

Medals reveal Yorkshireman's bravery in the valley of death



Crimea War Medal William Nicholson (1).jpg
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Size: 726 KB
Dimension: 1700 x 2338 pixels

Andrew Norfolk

THE medals record the role played by a young Yorkshireman in the most celebrated disaster of British military history.

When he awoke on the morning of October 25, 1854, Private William Nicholson could have had no idea that he and his pals in the 13th Light Dragoons were on the threshold of immortality.

Born at Naburn, near York, Nicholson was a miller who had joined the brigade in 1848, aged 19, and six years later found himself in the Crimea, a Russian peninsula in the Black Sea, part of a British and French expeditionary force sent to give the Czar a bloody nose.

At 11.10am, the five British cavalry regiments of the Light Brigade were assembled at the west end of

North Valley, a long plain between two ridges of hills near the little Crimean seaport of Balaclava.

Russian guns and troops controlled both sides of the narrow valley, while at its far end, about one and a half miles away, a line of field guns fronted lines of Russian cavalry and infantry.

Nicholson and the 700 men of the Light Brigade were at rest, chatting and smoking near their horses, when a fatally-misinterpreted message sent by Lord Raglan, their Commander-in-Chief, led cavalry commander Lord Lucan to order an attack on the far end of the valley.

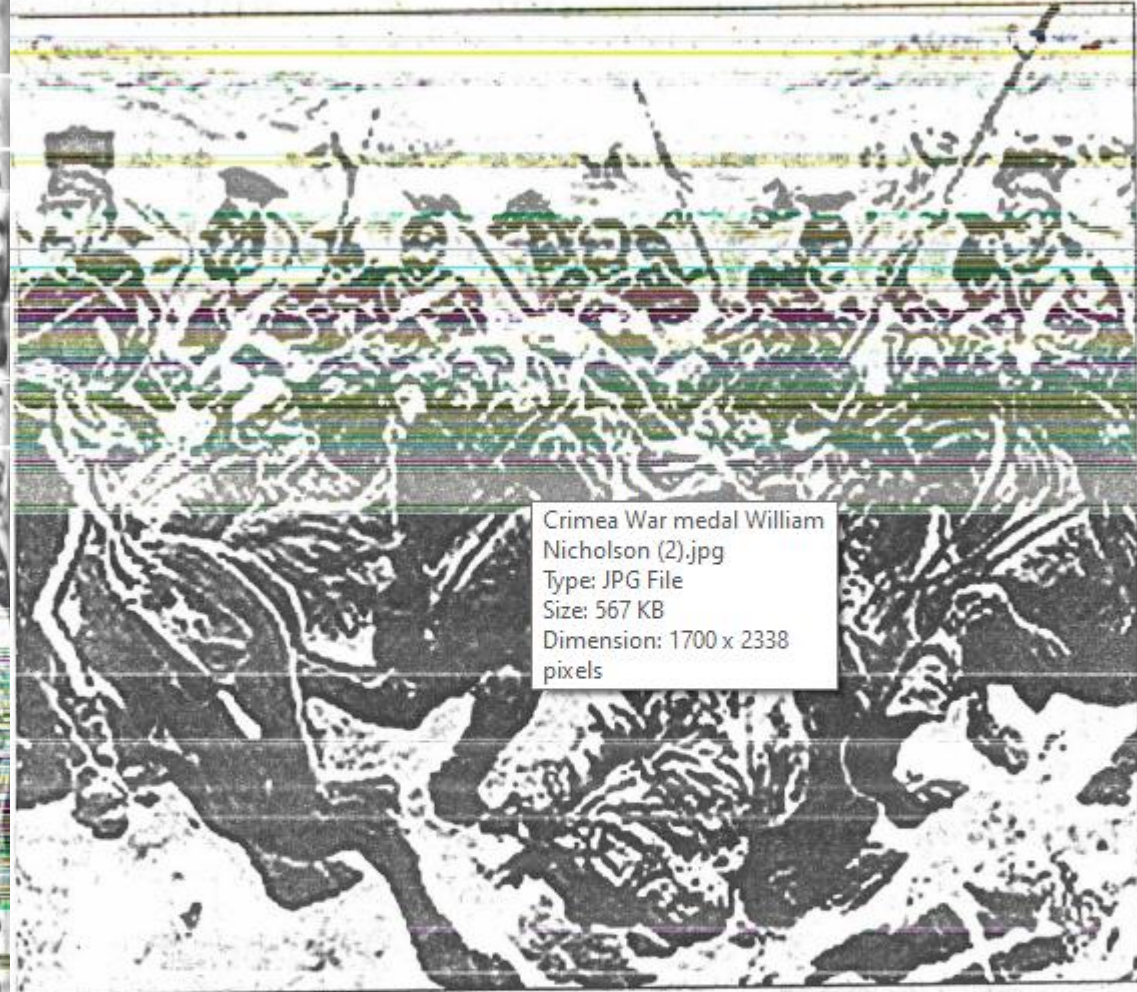
It was, as Lucan knew, effectively an order for mass suicide. At a walk... at a trot... at a canter, three long lines of British cavalry started down the valley.

Into battle: R Caton Wood

Within 50 yards they came under fire from left, right and centre, yet they did no falter or slow down.

Tennyson wrote: "Thei not to reason why, Thei but to do and die."

Of the 700 who set out for the Russian guns, only 195 returned from the massacre with the injured Nicholson among them.



Crimea War medal William Nicholson (2).jpg
Type: JPG File
Size: 567 KB
Dimension: 1700 x 2338 pixels

Charge of the Light Brigade, which Private William Nicholson, inset, survived.

was promoted to corporal in 1857 but discharged the following year as "unfit for further service" due to recurring ulcers in his left leg.

In later life, he worked as a police inspector for South Eastern Railways, based at Charing Cross, never parting with the two medals which recorded his part in a

Crimean campaign which eventually cost 500,000 lives.

Passed down from generation to generation, the two medals will finally leave family hands at the end of next week when they are auctioned at Sotheby's new online auction site at sothebys.amazon.com.

The Crimea War Medal, bearing his name and with

two clasps recording Nicholson's action at Balaclava and Sevastapol, is joined by his Turkish Crimea Medal, an original portrait photograph of the young soldier and related documentation.

Bidders are expected from across the world and the lot is expected to reach up to £3,000.

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Bravely won: The Crimea War Medal.