3.4 The Crimean War, 1854–56

KEY QUESTIONS

- How well prepared was the British army to fight the Russian threat in the Crimea?
- How effective was the work of Florence Nightingale and Mary Seacole?
- How far did the coverage of the war change public perception?

INTRODUCTION

In contemplating war in the Crimea, Russia saw a chance for territorial gains at the expense of Turkey, the so-called 'sick man of Europe' and an opportunity to access the Mediterranean to challenge the power of France and Britain. To enter the Mediterranean from the Black Sea, ships passed through the straits of the Bosporus and the Dardanelles. These narrow seaways were controlled by Turkey and defended by Turkish artillery. If Turkey was forced into an alliance with Russia, the Russian Black Sea fleet based at Sevastopol in the Crimea could pass freely through the straits. The Dardanelles seaway was a key flashpoint in big power tensions. The British and French did not want Russian warships in the Mediterranean, but the Russians had built up their Black Sea fleet, with bases in the Crimean peninsula, and the British feared the collapse of Turkey would lead to Russia threatening their naval supremacy in the Mediterranean and key routes to India.

KEY TERM

Sultan
Ruler of the Ottoman Empire. In 1853, the sultan was Abdulmecid I.

The outbreak of the Crimean War

In 1853, the Russians pressed the Ottoman **sultan** for concessions regarding the Empire's Christian subjects. The sultan refused and Russian soldiers invaded the Ottoman Danube provinces. Turkey declared war on 4 October. To show support for Turkey, the French and British sent fleets to the Dardanelles, and on into the Bosporus. On 30 November, the Russian navy attacked an Ottoman fleet at the Black Sea port of Sinope, sinking many Turkish warships.

The British and French Press made much of the attack at Sinope, causing public opinion to turn against Russia. In January 1854, British and French fleets sailed into the Black Sea to blockade the Russian fleet and, in March, war was declared on Russia. In August, the Russians agreed to withdraw troops from the Danube war zone, a move that kept Austria out of the anti-Russian alliance, but by then France and Britain were already preparing to land troops in the Crimea to attack Sevastopol. Going to war gave France's new leader, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, the opportunity to emulate his famous uncle (Napoleon I) and to demonstrate that France was, again, a leading power in Europe. It gave the British the chance to check Russian power in the Mediterranean, and any ambitions Russia might have in the direction of British-ruled India.

Unendorsed Proofs For Planning Purposes Only

1853 – October: Ottoman Empire declares war on Russia
November: Russians destroy Ottoman fleet at the Battle of Sinope

1854 – March: Britain and France declare war on Russia
June: British land at Varna to establish a base
September: The main Allied Expeditionary Force lands in the Crimea
The Battle of the Alma, reported by Times journalist William H. Russell
Allies begin the siege of Russian base at Sevastopol

1853 1854

October: The Battle of Balaklava, including the Charge of the Light Brigade
November: Florence Nightingale and her nurses arrive at Scutari (Turkey)
The Battle of Inkerman

Impact of the war on British opinion

The Crimean War was a war for which Britain had not prepared in advance and, as it developed, British military readiness, tactics and provision systems were all found wanting. The battles in the Crimea, at the Alma, Balaklava and Sevastopol caused much discussion and criticism in Britain as the courage of the troops was contrasted with the unsatisfactory supply arrangements, and the performance of some commanders including the commander-in-chief, Lord Raglan. The relief efforts of Florence Nightingale and Mary Seacole, amongst others, and the coverage of the war by photographers (for the first time) and war correspondents highlighted the hardships endured by soldiers in a war that in the end the British won without any great sense of triumph.

HOW WELL PREPARED WAS THE BRITISH ARMY TO FIGHT THE RUSSIAN THREAT IN THE CRIMEA?

Facing the Russian threat

The British style of land warfare had hardly changed since the French Wars. Wars in India and Burma against poorly armed opposition in mass formations had reinforced the old ways: infantry in line firing muskets with artillery support; and cavalry with swords at the gallop. Army uniforms (mostly bright-red jackets) were, for the most part, identical to those worn at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, and firearms too were much the same. The Russian army was assumed to be inferior, but little was really known about its recent operational experience.

One weapon gave the British and French an edge. The new French Minié rifle was muzzle-loading, like the old Brown Bess musket, but more powerful. It had about three times the range of the smoothbore muskets used by most Russian soldiers, and its **rifling** made it more accurate. The rifle fired a Minié ball, a large projectile that could inflict serious wounds and penetrate wooden planks.

KEY TERM

Rifling
Spiral grooves inside the barrel of a firearm (a rifle) that causes the ball or bullet to spin.

The state of Britain's military

The British army had not fought a major European battle since Waterloo. It had fought colonial wars in India and Afghanistan, however, and the 1847 Indian Rebellion (known in Britain as the Indian Mutiny) shocked military complacency. How its supply systems with an obsolete commissariat (see Chapter 1) and slow transport systems would cope with a war in an unfamiliar war zone such as the Crimea remained uncertain.

The navy remained Britain's most powerful fighting force. Recent successes such as in China during the so-called 'Opium Wars' had perhaps made it over confident. Its job in the Crimea was to blockade the Russian fleet, transport the army, safeguard supplies and lend gunfire support where needed. The army had Waterloo veterans at all levels and, with the French this time as allies not enemies and naval support, the British embarked for the Crimea in 1854 confident of victory. The navy was key to supply and was modernising, if slowly. It had yet to acquire its first steam-driven 'ironclad' all-metal battleship (1860), and ships used in the Crimea were a mixture of wooden steamers and sailing vessels.

Unendorsed Proofs For Planning Purposes Only

1855 – January: Mary Seacole travels to Crimea
March: Death of Tsar Nicholas I of Russia
Photographer Roger Fenton in the Crimea, until June

1855 1856

August: The Battle of Tchernaya
September: The fall of Sevastopol to the allies
December: William Russell leaves the Crimea

1856 – March: Treaty of Paris ends the Crimean War

Support service shortcomings

The army's support services had also changed little since the French Wars (see Chapter 1). The commissariat, which arranged food, supplies and transport, was still largely dependent on civilian contractors, not always efficient and sometimes fraudulent.

The war revealed shortcomings in the British army's leadership too: a lack of professionalism among officers; the inability of units to communicate and co-operate; the inadequacy of medical treatment; the shortages of decent food and shelter for soldiers – all were brought sharply into focus in the Crimea.

The Battle of the Alma, 20 September 1854

The British army expedition, led by Lord Raglan, arrived by sea and landed at Varna (in modern Bulgaria) in June 1854 to construct a base, before moving on to the Crimea. The British and French had decided to attack the Russians in the Crimea, hoping that with the bulk of Russian forces further west in the Balkans and Anatolia, they could take the naval base of Sevastopol quickly. The allied armies landed unopposed at Eupatoria on 14 September 1854, established a base and then pushed south towards Sevastopol. Their first battle came on 20 September 1854, against a Russian army under Prince Aleksandr Menshikov, at the Alma.

SOURCE 1 Letters written by Henry Clifford, who fought at the Alma and won the Victoria Cross at Inkerman, to his family.

Alma Camp, Sep 21.

My ideas are so confused with what has taken place in the last 15 hours that I cannot pretend to give you a clear or correct picture of the Battle we have just fought and in which we have come off victorious, driving the Russians from a most formidable position, not, however, without great loss... The Post leaves at 6 o'clock tomorrow morning and it is now 10 o'clock at night, late for a person who has been about all day and up all night. The papers will tell you all that has passed and that you will see by them the formidable position and determined forces we had to contend with. In one Regiment of our Division, the 23rd, we have lost 8 officers killed and I believe 400 men... General Buller and Glyn and myself escaped unhurt tho' the men and officers of our Brigade fell about us in all directions. I said my prayers the whole time... They tell me the force we have driven back consists of thirty thousand or forty thousand Russians and that it is the army of the Crimea to defend Sevastopol... They had a river in their front and the high ground on which they placed their guns, which they handled in the most beautiful manner. We had to advance on the flat and could not get our guns to play upon them. In crossing the river we lost many men and on the opposite bank we had to charge and take an embankment with guns charged with grape shot [small projectiles]. The men lay like grass on the ground... They lay all one on the other, killed and wounded, horses and men, English and Russians. Our men were most kind to them, gave them water, and this morning carried them off to the ships. Many poor fellows, however, lay out all night in the cold and their sufferings must have been truly dreadful. I went round the hospitals today. There they lay, English and Russians, only a few having been attended to by the Doctors in comparison with the great number who required their care. I must conclude, my dear Letty, I am so tired I can hardly hold my pen. My poor horses are quite done up and if we move on tomorrow I doubt if I shall be able to ride them. I think we shall yet have hot work before we get into Sevastopol.

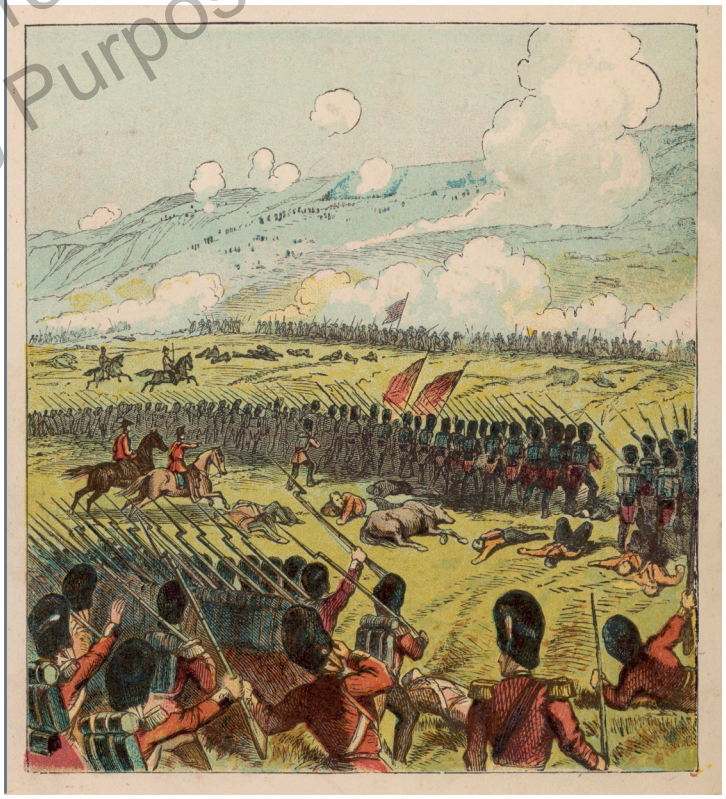
EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Lord Raglan (1788–1855)

Fitzroy Somerset, Lord Raglan, was in command of the British army in the Crimea. A veteran of the Peninsular War and of Waterloo, where he was wounded and lost his right arm, he had worked as a subordinate with Wellington, absorbing his ideas. Raglan was a considerate general, distressed by fruitless casualties, but was widely blamed for shortcomings and setbacks in the Crimea. Florence Nightingale thought him a very good man but not a very great general. Raglan became ill and died in the Crimea before victory was won.

