



Alexander Stewart

considerable land in the townlands of Monclone, Ballnagreagh and Ballyreagh.

Charles Davis Lucas was born at Druminargal House on February 19, 1834. He was the son of Davis Lucas and Elizabeth Hill the daughter of Captain Thomas Hill. Elizabeth Hill died on 10th January 1837 and is buried in Acton Parish churchyard. Unlike many of the Lucas family, he chose the navy, rather than the army as a career. Perhaps his maternal grandfather influenced him in this decision for he enlisted when he was just 13. He was already a veteran by the age of eighteen, having seen active service during the Burma War of 1852-53. He served as mate aboard the frigate '*Fox*' during hostilities at Rangoon, Pegu and Dalla and was awarded the Indian Service Medal for his efforts.

In 1854 war broke out between allies Britain and France on the one hand and Russia. Known as the Crimean War because most of the significant action took place in the Crimea Peninsula on the northern shores of the Black Sea, it was ostensibly fought to stop Russia's expansionist ambitions in Turkey.

The famous incidents of the war, '*The Charge of the Light Brigade*', the battles of Inkerman, Sebastopol and Balaclava took place there and it was there that '*The Lady with the Lamp*', Florence Nightingale, ministered to the

wounded and dying.

But hostilities were not confined to the Crimea. There was action in other areas as well, particularly in the Baltic Sea. In 1854, twenty-year-old Lucas was mate aboard *HMS Hecla*, Captain W.H. Hall being in command. The *Hecla* was part of a fleet of warships dispatched to the Baltic, when hostilities broke out with the aim of blockading the Russian Baltic fleet, inflicting damage on their defences and diverting some of the Russian army away from the Crimea.

The Russians had a large fortress on the island of Bomarsund in Aland, guarding the entrance to the Gulf of Bothnia and on the evening of June 21, 1854, the *Hecla* along with the *Odin* and *Valorous* attacked the fortress. The Russian fortress was defended by more than eighty guns and a fierce encounter ensued which lasted most of the night.

The *Hecla* was a wooden paddle-ship built in 1839 and in the early hours of June 24, in order to get within range of the fortress, Captain Hall edged his ship in closer. As a result the *Hecla* came within range of the Russian guns. Several shells fell just short and several more overshot but one, with its fuse hissing loudly, landed on the deck of the ship. Everyone immediately ran or threw himself flat for, if the shell exploded, it would mean instant death. Everyone, that is, except Charles Lucas. With great coolness he lifted the heavy shell, carried it to the side of the ship and threw it into the sea. It exploded before it hit the water causing some minor injuries and damage to the ship but Lucas's prompt action had undoubtedly saved many lives. He was immediately rewarded for his bravery by being promoted to the rank of Acting Lieutenant. In his report of the incident, Captain Hall praised Lucas's courage saying that he acted "*with great coolness and presence of mind*" and that his action had "*saved dozens of lives, if not the entire ship's company*".

There was at that time no other recognition for acts of bravery by personnel of Lucas's rank other than the promotion he was immediately given. While their French allies had the "Legion of Honour" and other European armies had similar honours, which could be awarded to all ranks for outstanding bravery, there was no