

Robert Ashton

The name of my officer was Colonel Douglas, and the captain of the troop Major Cooke. I was present at the Turkish campaign, and was through the whole of the Crimean war, and I never received a single wound. I had two horses shot under me and on one occasion my busby was shot off my head. I certainly consider myself very fortunate. On the day preceding the renowned charge we had been waiting all night in expectation of an attack, and knew that the Heavy Brigade had been engaged in a skirmish with the enemy.

Afterwards came the order from Captain Nolan to capture the guns. This gallant soldier, in leading the men down the valley, was the first man shot, receiving a bullet in his chest. Some say that he screamed, but I never heard it at the time. You did not know how the deuce you felt when you saw the enemy and the guns on every side; but picture to yourself what your sensations would be on the occasion. The order given, to the best of my knowledge, was "Walk, trot, gallop — charge!" My first horse was shot under me a very short time after we started. After being dismounted, Sergeant Fleming was near me, and I caught hold of the bridle of his horse. He said, "Leave go, or we shall both be killed." The bridle slipped out of my hand, and as the horse passed me I managed to catch his tail, to which I held on for a few yards; but the pace at which he was going was too much for me, and I was obliged to let go. Shortly afterwards I saw a horse belonging to the 4th Light Dragoons coming towards me, which, after some difficulty, I succeeded in catching, and, mounting it, I proceeded down the valley.

We captured the guns, and killed as many of the gunners as we could; but of course we could not hold the battery — the odds were too much against us. Colonel Douglas gave the order to re-form the line, and join the 17th Lancers, with the object of recharging the guns; but, upon finding out that he had made a mistake in thinking they were our comrades, the colonel said, "Gallop, men, for your lives!" I was close to him when he said it; and we galloped away as fast as we could, for the enemy was surrounding us on every side. The plain was strewn with dead horses and wounded and dying men. When we returned — I can hardly tell how we came back — the "rollcall" was read over, and then we got an idea how fearful had been the slaughter, and of the number of comrades missing. We were dreadfully cut-up, and felt sorry for our brave companions-in-arms, whom we could not bury in consequence of our being beaten off the valley. Our camp was afterwards shifted. The officers were very brave, and urged the men forward in every possible way, and everybody did their best. One of the principal incidents connected with the charge was the interchange of horses that was going on both up and down the valley. If a man was dismounted, which was a most common occurrence, he caught the first horse that presented itself. Of course riderless horses were numberless, and many of the poor creatures were almost mad, the blood pouring out in great profusion from many of them, owing to the bullet wounds they had received. They rushed up and down the valley, sometimes even to the very mouth of the cannons, not knowing where to go or what to do; and this, as might be expected, added greatly to the confusion of a scene which was indescribable.