William Bird

Colonel Shewell commanded the regiment, the next in command being Captain Tompkinson. The comrade who covered me was Tom Hefferan; he had only come up from the hospital at Scutari two days before, and, poor fellow, was very ill. As soon as we began to charge he said, "By God, boys, do you have this firing every morning?" I answered, "This was nothing to what we generally have," little thinking what it would lead to. I remember that he and Sergeant-Major M'Clure were the first I saw killed. Both of them, I believe, were shot through the head, and immediately fell from their horses; I never saw them again. Opposite the second battery, on the right of us, I lost my first horse, which was shot dead; but by a skilful movement, I landed on my feet, and was not hurt. Shortly afterwards I caught a stray horse, which was riderless, belonging to the Scots Greys, and rejoined my troop. My feelings as I went down the valley were principally that of intense excitement — a sort of sensation of madness. At the bottom of the valley we halted some time, wondering what to do. I heard Lieutenant Phillips shout to Colonel Shewell, "The Lancers are cutting off our retreat!" to which Colonel Shewell replied, "No, Phillips; it's the 17th coming to our relief." Immediately afterwards I heard Lord George Paget call out, "Where is the General?" Colonel Shewell answered that he did not know. Lord George then said that we had better take our regiments back as best we could. Colonel Shewell, having wheeled us about, said, "Every man for himself, and God for us all. Go into them, men!" We then made for the Lancers of the enemy, and they opened their lines for us to pass, but we did not feel inclined to go through. I did not think it was a trap for us, but there was a sort of feeling of devilment or courage in us at the time, and we would not avail ourselves of their opening, but cut our way past their right and left flanks. In this charge my second horse, which had been shot, fell on my left leg, and I remained on the ground until relieved from my painful position by some of the enemy's soldiers. When I found I could not move my leg from under my horse, I got thought it was all over with me, because I had heard that the Russian soldiers were very barbarous, and killed all their prisoners; but to my agreeable surprise they ordered me to accompany them, with several other of my comrades, to the bottom of the valley, where we were assured by a Russian officer that we were in the hands of Christians, and would be taken care of. I had received a bullet wound through the calf of the right leg, and a lance wound in the arm. The Russians kept me a prisoner for twelve months. On the following morning — the 26th October, 1854 — in company with a number of other prisoners, I was brought before General Liprandi, the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian army. He asked us what amount of brandy had been served out to us that morning. We replied that we had had neither brandy nor victuals of any kind, telling him that we were very hungry. The General then ordered his aide-de-camp to see that our wants were attended to, and we afterwards obtained some beautiful white bread and German sausage. While appeasing our hunger we were surrounded by the Russian soldiers, and some of them gave us some apples. According to Gen. Liprandi's orders we obtained also some native drink, which they call vodka. We had handed to us also some marching clothes, and afterwards marched up the country to Voronetz, which took us from three to four months to accomplish through a

severe Russian winter. Our treatment from the higher class of Russians was of a very kind character, but the peasantry behaved to more like brutes than Christians, and our privations were great. At Voronetz, Mr. Catlin, an English merchant, took charge of me, he undertaking to be responsible for my body; and during the three months I was with him he treated me most kindly. At the expiration of this time a Russian officer fetched me, and I was exchanged with my fellow prisoners at Odessa, and rejoined my regiment in the Crimea.