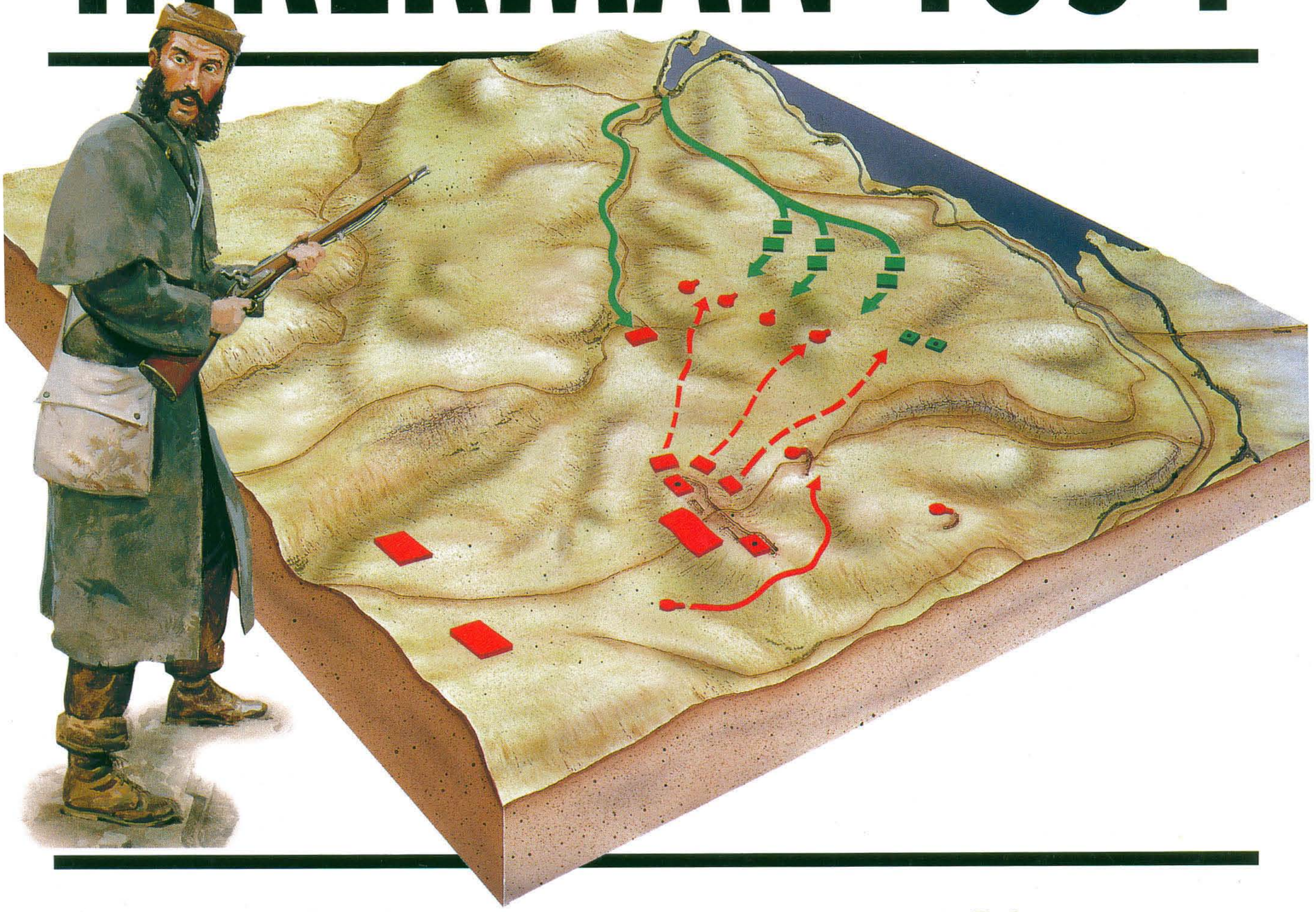
CONSULTANT EDITOR DAVID G. CHANDLER

OSPREY MILITARY

CAMPAIGN SERIES 51

INKERMAN 1854



THE SOLDIERS' BATTLE

PATRICK MERCER

OSPREY MILITARY CAMPAIGN SERIES: 51

INKERMAN 1854

THE SOLDIERS' BATTLE

SERIES EDITOR: LEE JOHNSON

OSPREY MILITARY CAMPAIGN SERIES: 51

INKERMAN 1854

THE SOLDIERS' BATTLE

WRITTEN BY PATRICK MERCER
BATTLE SCENES BY GRAHAM TURNER

OSPREY
MILITARY

First published in Great Britain in 1998 by OSPREY, a division of Reed Consumer Books, Michelin House, 81 Fulham Road, London SW3 6RB, Auckland and Melbourne

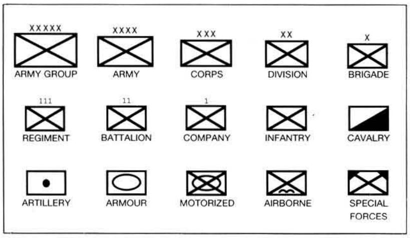
ISBN 1 85532 618 3

Editor: Sharon van der Merwe
Designer: Stuart Truscott, TT Designs

Colour bird's eye view illustrations by Peter Harper.
Cartography by Micromap.
Wargaming Inkerman by Ian Dickie
Filmset in Singapore by Pica Ltd.
Printed through World Print Ltd., Hong Kong

For further information about Osprey Military Publishing please write to:
Osprey Marketing, Michelin House, 81 Fulham Road,
London SW3 6RB

Key to military series symbols



Acknowledgements

The author would like to express his gratitude to Ian Knight, Rai England, Michael Barthop and Lt.Col. Ian Bennett for their generous help in the preparation of this book.