The French under Saint-Arnaud and the British under Raglan, with Turkish support, met the Russian army defending high ground south of the River Alma. The allies outnumbered the Russians, and had support from naval gunfire, but the battle was confused; first the French attacked, then the British but with little co-ordination. Unsure of what the French were doing, Raglan at one point ordered his infantry to lie down to minimise casualties from Russian gunfire.

SOURCE 2 British troops in action at the Battle of the Alma. Print illustration from the British-based Kronheim publishing company founded by Joseph Kronheim (1810–96). It appeared in *Pictures of English History from the Earliest Times*, giving a popular and imaginative impression of the battle (c1892).



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The British objective was a Russian **earthwork** called the 'Great Redoubt', in which Menshikov had placed artillery. As the British infantry advanced, the Russians removed their guns and retreated. The Light Division took the redoubt, but then lost it to a Russian counter-attack, only for the Guards Division to regain it after a fierce fight (see Figure 4.1).

KEY TERM

Earthwork
Defensive position, a barrier of soil often supported by wood, and with trenches. A single earthwork is sometimes called a 'redoubt' or a 'bastion'.

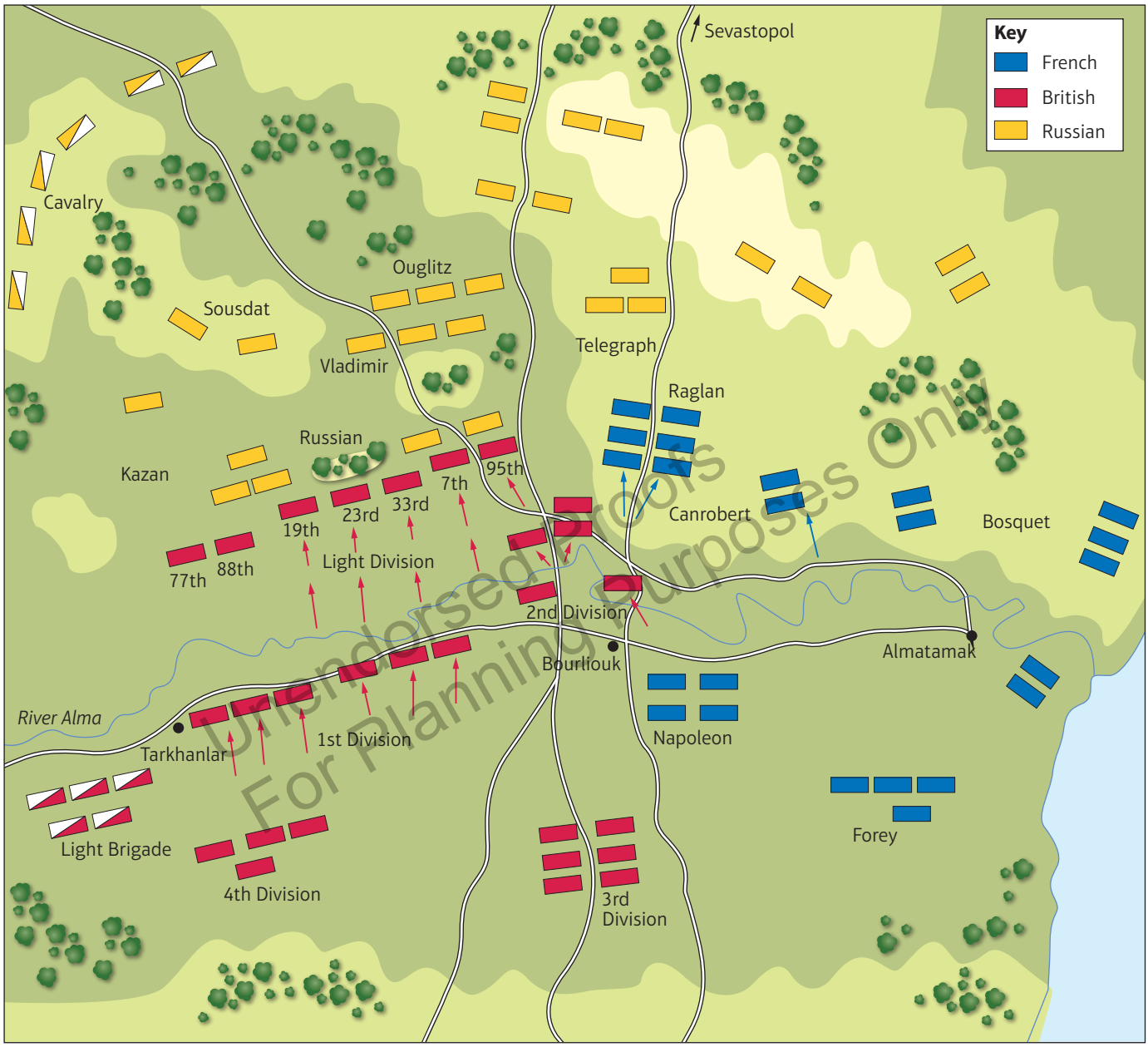


Figure 4.1 Map of the Battle of the Alma.

A final push by the Highland Brigade forced the Russians to withdraw, but Raglan was indecisive and did not pursue them with cavalry to drive home the advantage.

The Alma battle revealed shortcomings in allied leadership and organisation. At times, the British mistook the French for the Russians. There was confusion amid smoke from guns, bugle-calls and officers issuing contradictory orders. Until they waded the river, the soldiers had little idea how deep it was (it was in fact easily forded). An artillery officer, Captain Biddulph, wrote to his father complaining that he and his men were not given clear orders, but were merely told to go this way or that, and was highly critical of the ineffectual fussiness of his commanding officer. The infantry showed good discipline, however, and had the allies lost at the Alma, the Crimean War might have ended then and there.

KEY TERMS

Siege works
Trenches and redoubts dug by an attacking army to surround a town or a fort under siege.

Scuttle
To deliberately sink a ship by letting water into the hull.

After the Battle of the Alma, Raglan had intended to attack Sevastopol at once. The French disagreed and were supported by Raglan's chief engineer, General Burgoyne; they argued for a prepared siege assault. Raglan conceded, and the two armies marched around Sevastopol and began **siege works** ahead of an assault from the south. Making their base at Balaklava, a village with a secure deep harbour, they deployed artillery to bombard Sevastopol.

The Russians had **scuttled** warships in Sevastopol harbour and taken the ships' guns to defend the town, while their field army moved east, to avoid being trapped in the siege. The allies wasted more time digging siege works and unloading heavy siege guns – which Sir George Cathcart and some other officers suggested were not really required. These preparations gave the Russians time to prepare formidable defences.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The landing and first Crimea battles

1 Why were the allies able to land in the Crimea unopposed?

2 What effect was having two commanding generals likely to have on the allied campaign?

3 What factors at the Battle of the Alma indicated allied weaknesses?

4 Which weapon did much to help the allied victory at the Alma?

5 Why were the allies slow to attack Sevastopol?

The Battle of Balaklava, 25 October 1854

The allies' caution allowed Menshikov to move the Russian army to occupy the Causeway Heights, overlooking Balaklava. Fearing this threat to the harbour and the road to Sevastopol, the allies recalled troops from the siege, but even so the Russian army might have taken Balaklava had Menshikov not been tentative.

The fighting at Balaklava gave rise to three actions famous in British military history: the stand of the 93rd Foot; and the cavalry charges of the Heavy and Light brigades.

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The 'thin red line'

Having witnessed some Turks retreating, Menshikov sent Russian cavalry forward, but they were opposed north of Balaklava by the Highlanders of the 93rd Foot. General Sir Colin Campbell had deployed his Highlanders on the reverse slope of a hill (out of artillery fire), but seeing the Russian cavalry, moved his men to the hilltop lining up in two ranks. This encouraged the Russians to charge, since it was usual for infantry facing cavalry to form squares. However, the 500 Highlanders stood their ground against superior numbers, their Minié rifles inflicting heavy casualties on the Russian cavalry that could not break the 'thin red line' and retreated after a second failed assault. The phrase became a byword for steadfastness – the original words were 'a thin red streak topped with a line of steel', coined by *The Times* correspondent William H. Russell (see page XX).

The Charge of the Heavy Brigade

General Lord Lucan had moved the British Cavalry Division (which he commanded) to support the Highlanders and, observing that the infantry had stood firm against the Russian cavalry, he ordered one of its two brigades to charge. The 800-strong Heavy Brigade led by General Scarlett charged the Russians uphill. Inexplicably, the Russians stood still; had they galloped downhill, the result might have been different. As it was, the British cavalry broke through, British horse artillery opened fire on the Russian rear, and the Russians were in retreat

The Charge of the Light Brigade

After this success came an infamous mishap. Seeing Russian troops removing allied (Turkish) guns captured earlier on the Heights, Raglan wanted Lucan to move to stop them. Lord Cardigan's Light Brigade had so far remained immobile, but now Raglan ordered a staff officer, Captain Nolan, to tell Lucan to send in Cardigan's cavalry.

