, and delivered the order, Lord Lucan, was thoroughly confused. From his vantage there were no guns to be seen. Additionally, he was originally under the impression that Captain Nolan was referring to enemy artillery. Nolan waved impetuously toward the other end of the valley and said "there are your

guns, sir."<sup>14</sup> Lord Lucan then rode over to Lord Cardigan (without Captain Nolan, the original messenger, in tow) and ordered him to advance with his brigade. Cardigan, not seeing any point to such a suicidal attack, nevertheless was determined to obey orders to the letter. Now, instead of refraining from any sort of action when the attack was clearly warranted, as had been the case earlier, he accepted the direction of a vague order explicitly when caution and further clarification essential. The result of course would be an incongruous charge that was destined to become legendary in the annals of military folklore.

Thus began this gloriously famous and infamous "Charge of the Light Brigade."<sup>15</sup> The first line, 13th Light Dragoons and 17th Lancers, were practically all blown from the saddle. The second line, the 11th Hussars, and the third line, 4th Light Dragoons and 8th Hussars, also suffered heavily, but all managed to cross the mile and a half into the face of twelve cannon with at least equivalent artillery and more infantry firing at their flanks from the ridges on each side. Lord Cardigan not only miraculously pass between the cannon untouched, but he did manage to remain seated through the line, to engage mounted Cossacks some distance behind the guns before turning to retire up the valley. There he was eventually rejoined by less than 200 of the original 673 men who started the charge.<sup>16</sup> That anyone survived at all is attributable in whole to the action of the Chausseurs d'Afrique, who supported the British advance by clearing the Fedukhine hills of Russian artillery and infantry in time to reduce their fire on the retiring horsemen. Of those who did not survive many were wounded or unhorsed troopers who fell victim to

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Cossacks during the withdrawal. After the battle the 1st Division (except for the 42nd and 79th Highland Regiments) returned to the trenches south of Sevastopol, but the 4th Division remained on the plain. This encouraged the Russian high command into thinking the British siege lines were weakened and this brought on the next battle.<sup>17</sup>

In order the Russians had become witness to three of the most incredible spectacles in British military history within the space of less than four hours. All of which were characterized by inadequate intelligence due to in no small measure to arrogance and a lack of understanding of the non linear battlefield.