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Senior Group Website

Process Paper

The Charge of the Light Brigade achieved immortality via Tennyson's famed poem, and it became an English class staple for generations. Even if you did not have to memorize it in school, phrases from the poem have made their way into shared cultural memory. "Into the valley of death" is a touchstone. But, although we, like most people, had heard the poem, we did not truly know anything about the battle it commemorated. When we started brainstorming ideas for History Day, this event stood out as something that was intriguing and might fit the theme of communication.

In our initial research, we discovered the brave battle that we thought we knew was actually a misguided military loss, a series of miscommunications that resulted in a suicidal charge that got remembered as a heroic exploit. As miscommunication is the mirror opposite of communication, it aligned well with the theme of this year. Through videos and articles, we uncovered how the charge occurred and both its short-term and long-term impact. Soon, we had a first draft thesis and a basic breakdown of key points to cover in a project.

Since both of us enjoy coding and history, the website category seemed like a perfect fit. Before we became subsumed in our research, we explored the platform we had to build our website on to see its limitations. We were used to coding websites from scratch, and having to adjust to a format that uses pre-done code was challenging. To build our website, we first decided on a color scheme and then, using Figma, wireframed each page, determining how to present the words and images.

Simultaneously, we continued researching. Due to Covid-19, we could not go to libraries and scavenge archives. However, as museums closed to the public, many put their complete collections online and created databases filled with searchable materials. We discovered letters, objects, diaries, paintings, parliamentary records, and even the actual note that ordered the charge. In fact, once we began researching, we found so many interesting facts that we wanted to incorporate, our thesis got lost. The Charge of the Light Brigade is a tragedy in which some of the main characters seem to come from farce. It was easy to get caught up in the drama and lose sight of our project's focus. We decided to re-outline our website with a heavy emphasis on the actual miscommunication involved, sadly giving up on the more salacious but less relevant facts. The second version was much better, more concise, and to the point. Keeping it focused allowed us to explore the impact of the series of communication errors that culminated in the disaster and decimation that was the Charge of the Light Brigade. The long-term impacts can be felt today; frequently, dying gallantly is more valued than smartly staying alive. The easily preventable failure of communication has led to a ripple in how people viewed warfare across the English speaking world.