SOURCE 3 *The Thin Red Line*, a painting (1881) by Robert Gibb (1845–1932); the artist was inspired by Alexander Kinglake's eight-volume history *The Invasion of the Crimea*, completed in the 1880s, depicting the Russian cavalry very close to the 'thin red line'. In fact, the cavalry did not manage to come so close, although Gibb did obtain Highlander's uniforms to ensure that this particular detail was accurate. Many Crimean veterans were, of course, still alive in the 1880s, and details of battles, positions of troops and so on had been analysed and discussed at length.



None of the senior officers present had a clear view of events, and Raglan's order to advance was vague. Lucan disliked Nolan, and the two probably did not share much discussion. The only guns Lucan could see were Russian, at the end of the North Valley, which had more enemy artillery batteries either side. When he told Cardigan to attack, Cardigan asked for clarification, aware of the likely cost of such a charge. Lucan insisted those were Lord Raglan's orders. Reporting later on the incident was *The Times'* correspondent, William Howard Russell (see Source 4).

Unendorsed Proofs For Planning Purposes Only

SOURCE 4 From British war correspondent William H. Russell's report on the Charge of the Light Brigade, published in *The Times* on 14 November 1854, some three weeks after the battle.

It appears that the Quarter-master General, Brigadier Airey, gave an order in writing to Captain Nolan to take to Lord Lucan, directing his Lordship 'to advance' his cavalry...

I should explain that the Russian cavalry retired; leaving men in three redoubts they had taken. They had also placed some guns on the heights over their position, and about 30 guns were drawn up along their line. Our cavalry was moved up to the ridge across the valley. When Lord Lucan received the order from Captain Nolan and had read it, he asked, we are told, 'Where are we to advance to?' Captain Nolan pointed with his finger to the line of the Russians and said, 'there are the enemy, and these are the guns, sir, before them; it is your duty to take them,' or words to that effect, according to the statements made since his death.

Lord Lucan, with reluctance, gave the order to Lord Cardigan to advance upon the guns. The noble Earl, though he did not shrink, also saw the fearful odds against him. As they passed towards the front, the Russians opened on them from the guns in the redoubt on the right, with volleys of musketry and rifles. They swept proudly past, glittering in the morning sun in all the pride and splendour of war.

We could scarcely believe the evidence of our senses. Surely that handful of men are not going to charge an army in position?...

They advanced in two lines, quickening their pace as they closed towards the enemy. A more fearful spectacle was never witnessed by those who, without the power to aid, beheld their heroic countrymen rushing to the arms of death. At the distance of 1,200 yards the whole line of the enemy belched forth, from 30 iron mouths, a flood of smoke and flame, through which hissed the deadly balls. Their flight was marked by instant gaps in the ranks, by dead men and horses, by steeds flying wounded or riderless across the plain. The first line is broken, it is joined by the second, they never halt or check their speed in an instant, with diminished ranks, thinned by those 30 guns, which the Russians had laid with the most deadly accuracy, with a halo of flashing steel above their heads, and with a cheer which was many a noble fellow's death-cry, they flew into the smoke of the batteries, but 'ere they were lost from view, the plain was strewed with their bodies and with the carcasses of their horses. Through the clouds of smoke we could see their sabres flashing as they rode up to the guns and dashed between them, cutting down the gunners as they stood.

The charge and the blame

The Light Brigade charged towards the Russian guns and took heavy fire from front and sides. Captain Nolan was killed by an exploding Russian shell. By the time the brigade reached the guns, over half of the men had been killed or wounded with many horses lost. The survivors fought against Russian artillerymen and were only saved by cover provided from a French cavalry charge.

The death toll was 113 out of 673, with 134 wounded – not as heavy as it might have been, but the impact was immense. The Charge of the Light Brigade became emblematic of the leadership problems in the Crimea: poor planning; poor communication; vague generalship; conflicting orders – failings balanced only by the bravery of the soldiers. After the Charge, Lucan was replaced. Raglan was blamed, and he and Lucan blamed one another.

A Level Exam-Style Question Section B

How far do you agree that the Battle of Balaklava demonstrated that the British army's capabilities were let down by failings in its command structure? (20 marks)

Tip

Compare the performance at Balaklava with other battles, and assess how much the outcome was dependent on decision-making by senior commanders.

The debate

Raglan's hastily written order told the Light Brigade to follow the Russians and prevent the enemy carrying away the guns. Which guns? The order was not specific. If Raglan meant the Turkish guns on the Heights, Lucan could not see them, and Nolan probably did not explain, if indeed he even knew what Raglan intended. Nolan may have assumed Raglan meant the Russian guns, and he was known to be an ardent advocate of cavalry charges. As Nolan was killed, he was unable to clarify things later. Lucan and Cardigan barely spoke, such was their mutual dislike (though they were brothers-in-law). Neither made an effort to check what Raglan intended. Raglan had requested the Heavy Brigade and horse artillery to support the charge but Lucan failed to provide this support, for which Raglan blamed him. By writers and artists, the Charge came to be seen as a tragically glorious episode, and it impressed observers at the time – some wept as they watched.

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THINKING HISTORICALLY Change (8a, b & c) (I)

Imposing realities



1 Explain why the conversation in the cartoon above would not have happened.

The shape of history is imposed by historians viewing events with the benefit of hindsight. Therefore, people who lived through the 'history' did not always perceive the patterns that later historians identify. For example, some people living through the Industrial Revolution may have understood that great change was taking place, but they would not have been able to understand the massive economic, social and political consequences of industrialisation.

Answer the following:

2 Consider the way the Crimean War was organised and fought:

a) Who would have made the decision as to how the Crimean War was organised?

b) Could anybody have challenged this decision?

c) Explain why someone living in the 1850s would have been unable to make a judgement about the war's impact on British history.

3 Who living at the present time might regard the Crimean War as an important event?

4 What does this cartoon tell us about the structure of history as we understand it?

The siege of Sevastopol, September 1854 to September 1855

The allies had laid siege to the Russian port of Sevastopol (their prime objective) since they first landed in the Crimea, and advanced slowly towards it. In response, the Russians fought hard to check the advance and relieve Sevastopol. In November 1854, they attacked the British at Inkerman, advancing in early morning fog. Although caught off-guard in camp, the British won the day. Losses were again heavy, though, and the assault on Sevastopol once more postponed. The siege army now faced a Crimean winter.

During November 1854, the Crimean peninsula was hit by one of the worst storms in living memory. The allied camps were wrecked and many ships carrying supplies for winter were sunk. It took weeks to ship in fresh stores, while allied soldiers suffered from cold, hunger and disease. Horses and pack mules died from lack of fodder (feed), and starving soldiers foraged for scraps. Huts and tents gave scant shelter from freezing rain and snow, and firewood was scarce. Disease killed far more soldiers than the enemy. Even when supplies did reach the base at Balaklava, they were slow to reach the troops outside Sevastopol.

After this terrible winter, by spring 1855 things had improved. The army received fresh horses, and a new railway was built linking Balaklava to the camps around Sevastopol. More guns, ammunition and troop reinforcements arrived. The Russians could not send relief in to Sevastopol, so the port's defenders' morale suffered.

The fall of Sevastopol

Sevastopol is divided by a sea inlet and overlooked by hills on which Russians had defences. In the spring, the allies planned a fresh attack, aiming to capture the higher southern hills first. Their main targets were four strongpoints: the Mamelon fort; and behind it three large redoubts known as the Redan, the Malakoff and the Little Redan. Both armies dug trenches to protect their positions.

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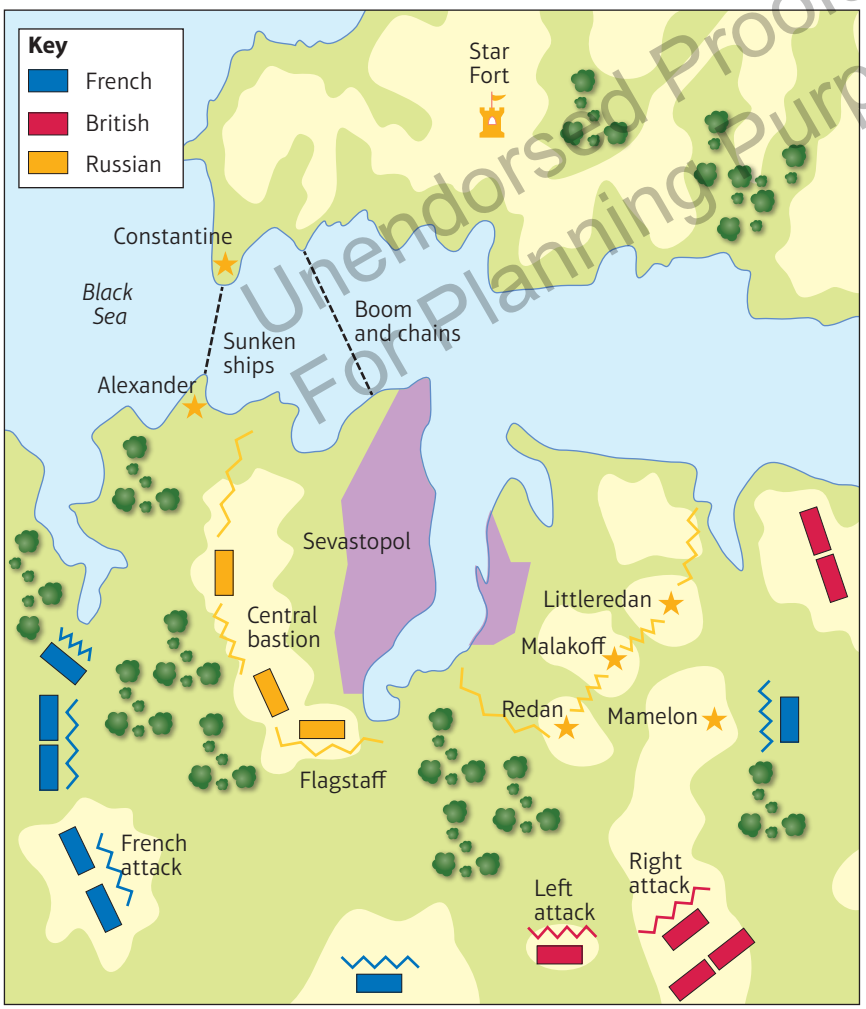


Figure 4.2 The Siege of Sevastopol, September 1854 to September 1855.