Publisher's Note

Readers may care to study this title in conjunction with the following Osprey publications:

Campaign 6 *Balaklava 1854*
MAA 196 *British Army on Campaign (2) 1854-56*
MAA 241 *Russian Army of the Crimean War 1854-56*

Artist's Note

Readers may care to note that the paintings from which the colour plates in this book were prepared are available for private sale. All reproduction copyright whatsoever is retained by the Publisher. All enquiries should be addressed to:

Graham Turner, 'Five Acres', Buslins Lane, Chartridge,
Bucks HP5 2SN

The Publishers regret that they can enter into no corres
upon this matter.

PAGE 2 **Capt Goodlake of the Coldstream Guards in action at Inkerman with a detachment of Guards Brigade sharpshooters. (Staff College)**

PAGE 3 **A sentry in the trenches. As numbers dwindled through disease and casualties so duties came around more frequently and exhaustion set in. Things were made no easier by the unusually wet autumn and subsequent harsh winter. (Wood)**

CONTENTS

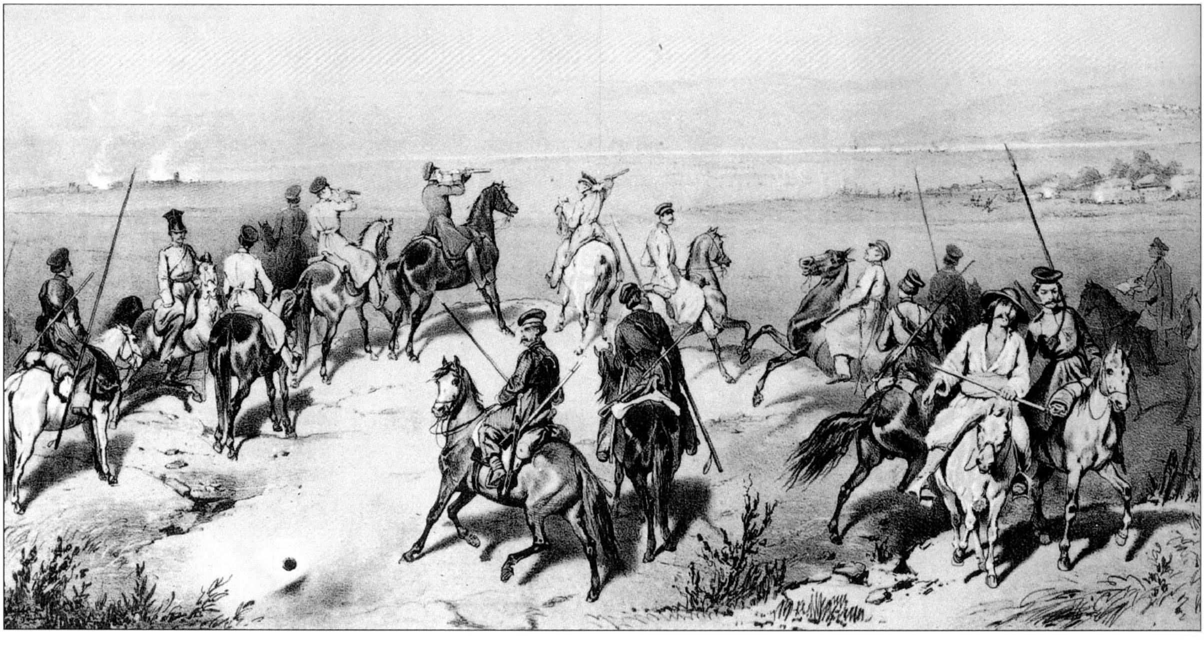
ORIGINS OF THE WAR

CASUS BELLI

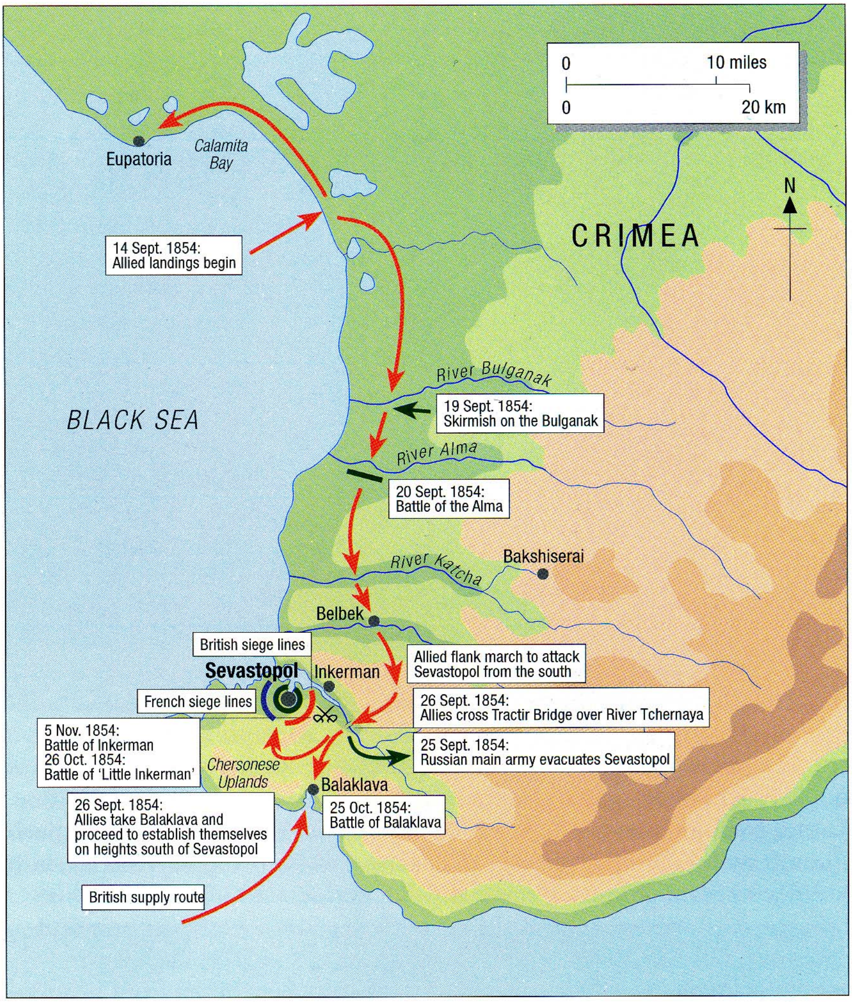
After the end of the Napoleonic Wars Europe's great powers manoeuvred to re-establish the political status quo. The most powerful nation to emerge was Great Britain, but, under the leadership of Louis Napoleon, France sought to further her cause, this time in alliance with Britain. Russia under Tsar Nicholas I had become increasingly bellicose in search of a warm water port and access to the Mediterranean. The so-called 'Eastern Question' – the problems raised by the weakness of the Ottoman Turkish empire – was of deep concern to all three. Turkey's Ottoman empire bordered Russian territories, was contiguous to France's North African empire and dominated the overland route to British possessions in India and the East. Furthermore, Turkey provided a crucial counterweight to the potential Russian threat to India via Persia or Afghanistan, a threat which had materialised with the Afghan War of 1839–42. Britain, therefore, traditionally supported the sultan in order to prevent the disintegration of the Ottoman empire.

Turkey and Russia's nearest, mutual and most powerful neighbour was Austria. While Austria found any Russian expansion into Turkish territories across the Lower Danube and into the Balkans difficult to contemplate with any enthusiasm, the fact that the tsar had restored the

Russian cavalry, a mixture of lancers and Cossacks, provide an escort for General Gortchakov and his staff during a reconnaissance of Turkish positions on the Danube in July 1854. (Author's collection)



