

Warhorse Chapter 8 – The Charge

Read this extract from the novel Warhorse. In it Joey tells us about his first cavalry charge (the novel is told from the horse's point of view).

“Wire,” I heard Trooper Warren whisper through his teeth. “Oh God, Joey, they said the wire would be gone, they the guns would deal with the wire. Oh my God!”



We were into a canter now and still there was no sound nor sight of any enemy. The troopers were shouting at an invisible foe, leaning over their horses' necks, their sabres stretched out in front of them. I galvanised myself into a gallop to keep with Tophorn and as I did, so the first terrible shells fell amongst us and the machine guns opened up. The bedlam of battle had begun. All around me men cried and fell to the ground, and horses reared and screamed in an agony of fear and pain. The ground erupted on either side of me, throwing horses and riders clear into the air. The shells whined and roared overhead, and every explosion seemed like an earthquake to us. The squadron galloped on inexorably through it all towards the wire at the top of the hill, and I went with them.

On my back Trooper Warren held me in an iron grip with his knees. I stumbled once and felt him lose a stirrup, and slowed so that he could find it again. Tophorn was still ahead of me, his head up, his tail whisking from side to side. I found more strength in my legs and charged after him. Trooper Warren prayed aloud as he rode, but his prayers turned soon to curses as he saw the carnage around him. Only a few horses reached the wire and Tophorn and I were amongst them. There were indeed a few holes blasted through the wire by our bombardment so that some of us could find a way through; and we came at last upon the first line of enemy trenches, but they were empty. The firing came now from higher up in amongst the trees; and so the squadron, or what was left of it, regrouped and galloped up into the wood, only to be met by a line of hidden wire in amongst the trees. Some of the horses ran into the wire before they could be stopped, and stuck there, their riders trying feverishly to extract them. I saw one trooper dismount deliberately once he saw his horse was caught. He pulled out his rifle and shot his mount before falling dead himself on the wire. I could see at once that there was no way through, that the only way was to jump the wire and when I saw Tophorn and Captain Stewart leap over where the wire was lowest, I followed them and we found ourselves at last in amongst the enemy. From behind every tree, from trenches all around it seemed, they ran forward in their piked helmets to counter-attack. They rushed past us, ignoring us until we found ourselves surrounded by an entire company of soldiers, their rifles pointing up at us.

The crump of the shelling and the spitting of rifle-fire had suddenly stopped. I looked around me for the rest of the squadron, to discover that we were alone. Behind us the riderless

horses, all that was left of a proud cavalry squadron, galloped back towards our trenches, and the hillside below was strewn with the dead and dying.

- 1. Look up the words *galvanised*, *squadron* and *inexorably*. Rewrite the sentences they appear in using their definition instead.**
2. In two sentences summarise what happens in this extract.
- 3. In the first paragraph Trooper Warren uses repetition. List four words that are repeated.**
4. Explain the effect of using this repetition.
- 5. Re-read the second paragraph. List three phrases that show the effect of the “*terrible shells*” on the cavalry attack.**
6. How do you think it would feel to take part in this attack? Refer closely to at least two pieces of evidence to support your answer.
- 7. Write the next paragraph as the horses and troopers arrive at the wire. What happens to them? Do they get through? If so, how? If not, what happens? Make your paragraph exciting and descriptive.**