

Far Flung Lines

*Studies in Imperial Defence in Honour of
Donald Mackenzie Schurman*



Edited by
**Keith Neilson and
Greg Kennedy**

FAR-FLUNG LINES

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 Studies in Imperial Defence in Honour of Donald Mackenzie Schurman
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Essays on Imperial Defence
in Honour of
Donald Mackenzie Schurman

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GREG KENNEDY and KEITH NEILSON

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Publisher's Note

The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint
but points out that some imperfections in the original may be apparent.

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David French has a personal chair at University College, London. His most recent book is *The Strategy of the Lloyd George Coalition*, published by Oxford University Press.

Greg Kennedy is completing his PhD at the University of Alberta. He is the author of several articles on British, American and Canadian maritime power in the 20th century.

Nicholas Lambert is a graduate of Oxford University and the author of numerous articles on the Royal Navy from 1880 to 1914.

Keith Neilson teaches history at the Royal Military College of Canada. His work, *Britain and the Last Tsar* was published by Oxford University Press last year.

Karl Revells received his PhD from Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, under the tutelage of Donald Schurman. He teaches in Montgomery, Alabama.

Introduction

GREG KENNEDY AND KEITH NEILSON

The study of British imperial defence has been badly served over the past forty years. In 1955, a rich school, full of promise, populated by such men as Bryan Tunstall, Gerald Graham and the young Donald Mackenzie Schurman seemed poised to take the subject to a higher plane. Despite their best efforts, the writing of imperial defence suffered a decline as precipitous as the collapse of the British Empire itself. What follows is a tribute to Donald Schurman, one of the major practitioners of this lost school, and an attempt to reposition the school itself where it rightfully belongs: at the centre of debate concerning Britain's position as a great power.

Why did the older approach, epitomized by Schurman's work, become unfashionable?¹ The reasons are complex, and stem from the end of empire itself. After 1945, with the very concept of empire under attack from within by rising nationalism and from without by theories of imperialism and social history that stressed the importance of periphery over the centre and the less liberal aspects of the white man's burden, empire became a dirty word.² The new imperial history epitomized by Ronald Robinson and Jack Gallagher had a splintering effect: deprived of their metropole, which was castigated as unimportant economically and morally deficient, studies of the British Empire became local studies, detached from the whole and lacking the context that the Empire provided.³ A second reason came from Britain's diminished role in the world. The end of the British Empire seemed to be a logical corollary of the rise of the superpowers. This was inevitably tied into a literature on the rise and fall of Great Britain, which portrayed the Empire as a passing phenomenon, doomed to extinction by Britain's relative economic decline.⁴ Taken together with a vague notion that Britain's ruling elite had somehow lost the will to maintain the Empire, these explanations relegated studies of the Empire as a vibrant institution to the dustbin of history.

Other global events also had their impact: two world wars fought by Britain against Germany led historians down a blind alley, one that relegated imperial defence to the peripheries of both history and the study of history. In the rush to find explanations for the military events of the first half of the twentieth century, a 'continentalist' analysis of British power, at the expense of imperial defence, was perhaps inevitable.⁵ And, when two world wars against Germany were followed by the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the British Army of the Rhine, the entire concept of imperial defence seemed increasingly quaint. The British effort to maintain the Empire, especially after

India became independent and was no longer the jewel in the crown, seemed an irrelevancy when the fate of the world apparently was being decided in Europe by the United States and the Soviet Union.

The inevitable consequence of this was that graduate students flocked—pushed by the trade winds of funding and ‘relevancy’—to the more fashionable approaches to British defence policy advocated by such historians as Michael Howard, Brian Bond and, later, Paul Kennedy. These young scholars wrote books in which the words ‘empire and imperial defence’ took on a different meaning. As this movement caught the tide of the expansion of universities in the halcyon days of the 1960s and 1970s, it produced works that threatened to exorcise the ‘old’ school of imperial history from the canon. The lessons of Corbett, Laughton, Knox, the Colomb brothers, Richmond, the intellectual founts of British naval and imperial history, that clearly demonstrated the undeniable ties between commerce, diplomacy, finance, national will and military and naval power, were ignored.⁶

A second consequence was the decline of naval history. As the Royal Navy had existed to serve and protect the British Empire, when the latter was deemed a matter not to be discussed in polite society, studies of the navy reduced themselves to battle accounts, operational histories, examinations of technological minutiae and great-man biography.⁷ At their very best, such studies were aimed at explaining how Britain prepared for war and fought against Germany: the naval race, steam and continuing technological change, blockade, convoy, Jutland, main fleet to Singapore and the great betrayal became the only prototypes for naval writing. Lost were the connections between diplomacy and naval force, imperial requirements and command of the sea, economics and imperial defence. In the shadow of the Battle of the Atlantic, Pearl Harbor, the sinking of the *Repulse* and the *Prince of Wales*, Midway and Operation Overlord, Mahanian dogma regarding command of the sea—itself a derivative of Clausewitz and Jomini’s pernicious emphasis on land warfare—became paramount. The subtler vision of a British way in warfare, espoused by such imperial thinkers as Corbett, was lost.