KEY TERMS

Mortar
Artillery gun firing at a steep angle, to lob explosive shells into fortifications

Enfilade
Gunfire from two or more sides against a target that has little protection.

The French took the Mamelon fort in June 1855 and the allies bombarded the Russian defences, using siege guns including **mortars.** Sevastopol was a new kind of battle, fought by engineers and artillery gunners, with no role for dashing cavalry. The infantry sheltered in trenches and stormed fortifications, harassed by enemy snipers. It was a foretaste of battles in the American Civil War and, much later, the First World War.

At the Battle of Tchernaya in August 1855, the Russians suffered another repulse at the hands of French, Ottoman and Sardinian troops. In September, the allies at last took Sevastopol. The French took the Malakoff redoubt and held off Russian counter-attacks, and the British captured the Little Redan. The main Redan remained in Russian hands until the French moved cannons into the Malakoff and **enfilade** fire forced the Russians to withdraw. The allies had the high ground, so the Russians evacuated Sevastopol, the allies being too exhausted to pursue them.

So ended the last major battle. Diplomatic arguments continued until March 1856, when the Treaty of Paris ended the war.

The influence of Lord Raglan

Lord Raglan contracted cholera and died on 28 June 1855. His reputation soon came under fire, as did the performance of the army. Critics called for change. Raglan's conduct of the war was seen as indicative of deeper problems. Raglan was 'old-school'; he had fought at Waterloo in 1815, and had always been close to Wellington. The 'iron duke' had not encouraged army reform in his later life as a leading politician.

Raglan's army in the Crimea was little changed from Wellington's in the peninsula or at Waterloo. The battles at the Alma and Inkerman, won by infantry in line, might have come from the French Wars. Raglan's coolness on the battlefield was reminiscent of Wellington, and none doubted his courage, but the debate about his influence and methods continued after the war, dividing opinion (see Source 5).

SOURCE 5

From *A Review of the Crimean War to Winter 1854–55,* published in 1860. The author, John Miller Adye, was an army officer in the Crimea, and later a general. Here, he defends Raglan against critics.

A brilliant and in many ways admirable account is given of this battle [The Alma] by Mr. Russell, *The Times* correspondent, the latest edition of his work on the Crimea; but it is to be observed, that Mr. Russell on this as on almost every occasion appears to take equal pleasure with the Baron de Bazancourt in imputing incapacity and blundering... to Lord Raglan, Sir George Brown and most of the superior officers of the English Army [sic]; in fact, so constantly does he portray them as ignorant of the most ordinary knowledge of their profession, that his remarks would almost appear to be dictated by personal feelings. This is doubtless a great blemish, and it is apparent throughout the work...

Even now when so little light has as yet been thrown upon the conduct of Lord Raglan and upon the real cause of the English misfortunes in the campaign, the English public are already beginning to perceive that the impressions that they received at the time from irresponsible writers were very wide of the truth; and as to Mr. Russell's estimate of Lord Raglan's character and abilities as a general, I believe, at this moment, if the opinion of the allied admirals and generals (French, Sardinian, Turkish and English), who were engaged in that war, were obtained, as to what man among them was more distinguished for greatness of character, for calmness in danger and for foresight in counsel, that the unanimous result would be that one name alone would be mentioned, and that would be – RAGLAN.

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Raglan as a general

Raglan was not afraid to commit men to danger. He deployed infantry against the Great Redoubt at Sevastopol, because it was a key objective. At Balaklava, he committed cavalry to buy time for his slower-moving infantry. The Charge of the Light Brigade was not his fault alone, since British cavalry had a reputation for recklessness, but he might have anticipated this, and been more precise with his orders.

Raglan had bravely fought sieges in Spain during the Peninsular War. However, attacks on ancient Spanish citadels were not like the siege of Sevastopol, with its guns and earthworks. Raglan had assumed that Sevastopol would fall quickly after a concerted attack, but was persuaded to wait, which meant his men spent weeks in camp while siege equipment was still at Varna. The storm of November 1854 caused further delays and the allies were left out-gunned by the Russians.

In the Peninsular War, the Portuguese population was friendly, and the British had access to a secure supply base in a big city, Lisbon. In the Crimea, the locals were hostile and the supply base was a tentatively held village port, Balaklava. As his troops starved and died of disease in their thousands, Raglan knew that a retreat to Balaklava would allow the Russians to re-supply Sevastopol. Yet he would not sanction an all-out assault. The stalemate persisted until his death in June 1855.

SOURCE 6 From the diary of Captain Nicholas Dunscombe, 46th South Devonshire Foot. This soldier's account highlights some problems at Sevastopol – 'parade ground' thinking, and failings in communication and supply.

Very cold night; the firing on both sides was very heavy the entire of last night; we paraded at 10.30 am, we went up to the divisional parade ground and were marched down the middle ravine to the rear of the 21-gun battery; we took up the very same position that we had occupied on the 18th of June; the French went in at the Malakoff at 12 noon and the Russians were so completely taken by surprise that they got into it with very little opposition; but when they got in there was a great scrimmage; however, the French held it; after it was known that the French had taken the Malakoff, our storming parties went in at the Redan, but the Russians were fully prepared for them; the 3rd Buffs got into the Redan and spiked eight guns, but were obliged to quit it as the supports were not sent up; a second attack was made but they could not even cross the ditch, so the attempt was given up for this time; however, it is a great thing to have the Malakoff; we were all ordered to take 48 hours rations with us that in the event of our effecting a lodgement we may be ready to hold the place; the 7th, 88th, 97th, 90th and 23rd all suffered a great deal; an immense number of wounded officers and men passed us; we had 1 man wounded. I heard an artilleryman complaining today that he was under very heavy fire in the Quarries and that he had no ammunition to return the fire; so much for the mismanagement here; I do not think we shall assault the Redan again as the Russians cannot possibly remain in it now that the French have got the Malakoff; in fact we need not have assaulted it at all; we arrived in camp about 8 pm; very cold day.

A Level Exam-Style Question Section A

Study Source 6 before you answer this question.

Assess the value of the source for revealing that the army in the Crimea lacked direction, and that logistical and supply problems were at the root of its problems.

Explain your answer, using the source, the information given about its origin and your own knowledge about the historical context. (20 marks)

Tip

Consider the origin of the source material as evidence, and compare the performance of battlefield soldiers, high command and support services.

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The conduct of the war

Wellington's influence can be seen in Raglan's conduct of the war. Raglan's infantry was still trained in the old disciplines, firing fast and accurately with modern rifles, and it kept the Russian field army at bay during the siege of Sevastopol. In terms of overall organisation, there were failings, for the army was badly supplied, often ill-equipped and the state of the men at times wretched. The work of Florence Nightingale, and the Sanitary Commission, and the McNeill-Tulloch Report and subsequent investigations (see Chapter 1) drew public attention to the shortcomings of the Crimean campaign and influenced subsequent army reform.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Balaklava and Sevastopol

1 Why did the Russians attack towards Balaklava?

2 Using Source 4 and other material in this chapter, how true is it to say that the Charge of the Light Brigade was an avoidable mistake?

3 How fair would it be to describe Lord Raglan as 'out of touch with the realities of war', bearing in mind such views as expressed in Source 5?

4 Why did Sevastopol take so long to fall, and how does Source 6 shed light on this?

HOW EFFECTIVE WAS THE WORK OF FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE AND MARY SEACOLE?

Newspaper reports, and stories told by returning soldiers, alerted people in Britain to the plight of the wounded, the inadequate medical provision of the army and the work of volunteers, the most famous of whom was Florence Nightingale and the most persistent, Mary Seacole. Army medical services were provided by surgeons, aided by army musicians acting as stretcher-bearers. Wives of soldiers would help with nursing and offer folk remedies to the sick. The shortcomings of improvised medical care became a national scandal.

Florence Nightingale

Florence was born in 1820, the second daughter of a wealthy family. She was well-educated but was expected to marry and settle down to a quiet upper-middle-class life. Instead, Florence went to Germany to train as a nurse (medical training as a doctor was not yet available for women in Britain). She took up a senior nursing position in a London clinic in 1853.

From the beginning of the Crimean campaign, *The Times* newspaper reported on the poor quality of medical care for wounded and sick soldiers. The minister of war, Sidney Herbert, decided to send a team of volunteer nurses to the Crimea, and asked his friend Florence Nightingale to lead it. She set sail with 38 nurses in October 1854.

The problems at Scutari

Nightingale and her team were not to be based in the Crimea itself but at a hospital at Scutari in the outskirts of Constantinople (Istanbul). Upon arrival, they saw the magnitude of the task facing them.

The priority of the army was its fighting men, not the wounded. The commander-in-chief, Raglan, had limited the number of medical staff because he needed space on transport ships for fighting soldiers (and horses). Medical supplies had low priority. There are examples of medical supplies being taken off hospital ships so that the vessels could be used as troop transports.

KEY TERM

Orderly
A non-medical assistant in a hospital, looking after cleaning, meals, laundry and so on.

The staffing of medical services was unsatisfactory. Army veterans were drafted in as stretcher-bearers and nursing **orderlies**, and were often ill-suited for the work. Many became sick themselves. There was a bizarre idea that, in hospital, wounded men would nurse one another. At the start of the war, there were no doctors signed up for the Crimea.

