

Crimean War (1854 to 1856)

In the years preceding the Crimean War, Britain, France and Russia were all competing for power in the Middle East, especially in the Ottoman Empire (ruled by Turkey). One of the sparks to start the war was religious differences. Rioting took place in Bethlehem, which was part of the Ottoman Empire, as a result of disagreements of access controls to religious sites in the Holy Land, which had been disputed by Orthodox Russia and Catholic France.

What Happened and When

This is a very simple timeline, but will give you a flavour of events and when they happened.

1853 In May, Tsar Nicholas I delivered an ultimatum to the Turkish government, demanding that the Orthodox Church have control of the Holy Land sites. This was refused and so in July, the Russian army was sent in to Moldavia and Walachia, which are part of present-day Romania. In October, the Ottoman Empire declared war on Russia.

1854 Britain became concerned that its shipping routes to India would be cut off if the Balkans were occupied and with France, declared war on Russia during March of that year. During the summer, the forces of Britain and France advanced by ship and landed on the north coast of the Black Sea at the Crimean Peninsula.

September 20th saw the Battle of the River Alma in which Britain and France were successful and the Russian forces withdrew to Sevastopol soon afterwards. The next month, the Allied forces began the siege of Sevastopol, a key Russian position on Black Sea.

The Russians tried to break the siege by attacking the British at Balaklava on 25th October, where the British sustained heavy casualties. Tennyson's poem, The Charge of the Light Brigade tells the story of the battle that took place.

A couple of weeks later, on November 5th, the Russians tried to break the siege again by attacking the Allies on the ridges of Mount Inkerman, but were unsuccessful.

1854/55 The fighting was stopped during the harsh winter that ensued. By this time, Florence Nightingale and her nurses were helping the casualties by setting up a hospital at Scutari.

1855 March 2nd saw the death of Tsar Nicholas and so Alexander II became Tsar of Russia. One of his first actions was to start making moves to try to negotiate an end to the war, albeit unsuccessfully.

On September 8th, French troops took and held the Malakhov fortress, a major strongpoint in the Russian defences and 3 days later, the Russians blew up the forts and evacuated Sevastopol.

1856 On January 29th, Queen Victoria signed the Royal Warrant instigating the Victoria Cross, and approved a specimen Victoria Cross on 3rd March of the same year.

The Treaty of Paris was finally signed on March 30th, formally ending hostilities.

Where are the Records Kept?

Although there is no significant collection of records available online, some commercial websites do have a few. However, there are some records held by different County Archives and so it would be best to check out their holdings. In their War Office collection, the National Archives at Kew hold Commanders' Dispatches (1854-56).

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If you would like advice about where to find further information about the Crimean War and are not sure where to look, someone else might be able to help you. Register for FREE at <http://www.genealogy-specialists.com/> and post your query. The members will be delighted to try to help you.

If you would like to discover more about the Crimean War, listed below are some products that will certainly help you to understand, and all of them are available from [www.parishchest.com](http://www.parishchest.com). Just pop the reference number in the website search box to see the details:

- Military History Sources for Family Historians: The Crimean War 1854-56 Ref: NWA-OHM32
- The Crimean War 1854-56 Ref: FHP-055
- The Life of Florence Nightingale 1913 Ref: ARB-0994
- The Victoria Cross Ref: VMS-03
- The Victorian Soldier Ref: VMS-02