The essays that follow join together the separated aspects of what was once encompassed within imperial history. They deal with the relationships between domestic politics and defence; the links between diplomacy, economics and finance; the need to maintain imperial communications to defend imperial frontiers; the adaptations in strategy caused by technological advances; the changes in the mechanisms for strategic planning; and the interconnections between perceptions and policy.

It is the latter theme that is the subject of Karl Revells’ look at the Crimean War. Revells reinforces much of what recent scholarship has said about that conflict, but emphasizes the way in which the faulty perceptions of the efficacy of naval power—the legacy of Trafalgar—held by the political elite in Britain muddled the imperial strategy of the naval professionals.⁸ John Beeler, starting with the *loci classici* provided by Schurman and Tunstall, traces the develop-

ment of imperial defence strategy in a period of rapid and profound technological and ideological change. The adaptation to steam and the protection of free trade churned up a number of specialists whose views of the future were listened to, often with scepticism, by both government and defence professionals. For both Beeler and Revells, personality and ideas were at the centre of imperial events.

Nicholas Lambert, utilizing archives on three continents, shows how the Empire itself played into imperial defence. Focusing on the Far East before the First World War, Lambert reveals the complex relationship between Britain and her Pacific Dominions—Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Lambert clearly demonstrates that Britain was willing to share the strategic planning in the Far East with the Dominions if they were willing to accept the responsibility of helping to defend their own interests. While not a master-servant relationship, clearly Britain held the central position in this pre-Commonwealth defence partnership, especially in naval matters.

The First World War posed new problems for imperialists. The rise of new powers, such as the United States, not only created threats to the existing Empire itself but also made it necessary to factor their strength into the new equation for post-war imperial defence. David French speaks directly to this matter. Would the anti-imperial United States prove to be more than a temporary, wartime 'associated power', or would it be only, as the Second World War revealed, an 'ally of a kind'?⁹ Coupled with the rise of new peripheral powers came the collapse of other existing empires—particularly the Ottoman and Russian ones. This provided new opportunities and imperatives for the expansion of the British Empire. However, this expansion created the possibility of imperial overstretch, replete with its own dangers. In his examination of imperial defence in India and the Middle East, Keith Neilson confirms that imperial defence was considered against all comers, including wartime allies.

In the environment of pacifism and disarmament that followed the First World War, imperial defence faced enemies from without and within. John Ferris links naval strategy, political will and economic and industrial capability to suggest why the Royal Navy's ability to defend the Empire rested on a fragile base. Pared to the bone by those who believed that the Great War had ushered in an era of peace and harmony through international co-operation for security, the Royal Navy maintained its supremacy only by tying its building programmes to domestic stability. Its mission, however, remained as it had always been: the defence of the far-flung lines of the Empire. This was not the only way that the Royal Navy ensured that it could survive and still fulfil its tasks. Orest Babij illustrates that the professional heads of the Royal Navy had a surprising suppleness in their dealings with their political and public masters. Realizing that their maximum demands for ships could never be granted in the existing political climate, the sea lords negotiated shrewdly and ruthlessly in order to maintain what they perceived to be the essential sinews of empire: a navy second to none.

Tying together many of the themes touched on above, Greg Kennedy traces the complex web of British imperial policy in the Far East in 1935. British imperial defence and economic interests in that region were dependent upon maintaining a subtle balance between the regional realities, great power politics and imperial imperatives. Kennedy's piece thus illustrates a central tenet of British imperial defence: the differences between the defence policy of an empire and that of a sovereign nation state.