The Scutari 'hospital' had originally been a barracks for the Turks. It was not designed for sick or wounded – for example, there was hardly any clean water available. Toilet arrangements were primitive, and inadequate for thousands of wounded men with limited mobility.

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Nightingale's impact

When Florence Nightingale arrived with her 38 nurses, there were some doctors and surgeons in place struggling to cope. Rather than welcoming the nurses, the doctors took their presence to be an implied criticism and Nightingale faced resentment. Florence Nightingale was shocked by what she found at Scutari and immediately set about improving the situation. She and her team reorganised the kitchen and improved the food for patients. They cleaned the wards and strove to provide clean, washed bedlinen. She arranged a school room and a library, and sent some of the men with minor wounds to grow vegetables in the hospital grounds. She worked long hours and would often do ward rounds with her lamp when other staff had gone to bed.

The image of Florence Nightingale as the caring 'lady with the lamp' is balanced by a reputation as a tough administrator. Though her brief was only to take charge of nurses, her forthright opinions brought her into disagreement with Dr Menzies, the senior medical office at Scutari, and Dr John Hall, in overall charge of army medical staff. He tried, but failed, to get nurses sent back to England. In October 1854, Hall wrote a favourable report on conditions at Scutari, saying things were improving.

Army doctors were alienated by Nightingale's brusque approach and single-mindedness – due perhaps to dealing with prejudice against women 'interfering' in male domains. She was also quick to criticise women nurses and wrote to England complaining about attitudes. When a senior nurse,

Mary Clayton, arrived at Scutari with another nursing team, Clayton reported that she found it a horrible place, where no one trusted or spoke well of each other, and people abused others behind their backs.

Nightingale's work was reported in Britain, where public unease about the Crimean campaign was mounting, and she became a celebrity; the subject of popular songs, Staffordshire pottery and a waxwork tableau in Madame Tussaud's in London. Newspapers carried stories of her nurses' heroism. Her friendships with government minister Sidney Herbert and with *The Times* correspondent, William Russell, gave her access to influential people. *The Times* organised a fund which raised £30,000 to buy medical supplies.

SOURCE 7

Part of a letter written by Britain's new prime minister, Lord Palmerston, to his minister of war, Lord Panmure in February 1855. A month before, the previous government had been defeated in parliament on the issue of 'the condition of the army before Sevastopol'.

It is clear that, quite independently of the medical treatment of the sick and wounded, there is an urgent necessity for improved sanitary arrangement in our hospitals at Scutari and elsewhere. Proper ventilation has been neglected and various other sanitary arrangements have been either not thought of, or not carried into effect. There are two very able and active men who have been connected with the Board of Health and who I have much employed about sanitary matters – Dr Sutherland and Dr Grainger. I wish very much that you would send them out at once to Constantinople, to Scutari and Balaclava and the Camp, not to interfere at all with the medical treatment of the sick and wounded, but with full powers to carry into immediate effect such sanitary improvements and arrangements in regard to the hospital buildings and to the camp as their experience may suggest. I am convinced that this will save many lives.

The Sanitary Commission

In early 1855, the British government was defeated in a parliamentary vote on the conduct of the war, and a new prime minister, Palmerston, succeeded Aberdeen. Nightingale lost her friend and ally Sidney Herbert (now out of office), but Palmerston was also her supporter. The new war minister, Panmure, ordered a Sanitary Commission to the Crimea. The commissioners (John McNeill, a doctor and diplomat, and a soldier, Colonel Alexander Tulloch) began work in March 1855 by expressing shock at conditions at Scutari. A clean-up was ordered: rubbish cleared; walls whitewashed; dead animals removed. Neither doctors nor nurses yet clearly understood infection and the causes of disease: Nightingale herself blamed sickness on **miasma**. As the sanitary commissioners demanded changes, mortality rates fell among hospital patients. Nightingale welcomed the commission as having saved the army, and worked hard to improve the supply of medicines and basic aids such as hot-water bottles. She also welcomed Alexis Soyer, a London chef, who arrived to improve patients' food using recipes for nourishing stews and soups made from army rations.

KEY TERM

Miasma
Bad air (from the Greek word for pollution). Prior to Pasteur showing that germs cause disease, many people believed that disease was caused by 'bad air'.

The Nightingale effect

Nightingale was frequently at odds with nurses, especially those who were independent-minded like Elizabeth Davis, who went off to Balaklava against her wishes. When Nightingale herself went to Balaklava in May 1855, she became seriously ill. She was visited on her sick-bed by Lord Raglan, recovered and returned to Scutari, where she complained her work was being undermined by nursing indiscipline and continued opposition from the army doctors. She was back in the Crimea in September 1855, when a row broke out in Britain after her friend Charles Bracebridge made a public (and inaccurate) attack on the Crimean military medical department. The army doctors concluded, mistakenly, that Nightingale was behind the story, and once more accused her of interference.

The **McNeill-Tulloch Report** (in two parts, June 1855 and January 1856) confirmed much of what Nightingale claimed about army failings. Even so, Dr Hall got a knighthood and continued his criticism of her. A confidential report by Colonel Lefroy to Panmure at the War Office, however, backed Nightingale and under the new army commander-in-chief in the Crimea, Sir William Codrington, her role as superintendent of the 'Female Nursing Establishment' in the Crimea was confirmed.

KEY TERM

McNeill-Tulloch Report
Findings of the commission sent to inquire into shortcomings in the army's supply and medical arrangements in the Crimea, ordered by the War Department in 1855.

Nightingale's work divided opinion. Her supporters cited the improvements that she made, in cleanliness, general care and concern for the sick and wounded, and her popularity among the soldiers. Critics claim that she presided over a Crimean muddle neither she (nor anyone else) understood how to deal with. They cite the increase in death rates after her arrival, suggesting her

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work was less effective than the changes made by the Sanitary Commission. Nightingale's impatience with colleagues did cause problems; the atmosphere was often rancorous, with nurses being accused of theft, drunkenness and immorality. Her efforts to improve nutrition and obtain essential supplies were major factors in helping to improve conditions, in an often hopeless situation; due to the difficulties in moving casualties from the battlefield at Sevastopol, by the time they reached hospital in Scutari many men were already beyond help.

EXTRACT 1 From Denis Judd, *The Crimean War* (1975). It echoes the traditional view of Florence Nightingale's impact.

It was at Scutari that Florence Nightingale battled as valiantly as any soldier in the field to improve conditions. The men were piled up in corridors, lying on unscrubbed, rotting floors crawling with vermin. In her early days in the hospital at Scutari there were more than a thousand patients suffering from acute diarrhoea and only twenty chamber pots to go round! The privies were blocked up and an inch of liquid filth floated over the floor. The men's food often lay in this revolting mess. The vile stench from the hospital penetrated the walls and could be smelled from some distance away.

Florence Nightingale had a fund of £30,000 to manage, and out of this she purchased some of the necessities so badly needed at the Barrack Hospital. She also worked with incredible energy and devotion, often going without sleep, superintending the multiple tasks that confronted her – cleansing the wards, ensuring that fresh bed linen was available, tending to the dying, and arranging for the preparation of special nutritious diets.

EXTRACT 2 From Clive Ponting, *The Crimean War* (2004); here is an alternative view, suggesting conditions at Scutari were not as grim as they were painted.

Nightingale did not arrive at Scutari until 4 November 1854. By then the hospital was running well. At the end of September, Thomas Chenery reported to 'The Times' that 'the preparations for the reception of the sick and wounded have been as complete as those for the active business of the war'. The old Ottoman barracks had been 'cleaned and whitewashed' and were 'sufficiently comfortable'. He added that 'the health of the men is wonderfully improved by the air of the Bosporus'. Sidney Herbert sent out – at the suggestion of Dr Andrew Smith, the Head of the Medical Department – a commission to investigate the state of the hospitals. Nightingale travelled out with them in October and immediately after their arrival Dr Spence (who was to die a week later on the 'Prince' just outside Balaclava harbour) reported to London: 'Just returned from Scutari, perfectly delighted to find things so well managed.' A friend of Sidney Herbert, Mr Bracebridge, reported at the same time that the hospital was 'clean and airy' and that there were 'few bad smells'. Although Florence Nightingale tried to portray the situation at Scutari as appalling before she arrived, this was not the case.

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SOURCE 8 *Miss Nightingale, in the hospital, at Scutari.* This picture was published in the *Illustrated London News* on 24 February 1855. It helped to create the public image of the 'lady with the lamp'.



THINKING HISTORICALLY Interpretations (6a)

Ever-changing history

Our interpretations of the past change as we change. This may be because our social attitudes have changed over time, or perhaps because historians have constructed a different theory, or perhaps technology has allowed archaeologists to discover something new.

1 Work in pairs. Make a timeline that starts with Britain's entry into the Crimean War and ends 50 years in the future. Construct reactions that illustrate the point that time changes history. In the future box, you can speculate on how people might react to the event in 50 years' time. Below is an example:

1854	1857	1918	2015	2066
Britain at war with Russia in the Crimea.	British war veteran: 'Just one disaster after another, and nothing to come home to.' Russian patriot: 'A triumph for Russian imperial diplomacy, putting us on equal footing with the Great Powers.'	British civil servant: 'The start of reforms that modernised the army and medical care.' Russian revolutionary: 'Tsarist folly, wasting the lifeblood of the Russian people in a pointless war.'	French student: 'A war that meant more to the Turks and Russians than to either the French or British.' Russian politician: 'A patriotic war showing the ages-old importance of the Crimea to Russia.'	?

Answer the following questions.

2 Identify three factors that have affected how the Crimean War has been interpreted over time, or might affect its interpretation in the future.

3 If a historian was to write a book proposing a radically new interpretation of the Crimean War, how might other historians react? What would affect their reaction?