AREA OF OPERATIONS



14 Sept. 1854: Allied landings begin

19 Sept. 1854: Skirmish on the Bulganak

20 Sept. 1854: Battle of the Alma

British siege lines

French siege lines

Allied flank march to attack Sevastopol from the south

26 Sept. 1854: Allies cross Tractir Bridge over River Tchernaya

25 Sept. 1854: Russian main army evacuates Sevastopol

5 Nov. 1854: Battle of Inkerman
26 Oct. 1854: Battle of 'Little Inkerman'

26 Sept. 1854: Allies take Balaklava and proceed to establish themselves on heights south of Sevastopol

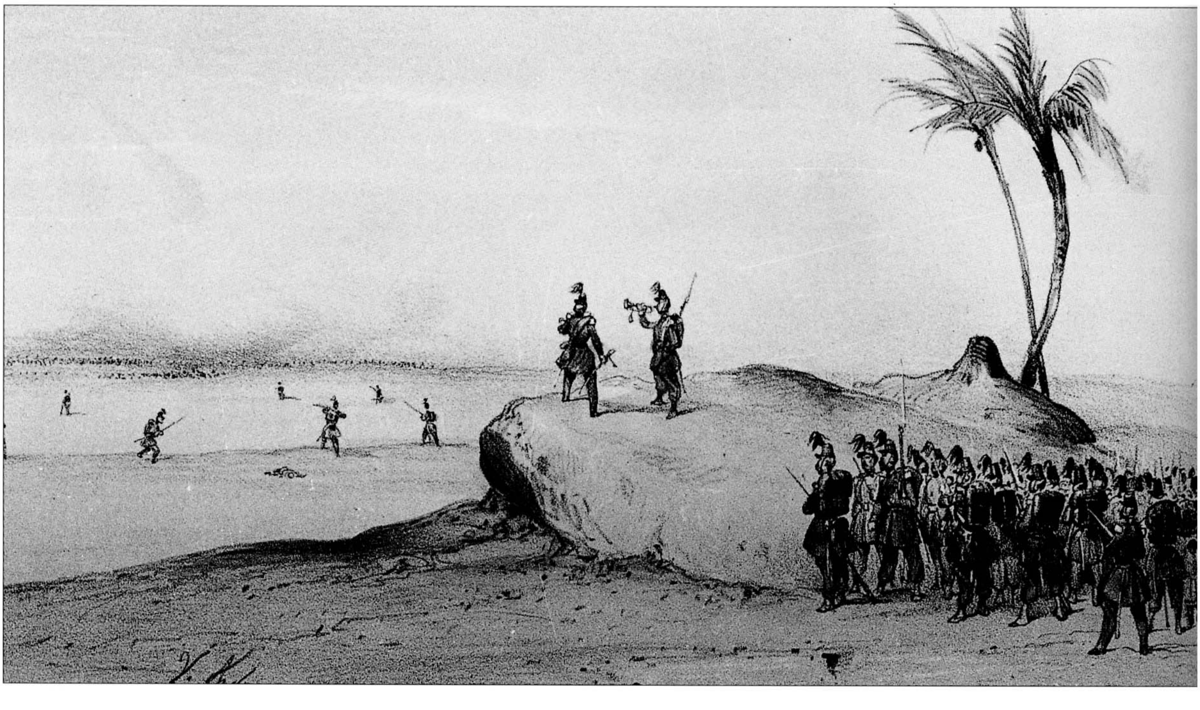
25 Oct. 1854: Battle of Balaklava

British supply route

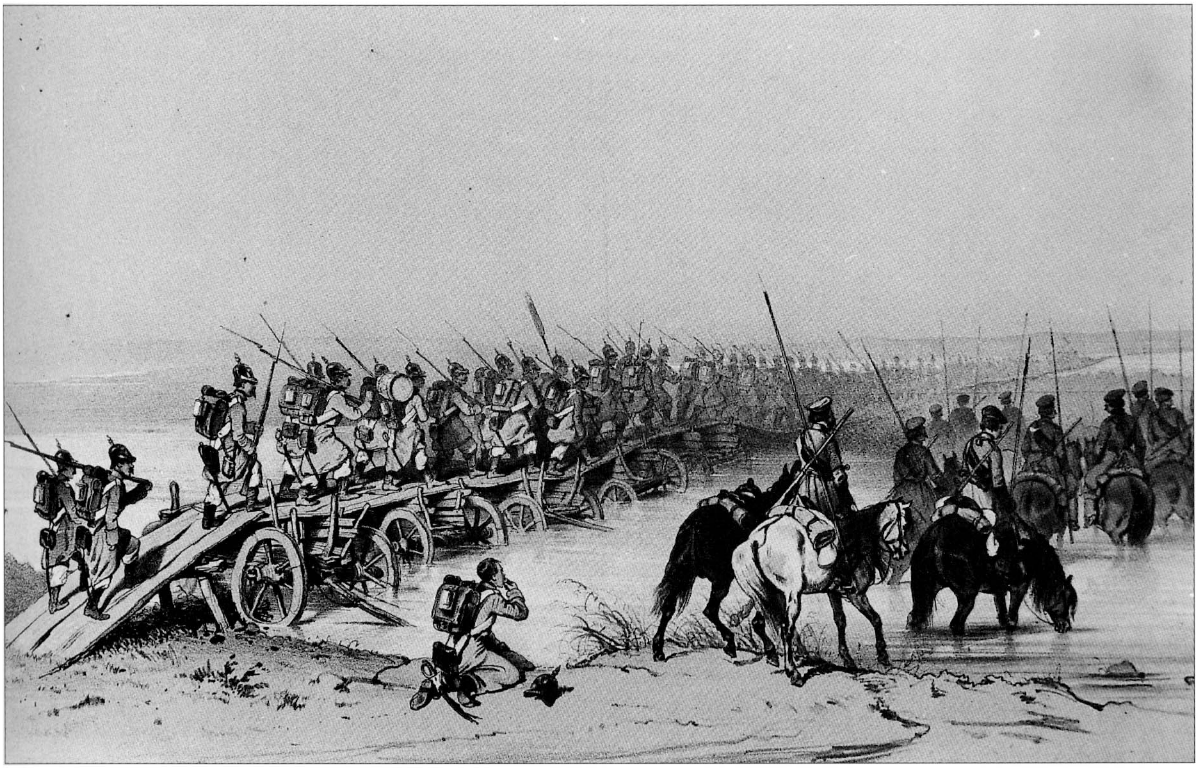
Hungarian kingdom to the young emperor Franz Joseph effectively neutralised Austrian opposition. Similarly, while Prussia was emerging as a power to be reckoned with, the country had no direct interest in the Eastern Question, and her king was related to the tsar by marriage. Therefore, if Russia were to expand and increase her international prestige at the expense of Turkey, the tsar had only to come to some arrangement with Britain and France. The former seemed the more likely to co-operate and stood to gain by any division of Turkish territories. In addition, both Britain and Russia were alarmed by Louis Napoleon's assumption of near dictatorial powers after the coup of 1851; a new Bonapartist imperialism seemed to be taking shape.

Grafted on to the tsar's territorial ambitions was the vexed question of the 13 million Greek Orthodox subjects of the Turks. The tsar saw himself as both their protector and their eventual liberator, having already fought Turkey in 1829 after Greece's independence from Turkey in that same year. The victories of Tsar Nicholas had not only won him influence in this quasi-religious question, but they had also left him with a pretext for further agitation as the need or desire arose. The spark came in 1850 when Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox monks quarrelled over matters of precedence in the holy places of Bethlehem and Jerusalem, both within the Ottoman empire. The Catholics sought the intercession of Louis Napoleon with the sultan, while the Orthodox monks appealed to the tsar. After much wrangling, the sultan found in favour of the Catholics in December 1852, thus infuriating the tsar.

