William Charles Stanton

Well, you must know that twenty-one years is a long time to remember the incidents connected with such a memorable charge, but I'll try and recall what I know of the matter. We had done nothing worth speaking about in regard to fighting for some time previous to the day on which the Light Brigade so distinguished themselves. On the 24th October, 1854, we had been in readiness all the evening, expecting a night attack, for during the day we had heard the guns some distance off. At the dawn of morning we turned in to get breakfast and feed our horses; but before all of us were out of the saddle, the guns again began to fire, and we were ordered out again directly. Most of us had not time even to get a bit to eat, and the majority of us rode to the guns on empty stomachs. Having formed on the plain, we started, and came over a range of hills near Inkerman Valley, the Heavy Brigade being on the opposite side, about a mile from us — we could not exactly tell the distance — and they had previously repulsed the Russian cavalry. We had no idea at the time that we were about to charge, but it appeared very evident to us soon afterwards, when we saw the Russians.

The order came in the first place from Lord Raglan, who was at the time so situated that he could not see what effect it would have. When Captain Nolan commanded us to ride for the guns, we were all puzzled, and did not at first understand the order; but Captain Nolan, repointing to the guns, said that we must capture them. We could all very well understand that there was a mistake made somewhere, for every one of us could see how impossible it was for us to attack nearly the whole of the Russian army with only about 600 men. But it was not our place to argue the matter, so we simply obeyed. The Russians had cavalry enough to swallow us all up if they chose. We advanced in three lines. The first line comprised the 13th Light Dragoons and the 17th Lancers, and at the head rode Lord Cardigan, along with Captains Morris, Webb, Oldham, Good, and Jennings, Sir William Gordon, and Sir George Wombwell. In the second line were the 11th Hussars and the 4th Light Dragoons, commanded respectively by Lieutenant-Colonel Douglas and Lord George Paget; while bringing up the rear was the third line, composed of the 8th Hussars, at the head of which rode Lieutenant-Colonel Shewell. The day was fine, and a very favourable one for a battle. As soon as we commenced to move, the enemy, who were on the right and left of us, began to fire, and kept it up during the whole of the ride; while the guns of the Russians in front of us, which we were sent to capture, were also fired. Very soon the shot and shell that were poured in upon us began to have a visible effect on our number, weakening the lines to an alarming extent. Our lines were literally cut through by the enemy's firing, and I witnessed twelve horses fall at one time by cannon-shot. We had carbines with us, but we never fired a shot — our order was only to capture the guns. There was not much time to think; the command had come upon us suddenly, and we were ready to do or die. At every stride saddles were being emptied, or horses were shot from under the men. Many of the men who had been dismounted and wounded got ridden over; for in the exciting charge this could not be helped. In that fatal ride no description could properly convey the awful sight that was presented. We were galloping as fast as our horses could go to keep in line together; and during the time it took to reach the

valley, which was about a mile and a quarter in length, where the guns were stationed, you had not much thought of anything around you. As we rode down the valley
I overheard no conversation pass between the men; I believe the officers gave words of command, but in the din and confusion nothing definitely could be heard. The trumpets sounded the charge, and after this the officers' or anyone's orders could not this be heard unless you were close to them. The only thing was, to look before you to see what there was to do. The man who goes into a charge of this sort, you know, cannot tell half what he ought, and could give but a poor description of the scene.

Just as we were close to the guns several of our officers got wounded, amongst them being Captain Morris, Sir William Gordon, and Captain Jennings. Sir George Wombwell was taken prisoner, and afterwards escaped. I believe he was in the hands of the Cossacks at the time, but was only a prisoner for a few minutes. He was a young and an active officer — a lieutenant at that time - and whilst the Cossacks were otherwise engaged he managed to get away from them and caught a horse which was passing near to him and mounting it thus effected his escape. Directly we got to the guns we found that we were a mixed company; but I believe the 8th Hussars kept their line all through. Men were pushing eagerly forward in their anxiety to go to the front. As soon as we reached the guns we killed many gunners, and afterwards attacked the Russian cavalry, who gave way. Some of the Light Brigade pursued them for some distance towards Tchernaya Bridge, but these poor fellows never returned. Of course, those of our men who went after the cavalry were all killed, for they had no chance with nearly the whole of the Russian army, who were behind the guns, upon them.
The Russian cavalry did not seem at all inclined to fight; they wondered what on earth we were going to do; and on the following day, when a flag of truce was sent to the enemy by Sir Colin Campbell, they asked what was the matter with the Light Brigade, wanting to know whether they were drunk or mad, or words to that effect, to make such a charge. We held the guns for a time, but were soon ordered to return, or there would have been but few of us left. We retired as best we could, mixing ourselves up in other regiments; and to the noble Chasseurs d'Afrique we owe a good deal, for they charged the Russian Horse Artillery, who wore on the left of us as we went down the valley, and drove them away, so that, in returning, we had not to run the risk of their deadly shot. By this means many lives were saved. When we returned from where we started, our hearts were almost too full to speak. It wan a sad cut-up for us to see so many poor follows missing, and many anxious inquiries were made after comrades, for there was such a sprinkle of us who had returned.