4 How will the future change the past?

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The legacy of Florence Nightingale

Florence Nightingale became a legend as the 'Angel of the Crimea', and spent the rest of her life campaigning for reforms to army medical services and nursing. She was an advocate for improvements in hospital design and nurse training, and became a role model for Victorian women, who before had little prospect of a professional career in medicine or other fields. On her return from the Crimea, Nightingale had argued for a full inquiry, and contributed to the Royal Commission on the Health of the Army in 1857. In late 1855, a public meeting was held to decide on uses for the money raised through public subscription, and rather than present Nightingale with a gift, it was decided to set up a fund to train nurses. The fund had raised £45,000 by 1859, and a nurses' training school was set up at St Thomas' Hospital in London, the first trainees arriving in the summer of 1860. A new hospital opened on the Albert Embankment in London in 1861, and its 'Nightingale wards' design became common in other British hospitals.

Florence Nightingale herself took little public part in this legacy work, since from the late 1850s until her death in 1910 she lived as a virtual invalid; her collapse and illness attributed to various factors including bipolar disorder and infections contracted through her war work. Despite this, she continued to campaign from her sick bed. In 1859, she published *Notes on Nursing*, a manual for the training of nurses, still in print today. Her use of patient-mortality statistics was also recognised by the Royal Statistical Society. The Florence Nightingale Foundation (1929) continues to promote her ideals.

Mary Seacole

Mary Seacole came from a very different background to Nightingale, but her work in the Crimea won her similar fame to Nightingale's at the time, though her impact on medicine was less enduring. She was born Mary Grant, in Jamaica in 1805, the daughter of a Scottish army officer (and thought of herself as a Scot). Her Jamaican mother, a local healer or 'doctress', practised folk medicine and

taught Mary her remedies. In 1836, Mary married Edwin Seacole, and they kept a store until his death in 1844. Mary then ran a hotel, still working as a healer and nurse treating local people and British service families stationed in Jamaica. She next moved to Panama, to run with her brother a hotel for gold prospectors travelling to California, and there she successfully treated cholera victims. In 1853, the Jamaican authorities asked her to return home to help combat an outbreak of yellow fever – evidence that her reputation for effective treatment in emergency situations was recognised.

Going to the Crimea

The Crimean War changed Mary Seacole's life. When she learned of the call for nurses to go to the Crimea, she made her own way by ship from Jamaica to London in 1854 to offer her services. It was her second visit to Britain (she had come on a visit as a young girl) but, although she had relatives in Britain, she knew no one of influence in London. When she volunteered as a nurse, she was turned down, possibly she thought because she was of mixed race. In her 1857 memoir, Mrs Seacole described how on her second application she had an interview with one of Florence Nightingale's assistants, and read in her face that had there been a vacancy she would not have been chosen.

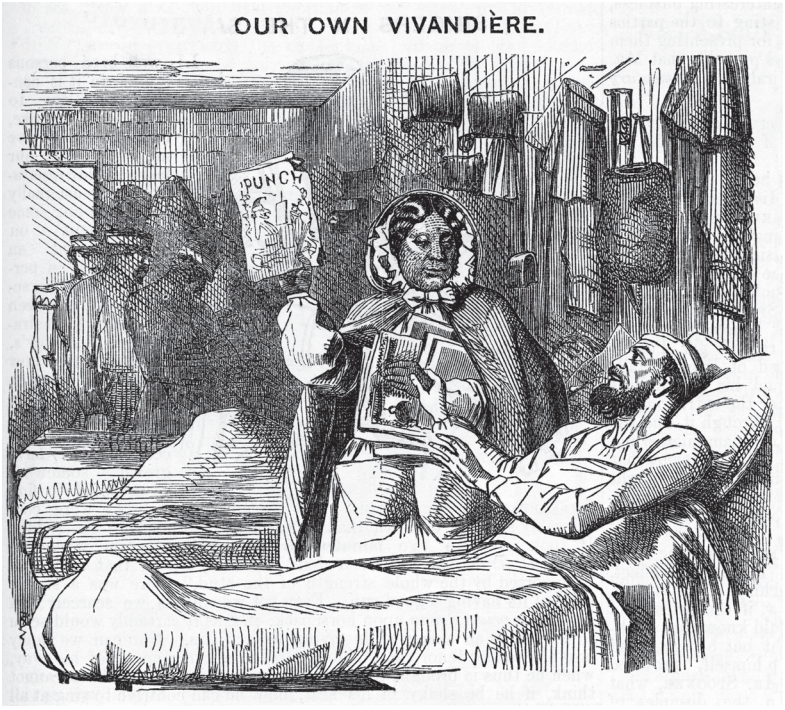
Undeterred, she decided to go to the Crimea independently, with a view to resuming the kind of commercial/medical/retail business she had run in Panama. In January 1955, she sailed for the Crimea to join an old business partner, Thomas Day. Stopping at Scutari, she offered to help Florence Nightingale (already at the army hospital there) as a nurse but, again, was turned down. She then travelled on to the Crimea, setting up business with Day outside Balaklava.

SOURCE 9 From a letter home, written by Dr Reid, a surgeon in the British army, in 1855; his view reflects that of most people who met Mary Seacole in the Crimea.

> Here I met a celebrated person. A coloured woman, Mrs Seacole. Out of the goodness of her heart and at her own expense, she supplied hot tea to the poor sufferers while they waited to be lifted into the boats.
>
> She did not spare herself if she could any good to the suffering soldiers. In rain and snow, day after day, she was at her post. With her stove and kettle, in any shelter she could find, she brewed tea for all who wanted it – and there were many.

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SOURCE 10 A cartoon of Mary Seacole published in *Punch* magazine in 1857. The French word 'vivandiere' means 'sutler', a person who follows the army selling basic necessities (clothing, food, soap) and small luxury items to soldiers.



The British Hotel

Seacole and Day's 'British Hotel' on Spring Hill opened in the spring of 1855; it was part hotel, part store, part clinic; where soldiers could enjoy hot food and shelter, and small comforts such as tea, coffee, blankets and fresh bread. The hotel was very popular with officers and ordinary soldiers, drawn by the prospect of better quality food than army rations (such as hot soup, chicken, tinned salmon and sardines), and the chance to buy warm clothing and shoes. No gambling was allowed and the hotel closed at 8 p.m. every evening. French chef Alexis Soyer was impressed that Seacole fed men better than the army and the two became friends.

In the mornings, after breakfast, Mary Seacole cared for the sick and wounded, using an upstairs room as a dispensary for medicines. Using her folk-medicine experience, she prescribed remedies that were often helpful, especially since most medical staff at the front line were army surgeons, with little knowledge of treating fevers and cholera.

Unlike Florence Nightingale who, battling the authorities, remained at Scutari most of the time, Mary Seacole visited the battlefields, carrying first-aid supplies on mules to troops. In September 1855, she watched the allied attacks on Sevastopol, along with other spectators including officers' wives and women 'camp followers'. She treated the wounded and dying, and was reputedly the first woman on the allied side into the city after the Russians withdrew. At Sevastopol, she met war correspondent William H. Russell, who became her enthusiastic advocate, describing her as a kind and successful 'physician'. Seacole remained in the Crimea, touring the battlefields and running her store, until 1856, by which time most of the British troops had left.

With unsold stock and debts, she returned to Britain and opened a store in the army town of Aldershot. Day decided to try his luck in Australia. When the Aldershot business failed, friends came to her aid: a letter to *The Times* newspaper, and a poem published in *Punch* magazine, appealed to the public not to let her efforts be forgotten. Among her many supporters was Russell, who in *The Times* of April 1857 praised her 'skilful hand' in tending wounds and broken limbs. There was a fundraising concert, and Mary Seacole produced a book of memoirs in 1857: *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands*. This is her account of her life, and the main source for her years before the Crimea, when her work was seen and reported.

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Nightingale and Seacole considered

While Florence Nightingale's work received great publicity at home, Mary Seacole was, after a brief period of celebrity in London, almost forgotten. Nightingale returned from the Crimea to strengthen the argument for reform of army medical services. She met Tulloch and McNeill, and also Queen Victoria, and her fame and influence were established. She had access to influential people in the establishment and, even after her retirement from public affairs, hers remained a voice that might be heard when she raised it.

Mary Seacole took no part in the post-Crimea discussions and reforms. She settled in London, living quietly though at one point consulted (for massage) by the Princess of Wales. She died in 1881, her tombstone bearing the inscription 'a notable nurse', but her Crimea work was then largely forgotten until later in the 20th century when her achievements were aired afresh.

Before Nightingale and Seacole, nurses were poorly thought of (often portrayed as criminals or alcoholics). Nursing was menial work, often little more than sitting at the bedside of the incurable or dying, done by uneducated lower-class women with little medical training. Nightingale had gone to Germany to study nursing. Seacole learned most of her medicine from her mother and from her own experiences in the Caribbean and Panama, acquiring practical first-aid expertise that was valuable in the Crimea.

After Nightingale, nursing became a vocation and a profession. Few would disagree that modern nursing began with Nightingale, who for many years was the most significant woman in British nursing history, and firmly associated in the public's imagination with the Crimean War. However, Mary Seacole's role in the Crimea has been extensively revisited and researched and, in 2004, she came top in a poll of greatest black Britons. Plans for a statue of her at St Thomas' Hospital in London caused some discussion, with some historians (such as Lynn Macdonald) suggesting Seacole's role in nursing had been overstated, since to associate her with hospital nursing is inaccurate – and does not do justice to her overall achievement. Concern that she might be removed from the history curriculum resulted in a petition and her reinstatement alongside

A Level Exam-Style Question Section B

To what extent do you agree with the view that Florence Nightingale did more useful work in the Crimea than Mary Seacole? (20 marks)

Tip

Contrast their work in terms of immediate and longer-term national impact, and reaction to it, to arrive at a supported judgement.

Florence Nightingale as a key figure for study The two women remain central and contrasting figures in the Crimean War story.

SOURCE 11 From Mary Seacole's book about her life, *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands*, published in 1857.