In the tsar's view, the time was now ripe to precipitate the dismemberment of the Ottoman empire. In early 1853 he approached London and reminded the prime minister, Lord Aberdeen, of the agreement they had reached in 1844. Despite the tsar's promise to cede Egypt to Britain in return for support, Lord Aberdeen remained lukewarm. The tsar misjudged this meeting, as he had done almost a decade before, and did not appreciate that British views were hardening in the light of hostile despatches from the influential British ambassador in Turkey. He sent his own emissary to Turkey to deliver ultimata, and took for granted tacit British support. The sultan, with support from the British ambassador, Redcliffe, refused the Russian demands for both the restoration of the Orthodox monks' privileges and for a Russian protectorate over all Christians within the Ottoman empire, further incensing the tsar. Despite the dispatch of British warships to the Dardanelles to join a French squadron already there, the tsar threatened to re-occupy the Danubian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia unless the Turks agreed to his demands. Encouraged by the reassuring presence of the warships, the sultan again refused. On 3 July 1853 Russian troops occupied the principalities. Despite Austria's attempts at mediation via a conference in Vienna, Turkey declared war on Russia on 5 October, but on 30 November suffered a humiliating blow to her navy at Sinope. Under the command of Admiral Nachimov, who was later to distinguish himself in the Crimea, the Russian Black Sea fleet destroyed a Turkish



French infantry carry out manoeuvres during the pause at Varna. The original caption reads, 'Will they come close enough for us to strike?' (Author's collection)



A rare depiction of Russian infantry in the field. Here, in operations against the Turks on the Danube, a small water obstacle is crossed using an improvised bridge of carts. Note the furled battalion colour in the centre of the column. (Author's collection)

squadron at anchor, killing 4,000 Turkish seamen in the process.

The immediate effect of Sinope was to make Britain's divided coalition cabinet act. All that it had been able to agree upon to date was that British ships could remain in support of the French off Constantinople. Public opinion, however, was becoming increasingly jingoistic and vocal and this, combined with French pressure, made the government agree to a French plan to deploy a combined naval force into the Black Sea and to dispatch troops to the Mediterranean where they would be better placed for action. In March 1854 an Anglo-French ultimatum was sent to St Petersburg demanding the Russian evacuation of the Danubian principalities. When no reply was forthcoming, Britain and France declared war on 27 and 28 March 1854.

MOVING TO WAR

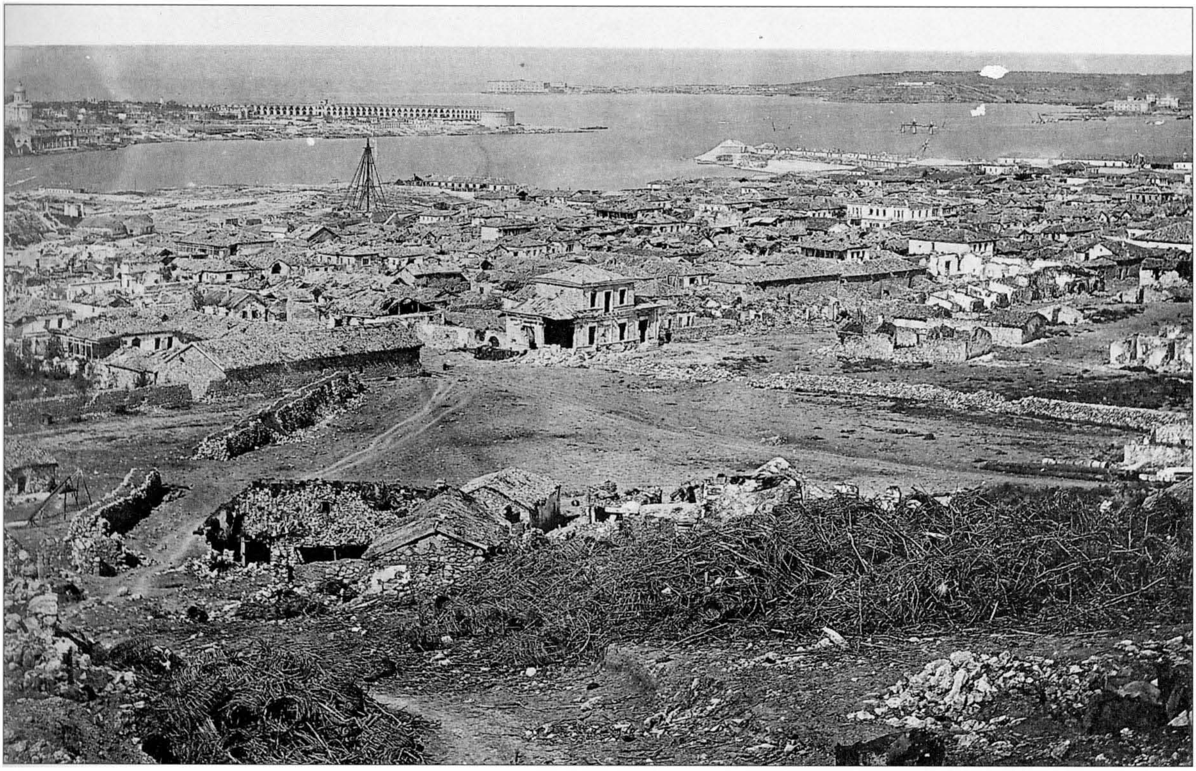
By May 1854 the fighting between the Russians and the Turks was warming up after a winter of inactivity. Taking the offensive, the Russians besieged the fortresses of Silistria and Shumla on the Danube. Allied forces, meanwhile, had landed at Gallipoli and then in June advanced to Varna, on the west coast of the Black Sea in Bulgaria, to support the Turks fighting on the Danube. Tsar Nicholas had hoped for a quick and decisive victory which would lead to a rapid Turkish capitulation, thus negating the presence of the Allies. But the Turks held out well in Silistria, and much against the tsar's expectations, the Austrians moved 50,000 troops up to their border and required the Russians to leave the principalities. Beset by difficulties, with no prospect of an easy victory and with the threat of Austria joining the Coalition, the tsar withdrew his forces on 2 August, removing any reason for the Allies to remain in the Black Sea.

