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## CRIMEAN CATASTROPHE: GORMLESS GENERALS IN BRIGADE BLUNDER

*The Light Brigade ordered in a senseless charge against the Russian guns amid rumours of feuding in the higher ranks*

“Surely that handful of men were not going to charge an army in position? Alas! It was but too true.” So wrote William Howard Russell in the *London Times* yesterday, describing the dreadful scene of carnage that blighted the Crimea on October the 25th, when scarcely 600 lightly armed cavalymen attacked the Russian artillery positions, in an act so ridiculous and yet so heroic it is hard to know whether to laugh or weep upon hearing of it.

It is easy to share Mr Russell’s incredulity. How did such a blunder come to pass? How were 600 men in the prime of life thrown needlessly against the full might of the Russian guns? Who is responsible? The answer is a story of egos, poor communication and incompetence that would be hilariously farcical, if it were not for their tragic consequences.

It seems Lord Raglan, our commander-in-chief, positioned high on a hill, could see the

Russians removing some captured English cannons. Accordingly, he dispatched a message to Lieutenant-General the Earl of Lucan, carried by the skilful but arrogant horseman Captain Nolan: “Lord Raglan wishes the cavalry to advance rapidly to the front, follow the enemy, and try to prevent the enemy from carrying away the guns”.

When Lord Lucan read Lord Raglan’s message, he was apparently somewhat confused. From his position he could not see the guns Lord Raglan meant, so asked Captain Nolan where they were. Nolan is said to have gestured at the Russian line and snapped “There are the enemy, and there are the guns, sir”. Lucan did not question Nolan further and rode to Lord Cardigan, commander of the Light Brigade. Perhaps he did not check his orders more diligently because there is supposedly little love lost

between the brothers-in-law Lucan and Cardigan.

Although it appears Cardigan did question this command, Lucan insisted orders must be followed. So the brave Light Brigade, their sabres glinting in the sunlight, set off towards the deadly cannons without so much as a murmur.

And despite the futility of their errand, their bravery will be remembered

for years to come. Perhaps the whole episode is best summed up by Marshal Bosquet’s words upon observing it: “It is magnificent, but it isn’t war”.



*Lord Cardigan, Commander of the Light Brigade—relations between him and Lord Lucan were allegedly not harmonious*