All of the above would come as no surprise to Donald Schurman. Schurman's approach to imperial defence was, above all, an intellectual one. His concentration on individuals, their ideas and the institutional memory that ensured that these ideas became part of British imperial defence policy shaped his writing and teaching. Donald is an 'ideas man' in all aspects of his life. Lesser-known aspects of his scholarly career, at least to those who think him primarily a naval historian, are his work on the Disraeli project and his writings on the Anglican church in Canada.¹⁰ In both of these endeavours, his unique approach to history—the study of personality and ideology—are evident. This methodology has permeated the study of naval history in Canada, for Donald was the founder of the serious study of maritime history in that country from his posts at Queen's University and the Royal Military College of Canada.¹¹ On either side of the Rideau, as well as on both sides of the Atlantic, Donald Mackenzie Schurman has made an indelible mark on his chosen field. It is the editors' pleasure and honour to present what follows as a tribute to and acknowledgement of his contribution to scholarship.

NOTES

1. Schurman has made his own partial explanation, see his 'Imperial Naval Defence: Then and Now', in K. Neilson and E.J. Errington (eds), *Navies and Global Defence* (Hamden, CN, 1995), pp 9–23.
2. There is a nice typology in John Darwin, *The End of the British Empire* (London, 1991). For an excellent historiographical discussion and debate, P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism. Innovation and Expansion 1688–1914* (London, 1993), pp 5–17.
3. J. Gallagher and R. E. Robinson, 'The Imperialism of 'Free Trade' *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 6 (1953).
4. This sort of thinking is epitomized by Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York, 1987); Correlli Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power* (London, 1972); Aaron Friedberg, *The Weary Titan. Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895–1905* (Princeton, 1988); Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share. A Short History of British Imperialism 1850–1970* (London, 1975); Keith Robbins, *The Eclipse of a Great Power. Modern Britain 1870–1975* (London, 1983); Max Beloff, *Britain's Liberal Empire 1897–1921* (London, 1969); Bradford A. Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War, 1937–1939: A Study in the Dilemmas of British Decline* (Stanford, 1973); and Christopher Hall, *Britain, America and Arms Control, 1921–37* (London, 1987).
5. The cornerstone of such analysis is Michael Howard's seminal work, *The Continental Commitment: The Dilemma of British Defence Policy in the Era of Two World Wars* (London, 1972). Others in this mould include John Gooch, *The Plans of War: The General Staff and British Military Strategy c. 1900–1916* (London, 1974); Brian Bond, *British Military Policy between the Wars* (Oxford, 1980); N. H. Gibbs, *Grand Strategy Vol. I, Rearmament Policy* (London, 1976); H. Montgomery Hyde, *British Air Policy between the Wars 1918–1939* (London, 1976); W. Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy. British Intelligence and Nazi Germany 1933–39* (Ithaca, NY, 1985).
6. Such thinkers and their ideas of Empire are central to Schurman's work: see his 'Imperial Defence, 1868–1887' (Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge, 1955); *Education of a Navy. The Development of British Naval Strategic Thought 1867–1914* (Chicago, 1965) and Julian S. Corbett, *1854–1922: Historian of British Maritime Policy from Drake to Jellicoe* (London, 1981).
7. For a perceptive account of the problems with the writing of naval history, see John B. Hattendorf, 'Ubi Sumus? What Is the State of Naval and Maritime History Today?' in John B. Hattendorf, ed, *Ubi Sumus? The State of Naval and Maritime History* (Newport, RI, 1994), pp 1–9 and many of the articles in this collection, particularly those on Britain, Canada and the United States.
8. The best modern account is Andrew Lambert, *The Crimean War. British Grand Strategy against Russia, 1853–56* (Manchester, 1990).
9. Christopher Thorne, *Allies of a Kind: The United States, Britain and the War Against Japan, 1941–1945* (New York, 1978).
10. The Letters of Benjamin Disraeli (Toronto, 1982–); Donald M. Schurman, *A Bishop and His People: John Travers Lewis and the Anglican Diocese of Ontario 1862–1902* (Kingston, Ont., 1991).
11. For Schurman's influence in Britain, see N. A. M. Rodger, 'Britain', in Hattendorf, ed, *Ubi Sumus?*, p 43; for his influence in Canada, see Marc Milner, 'The Historiography of the Canadian Navy: The State of the Art', in *ibid*, p. 85 n. 14; and for his influence in the United States and in navalist circles generally, see his contribution in James Goldrick and John B. Hattendorf, eds, *Mahan is Not Enough. Proceedings of a Conference on the Works of Sir Julian Corbett and Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond* (Newport, RI, 1993) and the effect of his ideas in the discussions.

Perception in the midst of chaos

KARL REVELLS

Q: What is the difference between the fleet in the Baltic and the fleet in the Black Sea?

A: The fleet in the Baltic was expected to do everything and did nothing; the fleet in the Black Sea was expected to do nothing and did it.