So strong was the old impulse in me, that I waited for no permission, but seeing a poor infantryman stretched upon a pallet, groaning heavily, I ran up to him at once, and eased the stiff dressings. Lightly my practised fingers ran over the familiar work, and well I was rewarded when the poor fellow's groans subsided into a restless easy mutter. He had been hit in the forehead, and I think his sight was gone. I stooped down, raised some tea to his baked lips. Then his hand touched mine, as though he had discovered his wandering senses. 'Ha! This is surely a woman's hand.' He continued to hold my hand in his feeble grasp, and whisper 'God bless you woman, whoever you are, God bless you!' over and over again.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Florence Nightingale and Mary Seacole

1 Why do you think Florence Nightingale was selected to lead the team of nurses sent to Scutari?

2 a) Make a list of all the problems Nightingale faced.

b) For each, explain how successful she was in overcoming the problem.

3 Why do you think Mary Seacole was rejected by the authorities? (You should come up with more than one reason.)

4 Why do you think Mary Seacole was so popular with soldiers, and later in Britain?

5 Work in groups of between four and six. Divide into two teams: Team A will prepare the case for Florence Nightingale being more significant; and Team B will prepare the case for Mary Seacole. The teams will then debate the motion: 'Mary Seacole made a greater contribution than Florence Nightingale'.

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HOW FAR DID THE COVERAGE OF THE WAR CHANGE PUBLIC PERCEPTION?

The Crimean War was the first to receive coverage that included photographs. To the British public, wars on foreign soil had hitherto been remote affairs. Before the 18th century, news trickled home slowly and sporadically. Weeks after a battle, town criers would announce what had happened, and rumour and gossip would embellish the tale. By the 19th century, newspaper reports were appearing more speedily, but were usually based either on edited official dispatches or on eye-witness accounts weeks out of date.

Before 1800, reading was a minority skill. This changed thanks to church Sunday schools, charity schools for the poor and laws forcing factory owners to offer their workers a basic education. Literacy rates increased and, by 1850, well over half of Britain's population could read and write. The increase in literacy meant a growing demand for something to read. Novelists such as Charlotte Bronte, Mrs Gaskell, Charles Dickens and William Thackeray had broad appeal. Newspapers and magazines were read in unprecedented numbers by all sections of society. The Public Libraries Act of 1850 began the process that gave access to reading material to all, free of charge.

Photo-journalism and communications

A major change in the way information was communicated from battlefield to home came with the invention of photography. Throughout the 1830s and 1840s, inventors had been developing photography, by which images captured with a camera could be preserved and printed. By the 1850s, this process, though complicated, was reliable enough for professional photographers to take cameras into battle zones. There were no action shots, since subjects had to hold each pose for several seconds, but the first war photographs from the Crimea gave people a new insight into what warfare was like.

Improved communications meant news could travel much faster. The 'railway mania' of the 1840s gave Britain the world's first steam rail network connecting major population centres. Newspapers printed one day could be taken by train around the country by the following day. The notion of national public opinion, influenced and reflected by the Press, was about to become familiar to politicians.

New technology

Reports from the war zone reached Britain more quickly, thanks to railways and the electric **telegraph**. During the earlier French Wars, correspondents with the British army in Spain sent reports by letter carried on horse wagons to Lisbon. This might take weeks. The mail then went by sailing ship to Britain. News of the Battle of Salamanca, fought on 22 July 1812, did not appear in *The Times* until 17 August – 26 days later. By the 1850s, the telegraph allowed brief information to be transmitted in hours. Though there were no direct links between the Crimea and Britain, dispatches from the war zone could be sent in stages by telegraph after the British laid a line from the Crimea to their base at Varna. The report of the Alma appeared in *The Times* just over a week after the battle.

KEY TERM

Telegraph
A system for sending coded messages electrically through metal wires.

The photographs of Roger Fenton

Roger Fenton was not the official war photographer in the Crimea, nor was he the first photographer to visit the region. That distinction belongs to Richard Nicklin, who was sent by the War Office to Russia early in the campaign. Sadly, all the photographs Nicklin took were lost when the ship carrying them sank.

Fenton went to the Crimea as a commercial photographer, working for the publisher Thomas Agnew. Through social connections, however, he was encouraged by Prince Albert (husband of Queen Victoria) and the duke of Newcastle. Albert believed that photographs might help to counter some of the negative newspaper publicity about the conduct of the war. He provided Fenton with a letter of introduction to the army command in the Crimea.

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The nature of Fenton's photographs

The brief given to Fenton before leaving Britain was to take photographs that would sell. Agnew believed his main market would be servicemen and their families who would buy a print as a souvenir. Since officers came from the wealthiest backgrounds, they would be more likely to buy photographs – so Fenton chose chiefly officers as subjects. Moreover, he needed army co-operation to move his van (a covered horse-drawn wagon) from place to place and this meant asking officers for help.

The primitive camera equipment also dictated the kind of photographs Fenton was able to take. Later war photographers with high-speed equipment could take shots of the action as it unfolded. Some placed themselves in the thick of the fighting. For Fenton this was impossible, given his cumbersome equipment. Furthermore, live action would appear as a blur, since his camera needed an exposure time of several seconds. His pictures are, therefore, of posed, motionless people or landscapes.

Commercial issues also excluded certain subject matter, as photographs of injury and death would not be welcomed by likely purchasers. Later photographers may have felt it their duty to show the horror of war, with casualties and corpses, but Fenton's only market was the private purchaser. In the 1850s, newspapers and magazine printers did not have the technology to reproduce photographs.

The timing of Fenton's visit

Fenton did not arrive in the Crimea until March 1855 and returned to England in June 1855. Therefore, he wasn't present for any of the major battles, nor did he see the immediate after-effects.

The period of greatest distress for British soldiers was the winter of 1854–55. Leaders in Britain had assumed that, because the Crimea was in the south of Russia, its winters would be mild. Nothing could be further from the truth. As a result, there was no rush to replace winter equipment lost during the storm of November 1854. The sufferings of the soldiers were great and, at this time, the strain on the hospital at Scutari was also at its greatest. Fenton had not witnessed any of this. Aware of public concern, however, he took a picture of men of the 68th Regiment wearing winter sheepskin coats, in order to show that the soldiers would not suffer from the cold. What the photo cannot convey is any information about when the coats arrived, nor the fact that it was taken in April, when the spring temperature was around 25 °C. The new photo-journalism could at times deceive as well as inform.

SOURCE 12 Lieutenant-General Sir George Brown at Inkerman, where he commanded the Light Division. Photograph by Roger Fenton, 1855, appearing in the *Illustrated London News*.



The impact of Fenton's photographs

Fenton exhibited his photographs around Britain for eight months, beginning in September 1855. Interest in the war meant that large numbers attended these exhibitions. Most of their views of war had been formed through dramatic, often idealised, paintings, and so Fenton's stark realism had an appreciable impact on popular perception. Landscape photos showed how barren the Crimea was. Portraits of men in front of tents or ramshackle shacks could not hide the squalid living conditions. One poignant photograph of *The Valley of the Shadow of Death* showed the extent of shellfire exchanged between the armies. People seeing such images already had a view on the conditions endured by soldiers, from Press coverage. Fenton's photographs provided a connection between subject and viewer, giving rise to a wave of empathy for the plight of the soldiers. One result was that people began to question not just how the war was being managed, but what it was being fought for.

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SOURCE 13 The photograph *Valley of the Shadow of Death*, taken by Roger Fenton in 1855. It shows a place between the British camp and Russian fortifications. Tired of taking photos of officers in camp, Fenton asked to be shown a 'good view', with some used shot lying around that might give people a better idea of the battlefield.



The reporting of William Russell

Newspapers provided a medium for people to express their views. *The Times* newspaper editor realised very quickly that reports of the war would be of huge interest, and sent out two correspondents: William Howard Russell and Thomas Chenery. Russell, the senior correspondent, spent more time at the front than Chenery, who was mostly stationed in Constantinople (Istanbul), from where he wrote articles relating the experience of Florence Nightingale in the Barrack Hospital at Scutari. Other newspapers such as the *Illustrated London News, The Daily News* and *The Morning Herald* also sent correspondents.

Russell was sent to the Crimea with the first wave of allied forces. He witnessed the Battle of the Alma and his report featured the concerns that soon became common throughout his dispatches. By getting close to the fighting, Russell was able to convey some of the horror that he saw. He was particularly interested in the treatment of the wounded, the brutality of battlefield surgery and the preparations made for evacuating casualties. He made unfavourable comparisons between the British army medical service and the better equipped French.

Russell was also keen to highlight the performance of the generals. He was critical of Raglan for keeping position on the battlefield after the Alma, rather than pursuing the defeated Russians and driving them away from Sevastopol. Raglan explained in the official **dispatches** that he remained at the Alma in order to organise care of the wounded rather than leave them to the mercies of the local people. He was also anxious the allied forces did not get separated during a pursuit.

KEY TERM

Dispatches
Written communications from the general of an army to the government at home telling them how the war was going at the front line.

Russell kept up such a steady stream of writing from the Crimea that *The Times* ran a lead article from him in most editions. As soldiers, even in a war zone, spend almost all of their time *not* fighting, Russell had to find other things to write about. An affable man with the knack of getting people to talk to him, Russell was able to examine all the aspects of the campaign. What people in the Crimea might not have realised was that a casual conversation with Russell might soon appear in a British newspaper.

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EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Alfred Lord Tennyson and the Charge of the Light Brigade
If Russell's dispatches from the front affected public perception of the fighting in the Crimea, Tennyson's poem, 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' shaped people's view of the action at the Battle of Balaklava.

Tennyson was Poet Laureate from 1850 until his death in 1892 and wrote a number of poems to commemorate public events. One of the first was a poem to welcome Princess Alexandra of Denmark on her marriage to the Prince of Wales. He wrote other poems about the Crimean War but none achieved the popularity of the 'Charge of the Light Brigade'.

Russell stayed in the Crimea for the opening months of the siege of Sevastopol and the actions at Balaklava and Inkerman. His description of the Charge of the Light Brigade was so vivid that the poet Alfred Lord Tennyson based his poem on it (see Source 14).