To see the issue in such simple terms, however, would be to ignore the very powerful forces and emotions which had caused the dispatch of British and French forces in the first place. These transcended monkish squabbles and had more to do with the desire of the Allies to maintain the status quo and to remove the threat of a more powerful Russia from the international scene. Since the time of Catherine the Great, the Black Sea fleet and its port of Sevastopol had been a symbol of Russian ambition and a threat to both Turkey and the Mediterranean. Indeed, this very fleet had carried out the 'massacre' at Sinope which had so inflamed British public opinion; it now lay within striking distance of an Allied force which had been assembled at great expense. Worse, it now seemed that the Allied fleet was on the verge of being sent home without firing a shot. In the face of pressure from the press, Britain and France conferred and agreed that their forces would land in the Crimea and reduce Sevastopol.

Little account seems to have been taken of the views of the Allied commanders. Boredom and disease had blunted the edge of their forces during their time in Turkey and Bulgaria, and they welcomed any move.

RIGHT **Sevastopol from the south-east. This picture gives a good feel for the city from the outer line of the Russian defences. Note Fort Constantine and the Quarantine Battery guarding the approach to the harbour. (Staff College)**

The unopposed landings at Kalamita Bay on 14 September. The artist correctly shows the British troops without their knapsacks; all of their kit had to be carried in an improvised blanket roll and it proved to be many weeks before the balance of their equipment was seen again. (Clifford)

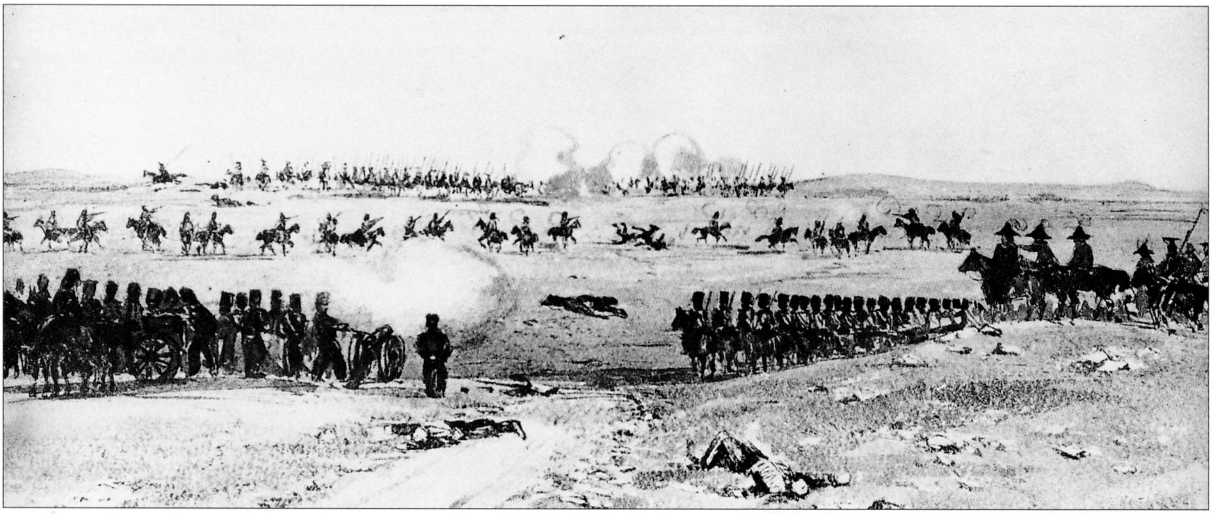


But maps and detailed intelligence of the Crimea and the forces it contained were sadly lacking, despite naval reconnaissance of potential landing places. Indeed, the selection of the landing place was to prove to be one of the most fundamental Allied mistakes of the campaign, for they chose to land well north of Sevastopol, at Kalamita Bay, rather than to the south of the city from where a speedy assault could be mounted. So, from the start, the Allies were always going to face an approach march to their objective which would, at best, betray their intentions and, at worst, allow the enemy to bring them to battle before they were within striking distance of their prize. On 14 September, however, some 30,000 French, 27,000 British and 7,000 Turks made an unopposed landing in the Crimea. They were in high spirits and spoiling for a fight with the months of frustration and tedium at last behind them.

Prince Menshikov, Commander-in-Chief, Crimea. After his failure at the Alma and his much criticised handling of the Black Sea fleet's resources in the defence of Sevastopol, Menshikov seems to have had no confidence that his plan of attack at Inkerman would succeed. (RMAS)

THE ALMA

Russian preparations to meet the Allied invasion had been patchy. Under the direction of the statesman turned amateur soldier, Prince Menshikov, few serious preparations had been made and, indeed, it seems that despite ample evidence of Allied naval reconnaissance, he was reluctant to believe that the Allied blow would fall on the Crimea at all. Defences had been thrown up around those that already existed in Sevastopol, and once it became clear that the Allies would land well to the north of the city, Menshikov elected to meet his enemies on the natural defensive line of the River Alma, some 14 miles to the north of Sevastopol. From 14 September Russian forces began to arrive at the



The inconclusive skirmish between British and Russian cavalry on the Bulganak on 19 September. (Clifford)

Within a short space of time the parade-ground appearance of the British infantry had given way to a form of dress more appropriate to campaigning. Shakos were soon abandoned, shaving was forbidden and, in most divisions, the hated leather stock that was worn around the neck was discarded. (Wood)

Alma, but beyond the creation of two strong batteries which covered the main bridge over the river and the north-eastern flank of the Russian position, no attempt was made to entrench an already strong position. The Russians correctly realised that the Allies would try to advance south with their right flank hard against the shoreline under the protection of the fleet's guns, and that they would be reluctant to stray too far inland and sacrifice the support of the ships. Accordingly, their left flank was positioned in such a way as to be either out of range or in dead ground to the ships' guns. The cliffs next to the sea appeared to be impassable to infantry and guns. However, Menshikov's planning (for it was he, almost single handed, who sited the position) was faulty, and he made no attempt to strengthen this vital flank. The centre of the Russian position opposite the bridge and the village of Bourliouk was well sited, however, with the redoubts dug at the optimum range from the river for canister shot. The ranges were carefully marked by posts topped with straw which could be lit at the critical moment by retreating skirmishers.

