

Edward R. Woodham

The colonel of my regiment, the 11th Hussars (Prince Albert's Own), was Sir Roger Palmer, Captain Cresswell being the next in command, but he had died of cholera previous to the Battle of Balaklava. Every morning we used to turn out a little before, daybreak, and stand by our horses heads in the expectation of an attack from the enemy. On the 25th October, 1854, when the fatal order was given, we were in support of the Turkish redoubts, being ranged on the plain just behind them. We could not see the Russians advancing, as we were on the brow of the hill, but we saw the Turks driven out of the redoubts, and run towards the 93rd Highlanders, who were near to the village of Balaklava. We retired from the position that we had previously held when the Russians captured the redoubts, the French at that time firing over our heads at the enemy. Meanwhile, the Russian cavalry had advanced into the plain fronting Balaklava. We stood watching the Highlanders and the Heavy Brigade drive back the Russians, after which we advanced a little to the top of the valley leading down to Tchernaya. Suddenly the order came from Lord Raglan, who was on the height above, for us to advance. I imagined I observed some of the officers protesting against the order. We advanced a short distance at a walking pace. The man next to me was named Wootten, an unsophisticated West-countryman, and when the order was given to move, he says to me, "Ted, old fellow, I know we shall charge." I recollect looking round and replying, "Oh nonsense! Look at the strength in front of us. We're never going to charge there." Presently we got into a gallop, and then all was excitement. I remember looking at poor Wootten and saying, "Yes, we're going to charge, and with a vengeance, too." We increased in speed at every stride, and went down the valley at a terrific rate. "Did you see anything more of your comrade?" — No, poor fellow ; he was shot down almost instantly, and I had the melancholy duty of reporting his death to his bereaved widow and family. Well, to proceed. The scene that presented itself as we proceeded was indescribable; from all sides the bullets came flying, and many a man had his arm shot off, while our gallant comrades were falling from their horses in all directions. A battery on our right was firing shell, but we were galloping at such a pace that we had time to get away before the shells burst, and of course that, in a great measure, saved many of us from being wounded or killed.

"Did you commence slaughtering the Russian gunners at once?" — Well, as soon as we reached the guns the men began dodging by getting under them, and for a time they defended with the rammers; but it was no contest - they had no chance with us, and we cut them down like ninepins. Of course we captured the battery and many of our men dismounted to spike the guns. "The cavalry carried spikes then?" - Oh, yes ; each man had spikes in his pouch. All the cavalry regiments were supplied with gun spikes whenever there was any likelihood of a battle. We had no hammers, but drove the spikes in with the hilt of our swords or our hands — in any way we could. "Did you escape uninjured?" — Providentially I did. At one time, however, I thought it was all up with me. Near to the end of the valley my horse was shot under me, and it fell with my left leg under it, so that I could not move; but happily I was afterwards released. "How was that?" — A corporal of the 13th Light Dragoons rode up and commenced pulling at my horse's head, thinking it

was not dead. And so it proved, for the animal gave a bit of a struggle, which I took advantage of, and regained my feet. All then was smoke and confusion, and all of our men that I could see were cutting right and left, and making their way back to camp.

"What did you do without a horse?" — Well, I began running away as hard as I could, when a soldier belonging to the 8th Hussars, who was lying under his horse shouted; to me, "For God's sake, man, don't leave me here." At this time the firing from the guns was incessant — indeed it was murderous; still I returned and strove hard to release him, but without effect, the horse being dead. The enemy at this time were coming up the valley, and killing the wounded on their march, so I said to the man, "It's no use my stopping here; we shall both be killed." The poor fellow said something in reply, but I don't recollect it now. I then reluctantly left him to his fate, and joined three or four of my comrades who, like myself, had been unhorsed, and were trying to escape on foot. To facilitate our retreat, we threw away everything that in the least encumbered us; even our "busbies" we pitched, on one side - in fact, we retained nothing except our sword-blades, and those we carried for our defence. "Did not the Russians pursue you?" — Well, the enemy, seeing us together, concentrated a heavy fire upon us; and, in order that the gunners might direct their attention to something else, we lay flat down, and they did not pursue us further. Shortly afterwards I espied a riderless horse, belonging to the 17th Lancers, which I succeeded in capturing by seizing hold of its bridle, and mounting it, I rode at full gallop to the top of the valley, when I handed it over to the regiment to which it belonged. The valley presented a fearful scene at this time. Our poor fellows lay moaning and groaning everywhere, but with the greater number the bullets had told their tale. Those who had escaped were making their way, some on foot and some mounted, with wounded and limping horses, as best they could, to the high road that divided the two armies. All those who were able at once formed, and it was a dreadful sight to see the havoc that had been made. Soon afterwards I met Trumpeter Smith, one of the survivors, whose horse I had to attend to. I asked him where his horse was, when he told me that it had been killed. I replied, "Well, it's not such a bad field after all; it was the first I was ever in where there was no horse to clean." This was not said as a joke, for I assure you there was nothing to joke about then. We were all too serious, thinking of our poor dead and absent friends.