SOURCE 14 From Tennyson's poem, 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' (1854)'

'Forward, the Light Brigade!'
Was there a man dismayed?
Not though the soldiers knew
Someone had blundered.
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die.
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

Russell spent most of December and January in Constantinople before returning to the Crimea. He left the siege of Sevastopol in May 1855 to accompany the expedition to Kertch, a joint action between the allied armies and navies aimed at gaining control of the Sea of Azov and cutting the link between the Crimea and the Russian mainland. Russell returned to Sevastopol in June and witnessed the fall of the city in September. He left the Crimea in December 1855.

The influence of *The Times*

Correspondents were allowed to travel freely around the war zone. They kept out of enemy-held areas but, within allied-held territory, they could go where they pleased. The reporters had the opportunity to uncover things authorities might have wished left hidden, and see events authorities would rather the public did not know about. By the time of the World Wars of the 20th century, governments and military commanders were more careful about Press freedom and how information got into the Press.

Russell was present at major actions, unlike Fenton. He also had firm opinions. Firstly, from the start, he was on the side of the common soldier. He wrote about the appalling conditions ordinary fighting men coped with. Secondly, he was convinced that the generals who commanded the army were not up to the task. His writing was full of sympathy for the soldiers he met, and contained pointed criticism of campaign organisation. As these two aspects of his work became more prominent, his relationships with the army command only reinforced them: Raglan told his officers not to talk to Russell, while ordinary soldiers who saw that he was on their side were only too willing to speak to him.

SOURCE 15 From an article by William Russell, published in *The Times*, September 1854. Here, he describes how the newly landed troops began the campaign.

> On 19 September 1854, early in the morning, the British soldiers began their march from the landing beach to the Russian naval base at Sevastopol.
>
> The day was warm, and our advance was delayed by the wretched transport provided to carry the baggage, an evil which will, I fear, be more severely felt in any long drawn out operations. Everything not absolutely indispensable was sent by ship.
>
> The country beyond the salt lake, near which we were encamped, is perfectly destitute of tree or shrub, and consists of wide plains, marked at intervals of two or three miles with hillocks and long irregular ridges of hills running down towards the sea. It is but little cultivated, except in the patches of land around the infrequent villages built in the higher recesses of the valleys.
>
> At last, the smoke of burning villages and farmhouses announced that the enemy in front was aware of our march. It was a sad sight to see the white walls of the houses blackened with smoke – the flames ascending through the roofs of peaceful homesteads – and the ruined outlines of deserted hamlets. Many sick men fell out and were carried to the rear. It was a painful sight – a sad contrast to the magnificent appearance of the army in the front of the column – to see litter after litter carried past to the carts, with the poor sufferers who had dropped from illness or fatigue.

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The Times campaigned to raise money for casualties, its Sick and Wounded Fund raising thousands of pounds over the course of the war. Russell's reports stirred the public's consciousness and played a major part in the campaign's success. The fund was managed by *The Times* employee John MacDonald, who was later replaced by William Stowe. It was they who decided, in consultation with medical staff, how the money was to be spent.

William Stowe arrived in the Crimea in May 1855 to cover the siege of Sevastopol, while Russell was away at Kertch. Stowe then visited the Barrack Hospital at Scutari to see the work being done there. While at Scutari, Stowe contracted cholera but was refused admission to the hospital on the grounds that he was not a soldier. On 2 June 1855, he died. Furious, the editor of *The Times* printed an editorial that was highly critical of the authorities.

SOURCE 16 From *The War: From the landing at Gallipoli to the death of Lord Raglan*, a book of reports by Sir William Howard Russell, published in 1855. The note of criticism of army organisation is apparent.

There is, therefore, a difficulty in getting food up to the army from Balaklava and there is besides a want of supplies in the commissariat magazines in the latter place. But, though there is a cause, there is no excuse for the privations to which the men are exposed. We were all told that when the bad weather set in, the country roads would be impassable. Still the fine weather was allowed to go by, and the roads were left as the Tartar [the local people] carts had made them, though the whole face of the country is covered thickly with small stones which seem expressly intended for road metal. As I understand it was suggested by the officers of the Commissariat Department that they should be allowed to form depots of food, corn and forage, as a kind of reserve at the head-quarters at the different divisions; but, instead of being permitted to carry out this excellent idea, their carts, arabas, wagons and horses were, after a few days' work in forming those depots, taken for the use of siege operations and were employed in carrying shot, shell and ammunition, to the trenches. Consequently, the magazines at head-quarters, were small and were speedily exhausted when the daily supplies from Balaklava could no longer be procured. The food, and corn, and hay, provided by the commissariat, were stowed in sailing vessels, which were ordered to lie outside the harbour... with a terrible coast of cliff to 1200 feet in perpendicular height stretching around the bay, and though it was notorious that the place was subject at that season to violent storms of wind. A hurricane arose – one of unusual and unknown violence – these ships were lost, and with them went to the bottom provender and food for fully twenty days of all the horses in the army and of many of the men... The cholera, which broke out on the night of the 28th of November, continued its ravages, and we could not estimate the number of deaths from it... As to the town itself, words could not describe its filth, its horrors, its hospitals, its burials, its dead and dying Turks, its crowded lanes, its noisome sheds, its beastly purlieus, or its decay...

A Level Exam-Style Question Section A

Study Source 16 before you answer this question.

Assess the value of the source for revealing the reasons why the British soldiers suffered so badly and the problems faced by the authorities in providing adequate supplies during the winter of 1854.

Explain your answer, using the source, the information given about its origin and your own knowledge about the historical context. (20 marks)

Tip

Consider reasons why the author might wish to write about the situation in such a way.

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After the war, Russell and *The Times* were involved in two further significant campaigns relating to the Crimea. The first occurred when the Press learned of the plight of Mary Seacole, who had returned to England from the Crimea in debt, and was forced to declare bankruptcy in November 1856. *The Times*, along with other publications, notably *Punch* magazine, organised a fund to help Mary. Russell also wrote the foreword to her book, the royalties from which kept her in her old age.

The other campaign was for some form of official recognition for bravery. Russell wanted an award to be given to men and officers alike (at the time only officers received medals). Russell found that he had strong support from the queen, who herself helped with the design. Though the army leadership objected, they bowed to public opinion and royal wishes. The Victoria Cross was instigated in January 1856 and awarded retrospectively to 111 men of all ranks who had served in the Crimea.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Meritocracy

Prior to the 19th century, the British political system had been largely built on wealth and privilege. Position in society and family background were usually prerequisites for advancement in public life. The Crimean War played a significant part in changing British society, in terms of appreciating the efforts, skills and sufferings of people from all social groups. Before the Crimean War, the sacrifices of the ordinary soldier had not been given recognition, nor had, in all but exceptional circumstances, their bravery. Florence Nightingale came from the higher reaches of society; Mary Seacole was of humbler origins and from Jamaica. But as women, both were at a disadvantage in seeking access to leaders, or leadership roles themselves, Journalists like William Russell showed real people from all classes in real life, just as fiction writers like Charles Dickens created characters from across the social divides. The change from a system where advancement was by privilege to a situation where advancement could be by talent (a meritocracy) owes much to the experience of Britons during the Crimean War.

Political change and the power of the Press

Before the Crimean War, the British government had not appreciated the potential of the Press to shape public opinion. In the same way that free-ranging photo-journalists (and television) changed US public opinion during the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s, newspaper correspondents and photographers free to roam the Crimea helped to shape the public's understanding of the conflict. As a result, questions were asked about the way the war was being conducted even before it had finished.

The Press attack on the generals, particularly Lord Raglan, led to the public demanding scapegoats at home. Questions were asked in the House of Commons and some politicians encouraged Press criticism of the government. In January 1855, a motion calling for a committee of enquiry into the conduct of the war was passed by a huge majority in the House of Commons. Taking this as a thinly veiled 'vote of no confidence', Prime Minister Lord Aberdeen resigned.

Aberdeen's replacement was Lord Palmerston. Disraeli described him as an 'old painted pantaloon' and the radical Richard Cobden called him 'an exploded sham', but the wily Palmerston had experience and a reputation as an effective foreign minister. He was also better at manipulating the Press than Aberdeen had been, and was a confident orator, tough on foreign policy but also willing to question the conduct of the army in the Crimea.

The Press had unleashed its new ability to sway public opinion and to affect political change. The power of the Press was also shown in raising money for good causes. 'The Nightingale Fund' and the money raised to help Mary Seacole were indications of how the Press could mobilise the general public. After the Crimean War, politicians had to give more attention to the Press, and to the way government managed information.

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ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The influence of the media

1 a) Examine the photographs by Roger Fenton included here, and find others online and in books.

b) What are the problems facing the historian who wishes to use these as evidence for the conditions experienced by the soldiers?

c) In what ways are these photographs useful?

2 Read Sources 15 and 16. How far do these sources reveal Russell's personal view of the war?

3 What impact did Russell's writing have on the conduct of the war?

4 How important was Russell's writing in shaping opinions in Britain?

5 What is significant about the coverage of the war provided by Fenton and Russell?

ACTIVITY
SUMMARY

The Crimean War and its impact

1 What were the main problems facing the British army in the Crimea?

2 What role did the navy play in the war?

3 How much of the criticism of Raglan and other commanders was justified?

4 What impact did the work of Florence Nightingale and Mary Seacole have on the war, army reform and public opinion in Britain?

5 How important was the role of Fenton, Russell and others in reporting the war?

WIDER READING

Farmer, A. *The Experience of Warfare in Britain: Crimea, Boer and First World War 1854–1929*, Hodder (2011)

Figes, O. *Crimea,* Penguin (2011)

Rees, R. and Stewart, G. *The Experience of Warfare in Britain 1854–1929*, Pearson (2008)

Stewart, G., Lucien Jenkins, et al, *The Experience of Warfare in Britain: Crimea, Boer and First World War 1854–1929*, Collins (2012)

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