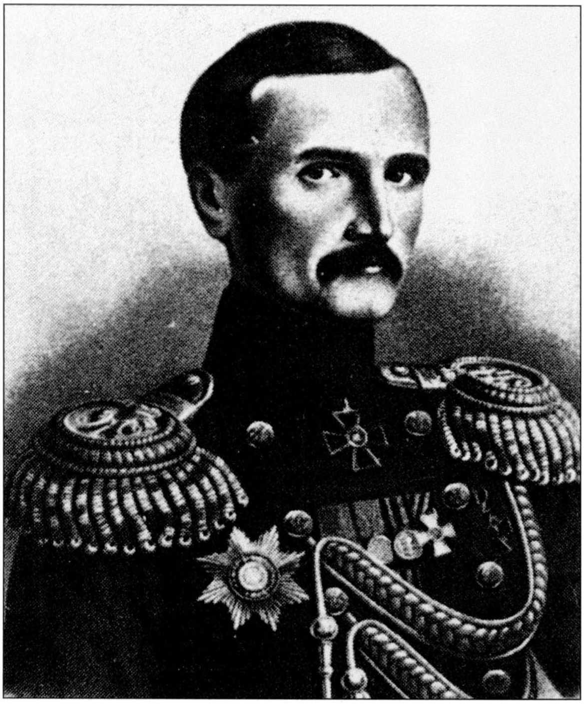
After an inconclusive clash between the Russian and British light cavalry on the line of the River Bulganak, the Allies advanced and spent the night of 19 September camped opposite the Russian positions above the Alma. Battle on 20 September was inevitable, and after remarkably little consultation or joint planning, the Allies advanced to the river at about midday. The French were aligned on the right next to the sea, with the British inland on the left. It was intended that Saint-Arnaud's infantry would push forward, gain the apparently unprotected cliff tops and then turn the Russian left flank. What the British, opposite the Russian centre and right, were to do was not planned in detail beyond an assurance from Raglan that he would respond to the needs of the French as the battle developed.

French casualties were light, despite the ferocity of the Russian cannonade, and they rapidly reached the tops of the cliffs and began to threaten the Russian left, which quickly became confused. Here, however, the French attack began to falter as they found it difficult to get guns up the cliff paths in time to exploit their infantry's initial success. The message was passed to the British to advance in order to distract the enemy from the French's imagined plight. Without pause to consider

A fanciful depiction of the moment of victory at the Alma as Highlanders and Guardsmen seize the heights. Curiously, every artist's impression shows the Russian positions on mountainous ground. In fact, the land rises fairly gently on the south side of the river to a series of rolling hillocks. (Staff College)

manoeuvre or any attempt to outflank, Raglan committed his troops to a river crossing under fire and then an advance up a coverless, 600-yard slope into the primary arcs of the enemy's artillery. Casualties were understandably heavy, but the main position, the Great Redoubt, was taken by the first dash of the Light Division supported by elements of the 2nd Division. These troops were driven back by a counterattack, but the position was re-captured and held by the Guards and Highland brigades. With their left turned under enfilade fire from French artillery, and with their centre pierced, the Russians broke and streamed away to the south and Sevastopol.

While some of the enemy were in good order, many were not. The Allies had the chance to turn the retreat into a rout by unleashing their slender, but fresh, cavalry. Indeed, a rapid advance on Sevastopol would have found the city's defences in disarray and morale pitifully low after a defeat which the Russians had simply never contemplated. Instead, the Allies dithered on the Alma; the cavalry and horse artillery were recalled and all efforts were concentrated on dealing with the injured. Casualties were numerous: 362 British had been killed and 1,621 wounded, but there were over 6,000 Russian casualties. For many British this was their first taste of action, and the experience was sobering. Few had realised what damage their Minie rifles would create among the densely packed Russian columns. Fewer (perhaps fortunately) reflected upon the lack of generalship that had caused so many of their comrades to fall. Many, however, began to appreciate the mettle of the regiments and individual soldiers who had stormed a formidable position in the teeth of such opposition.



Vice-Admiral Kornilov, with Nachimov, one of the principal architects of the defence of Sevastopol. He was to die from a sharpshooter's bullet in the Malakoff on 28 June 1855. (RMAS)

ESTABLISHING THE SIEGE

Spirits rose only slowly in Sevastopol and there was much disagreement between the stalwart sailors, Nachimov and Kornilov, and Menshikov over how the city should be defended. The port is effectively divided in two by a large roadstead, with the docks and naval base to the south. Under the guidance of Colonel Todleban, defences were growing by the day around the southern part of the city. After much debate, it was decided that the largely sail-powered Russian fleet would be no match for the steam-driven elements of the Allied navies and that resources would be better dedicated to the defence of the city by land. Accordingly, a line of block ships was sunk across the harbour mouth (some of which were still fully armed and victualled, so intense had been the argument about how best to use them), guns were dismounted from ships and their crews put ashore to man them. Menshikov, his prestige severely dented by the Alma, marched the bulk of his troops eastwards beyond the valley of the River Tchernaya where, he reasoned, he might threaten the flank of the Allies and remain in a position to be reinforced from the rest of the Crimea.

