

Archibald Cleveland writing to his uncle.

Balaklava, Oct. 26, 1854.

My dear Uncle

We were yesterday attacked in our rear by the Russians; they had 15,000 infantry, 5,000 cavalry, and about ten guns. Early in the morning firing commenced upon the Turks; it lasted two hours, when they cut like cowards, and their guns were taken. Their cavalry then advanced. The heavy brigade charged them and drove them back. The Russian cavalry did not fight longer than ten minutes; they must be awful cowards. The light cavalry brigade were on the hill as a reserve, and could not get down in time to pursue, which was fortunate for them, for few would have escaped. Some little time after this Lord Raglan, who had been told the wrong position of the captured guns, ordered the light cavalry to charge and retake them. We had our orders, and we had to obey, though we saw it was a forlorn hope, and not one of us expected to return. There never was such a charge on record. Accordingly we formed in two lines; first, the 13th and 17th Lancers; second, the 4th, 8th, and 11th. We were drawn up at one end of the valley, the guns being at the other end; on each side of this valley was rising ground — on our right batteries of twenty guns, on our left batteries of six guns; these were flanked with cavalry. Infantry and rifles were also formed on our right. We had to go over a mile and a half of ground before we could reach the guns. Directly we started they all commenced firing, and so did the infantry, when within a hundred yards of them. I must tell you that the guns we charged were nine twelve-pounders, so you may imagine how we were mowed down by the cross-fire.

As we reached the guns, a hussar regiment, 800 strong, retreated, so we could only succeed in cutting down the gunners; having no support it was an impossibility to take even a man, much less a gun. We pursued the cavalry as far as we could to a river, when they suddenly turned upon us. At that time there were not twenty of our men together. Imagine our surprise, on returning, to find a regiment of lancers, one of hussars, and another of Cossacks, formed in our rear. We rallied as many of our men as we could, and then, with a right good British cheer, rode smack through the hussars, and most of us got back to line. My horse was wounded in the side and leg before I reached the guns - and in attacking a dismounted gunner, who, to prevent me from cutting him down, ran his sword into my horses leg - and it was with the greatest difficulty I could get a trot out of him; but, by the help of God, I managed to get back; but not without fighting, as you may suppose. When I had fought myself well through, and thought myself safe, three Cossacks, seeing, as I suppose, the disabled state of my horse, came after me. I guarded the first fellow's point, and gave him a slight point, and he went on. The next ran his lance through my pouch-box, which is made of silver, and so saved me. The third caught me in the ribs, but the point of his lance being broken off, it only bruised my side. Was that not a lucky escape? I had, before that, other fortunate escapes of being cut down — only I was too sharp for them. My revolver was of great use to me.

The 17th Lancers went into battle 145 strong. When we mustered, we only had 34

horses not wounded: 99 were killed; 79 men killed and wounded; seven out of ten officers killed and wounded. We have now only three officers. Thank God, I am one. The 13th went in 125, and only mustered 29 horses.

In the Light Brigade I hear there are 24 officers killed and wounded. I have been obliged to destroy my horse, poor beast. He had a piece of shell in his side, and a ball in his right leg. We have a large force of Russians in our rear, but we do not fear them. — Believe me your affectionate nephew.