

The Crimean War (1854-1855)

Summary

For centuries, one central goal of Russian foreign policy was to obtain a warm water port in the south--namely, at the Bosphorus Straits and the Strait of the Dardanelles, the small waterways connecting the Black Sea to the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas. In 1854, the decaying Ottoman Empire controlled that essential waterway and Russia sought increased power in this region.



In 1853, the Russian rulers in St. Petersburg demanded that the Ottoman Empire recognize Russia's right to protect Eastern Orthodox Christians in Turkey. When Turkey refused, Russia sent troops into Ottoman territory. Fearing increased Russian power and an upset to the balance of power on the Continent, Great Britain and France declared war on Russia on March 28, 1854. Russia fared well against its weaker neighbor to the south, destroying the Turkish fleet off the coast of Sinope, a port city in north-central Asia Minor. However, in September 1854, the British and French laid siege to Sevastopol, Russia's heavily fortified chief naval base in the Black Sea, lying on the Crimean peninsula. After just under one year of constant battle, the Russian abandoned the fortress, blowing up their fortifications and sinking their own ships.

Meanwhile, at nearby Balaklava, British troops charged down a narrow valley that was flanked by Russian guns on both sides. Nearly every British soldier fell dead in what came to be called the Valley of Death. The name of the British group was the Light Brigade, giving rise to the famous Alfred, Lord Tennyson poem, "The Charge of the Light Brigade."

The Charge Of The Light Brigade

by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Memorializing Events in the Battle of Balaclava, October 25, 1854

Written 1854

Half a league half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred:
'Forward, the Light Brigade!
Charge for the guns' he said:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

'Forward, the Light Brigade!
Was there a man dismay'd ?
Not tho' the soldier knew
Some one had blunder'd:
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do & die,
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them
Volley'd & thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of Hell
Rode the six hundred.

Flash'd all their sabres bare,
Flash'd as they turn'd in air

Sabring the gunners there,
Charging an army while
All the world wonder'd:
Plunged in the battery-smoke
Right thro' the line they broke;
Cossack & Russian
Reel'd from the sabre-stroke,
Shatter'd & sunder'd.
Then they rode back, but not
Not the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon behind them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
While horse & hero fell,
They that had fought so well
Came thro' the jaws of Death,
Back from the mouth of Hell,
All that was left of them,
Left of six hundred.

When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!
All the world wonder'd.
Honour the charge they made!
Honour the Light Brigade,
Noble six hundred!





The Victoria Cross

The British medal of valor, the Victoria Cross, was designed by Queen Victoria herself and the metal used was from captured Russian cannons from the Crimean War.

The Lady with the Lamp – Florence Nightingale

Florence Nightingale is famous for her nursing work during the Crimean War (1854 - 56). She changed the face of nursing from a mostly untrained profession to a highly skilled and well-respected medical profession with very important responsibilities

In 1854, Florence Nightingale was asked to go to Turkey to manage the nursing of British soldiers wounded in the Crimean War (1854 - 56). She traveled to Scutari (the location where the wounded and ill soldiers of the Crimean War were taken.) She found the hospital conditions to be in a very poor state. Many of the wounded were unwashed and were sleeping in overcrowded, dirty rooms without blankets or decent food. In these conditions, diseases such as typhus, cholera and dysentery spread quickly. As a result, the death rate amongst wounded soldiers was very high, (only one in six died from their war wounds)

Florence and her nurses changed these conditions. They set up a kitchen, fed the wounded from their own supplies, dug latrines for sanitation, and asked for help from the wives of the wounded. Due to their care, the death rate among the soldiers dropped.

Florence was very dedicated to her job. She would often visit the soldiers at night when every one was asleep just to make sure they were well. She was then referred to as “**The Lady of the Lamp**” because she hardly took time off to sleep.



The End of the War

Russia's new tsar, Alexander II, called for peace in 1856. In the resulting Peace of Paris, Russia relinquished its claim as Christian protector in Turkey, the Black Sea was neutralized, and the balance of power within Europe was maintained.

Commentary

The Crimean War had the highest casualty rate of any conflict in Europe between 1815 and 1914, the century-long peace maintained by the balance of powers.

Disease killed many, but poor leadership killed thousands more. It was the final war in which the Ottoman Empire had any victorious role, though even in the Crimea, Russia fared quite well against the Turks. The greater importance of the Crimean War is embodied in one international and one national element.

In terms of European international relations, the Crimean War marked the end of the veritable charade of Russian military dominance on the Continent. Granted, the Russian army was the largest force due to its sheer numbers; however, it was soundly defeated by smaller British and French forces, and its navy proved utterly useless and backward by the middle of the nineteenth century. It was Russia who guaranteed to maintain order and balance after the defeat of the Napoleon--it did so with Austria, Prussia, and France since then. Now, that power was effectively eliminated; therefore, the demise of the balance of power could not be far behind.

On the national scale, the Crimean War, some historians have argued, marked the beginning of the road to the Russian Revolution of 1917.

Of Lighter Note -

A **balaclava**, also known as a **balaclava helmet** or **ski mask**, is a form of headgear covering the whole head, exposing only the face or upper part of it, and sometimes only the eyes. The name "balaclava" comes from the town of Balaklava, near Sevastopol in Crimea, Ukraine. During the Crimean War, knitted balaclavas were sent over to the British troops to help protect them from the bitter cold weather. They are traditionally knitted from wool, and can be rolled up into a hat to cover just the crown of the head.