The Allies were only now beginning to appreciate how difficult their position was. Having been mauled at the Alma, and equipped with poor intelligence, their commanders were increasingly cautious. They realised that they simply did not have enough men to besiege Sevastopol properly while at the same time maintaining their lines of communication and protecting their flanks and rear. Furthermore, they were in the wrong position to launch attacks against the southern half of their objective. The Allied positions were to the north of the city, while the harbours which they would need for supply were to the west and south. The only solution was to march to the east of Sevastopol, out of range and succour of the fleet and vulnerable to any Russian force at large within the interior. From there they would have to seize the ports of Balaklava and Kamiesch.

So with the so-called 'Flank March' the Allies swept around the east and south of Sevastopol, establishing the French in the west against the sea, and the British in the east on the open flank. The Russians, however, succeeded in keeping open a route from the city parallel to the roadstead, across the Tchernaya and into the interior of the Crimea, and this inevitably limited the effect of the siege. Indeed, one of the few pragmatic precautions taken by the Russians before the arrival of the Allies was to improve this route by the construction of a sturdy road which was labelled the Sapper Road by the British. The fact that the Allies allowed their enemy to keep this road open and in constant use seems incomprehensible. It was overlooked by the extreme right of the British above Inkerman and could surely have been blocked. Two things prevented this, however. First, there were not enough men to perform all the duties that the siege required, and any attempt to block the road

Officers and men of 6th (Inniskilling) Dragoons, one of the regiments of the Heavy Cavalry Brigade.
(M A Hayes, RDG Collection)

would have been met be severe resistance. Secondly, any force positioned to overlook the road would have been immediately vulnerable to the guns of the Russian warships, which were kept in the extreme eastern part of the harbour. Thus the Russians were able to keep open an artery vital to their existence and which was to play a major part in the battle of Inkerman.

Despite the advantages of the deep and sheltered harbour of Balaklava, it was some seven miles from the British siege lines and was threatened by the Russian forces outside Sevastopol. Two lines of defences were thrown up to protect its approaches. The inner lines consisted of a number of earthworks and improvements to the existing Russian fortifications. The outer line was a series of redoubts built along the Woronzoff Road on the knolls which came to be known as the Causeway Heights and which dominated the two shallow valleys which made up the Balaklava Plain. The redoubts were given guns and manned by Turkish garrisons and one British gunner NCO each. Additionally, both the Heavy and Light Cavalry brigades were encamped close to Balaklava in an attempt to make up for the paucity of numbers by speed of manoeuvre. The port itself was garrisoned by Royal Marines, sailors and one battalion of infantry, the 93rd Highlanders, stationed a little way outside in the village of Kadikoi.

While the British were aware of the weakness of their lines of communication and their right flank above Inkerman, all their energies, in

Life for sentries in the trenches was initially novel but very quickly became both dull and enervating. As numbers dwindled through disease and casualties so duties came around more frequently and exhaustion set in. Things were made no easier by the unusually wet autumn and subsequent harsh winter. (Wood)

common with the French, were directed towards the siege. Conscious that they had missed an opportunity to assault Sevastopol after the Alma, and with evidence growing daily of the city's improved defences and stiffened resolve, the Allies began digging entrenchments and parallels from 9 October. However, by this date Sevastopol's garrison had been increased to 25,000 men, and a four-mile semi-circular line of defence had been constructed which connected six, well-armed bastions crewed by the expert gunners of the Black Sea fleet. On 17 October 73 British and 53 French guns began to bombard the city in earnest, and were later supported by the naval guns. Sevastopol was badly damaged and Kornilov was killed, but two French magazines exploded which prevented their supporting the British effort the next day. The day after the French opened fire again, but after a week it became clear that the best efforts of the Allies to level the defences during the day could not equal the Russians' capacity to repair their damaged works by night. Breaches were not only repaired, but often improved, literally overnight. By 24 October the Allies had made very little progress and, worse still, they had begun to get a taste of winter on the windswept uplands.

BALAKLAVA

To add to the misery, Raglan had begun to hear rumours that extensive reinforcements were gathering beyond the River Tchernaya. Spies spoke of 25,000 men massed to attack Balaklava, but little was done either to verify the intelligence or to prepare for the attack. So, on the morning of 25 October when General Liprandi arrived with 25 fresh Russian battalions, 35 squadrons and 78 guns (the fabled 25,000 men) to advance on Balaklava with a view to cutting off the British from their port, few were ready to meet the attack.

Four redoubts fell very quickly and the Russians poured into North Valley. To their frustration, both cavalry brigades were ordered to withdraw from the fray and await the arrival of the 1st and 4th Divisions which Raglan had ordered up. Cambridge's troops moved smartly, but Cathcart's 4th Division vacillated and lost valuable time. There seems little doubt that the division's sloth was due entirely to the whim of its commander (who was to behave equally oddly at Inkerman), and it allowed the Russians to exploit a tactical advantage. With the cavalry

The stand of the 93rd Highlanders on 25 October, the 'Thin Red Line'. The number of casualties which the 93rd's three volleys inflicted has been much debated. However, they served to thwart the Russian cavalry's thrust towards Balaklava. (Orlando Norie, A & SH collection)