(*Punch*)

Mr Punch's answer to his riddle underscores the misunderstanding and intolerance with which the British public viewed the Royal Navy's performance during the Russian War, 1854–1856. Indeed, the suggestion that the Baltic fleet was charged with the primary mission in the war highlights the public's ignorance of the Crimea's significance in the Allies' strategy. This ignorance was juxtaposed in the popular mind with the impression that, at best, the war was a tale of wasted sacrifice and heroism, of woe and tragedy, of Florence Nightingale—the Angel of Mercy—and of the immortalized Charge of the Light Brigade. Overwhelmed by the overbearing sense of gloom and doom that emitted from the Crimea, the public seemed to lose interest in and sight of the importance of Britain's naval operations during the conflict and readily assumed that the fleets 'did nothing'. What is most curious about this attitude was its obvious negation of reality.

Throughout the war, the British Cabinet never lost sight of the fact that, in the absence of a large army, Britain had to rely principally on the Royal Navy and its Allies' military forces to accomplish its war goals. Thus, out of necessity, the conflict for Britain was essentially a naval war. Curiously, there seems to have been little appreciation of this fact by the British public. The cause of this omission is an intriguing problem and, one which raises in its wake a host of complementary questions: What was the British public expecting from this war? Was there any correlation between its expectations and reality within the campaign theatres? Perhaps, of greater importance, how did popular perception of the war effort succeed in condemning the Navy's operations to virtual anonymity in the public's mind at the time and in the historiography of the war since then?

An answer to these questions would require a full review of Britain's naval operations during the war—an impossibility given the limited length of this chapter. Nevertheless, a brief overview of the Royal Navy's campaign season in the Baltic and Black Sea theatres combined with an analysis of the reaction to some of the more prominent and newsworthy events of the conflict will help to illustrate the public's perception of reality. Moreover, measuring these perceptions against the factors and forces which combined to form these singular

events will demonstrate that the British public had a very distorted and simplistic view of what actually occurred in the operational theatres. Indeed, one could argue that because of the environment in which they lived, the observers of the war could not distinguish between reality and a mere perception of it.

THE ADMIRALTY'S ACHIEVEMENTS: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The problems that confronted the Admiralty at the inception of the war were daunting, for Russia's coasts bordered on four major bodies of water: the White, Baltic and Black Seas and the northern Pacific. Each of these became an instant theatre of operations for the Royal Navy which had to mount blockades of Russian ports, protect British commerce in the region and be on alert for possible attacks at sea. In addition, the Admiralty was charged with organizing the logistical arrangements for the expeditionary forces that were being sent to the East in ever increasing numbers.

The First Lord, Sir James Graham, shouldered the responsibility for mobilizing Britain's available naval resources to meet these demands. Most pressing was the need to commission a fleet for the Baltic where the Tsar maintained a large fleet capable of wreaking havoc on Britain's shores and trade if allowed to enter the North Sea. By reassigning ships from the Atlantic and home squadrons, and by commissioning ships in refit or off the construction blocks, Graham was able to produce a fleet on short order. Manning this fleet, however, presented a greater problem, for Britain's maritime commerce had siphoned off a great number of experienced seamen; new recruits were difficult to attract given the navy's reputation for harsh discipline and conditions. In desperation, the Admiralty was forced to draw on its lists of officers and seamen on half-pay or on pension; it also transferred able-bodied men from ships with full complements. When the fleet, commanded by Vice-Admiral Sir Charles Napier, sailed from Portsmouth for the Baltic on 11 March 1854, a good number of its ships were undermanned or heavily complemented by inexperienced crews.¹ Graham employed similar methods to cover the needs of the other operational theatres. Thus, a detachment of three steamers from Napier's fleet was assigned to maintain watch in the White Sea. Solving the needs of the Pacific theatre proved more taxing given the length of Russia's Pacific coastline. As a stop-gap measure, a squadron under the command of Rear-Admiral David Price was created out of contingents from the Pacific and China Squadrons. The operational needs in the Black Sea were met directly by ships of the Mediterranean fleet, under Vice-Admiral Sir James Dundas, which had been anchored in the Euxine since late September 1853. Dundas was warned not to expect reinforcements in the near future as Graham's drafts to fill the Baltic fleet had been so heavy that the home ports were depleted of ships.² By stretching his resources, therefore, Sir James was able to produce creditable naval forces for each of the four theatres of operations from a peacetime establishment.

Throughout the war, the Tsar's fleets never actively challenged the Allies' command over the Black and Baltic Seas. Though this deprived the fleet commanders of an opportunity to engage the Russians in battle, it did provide them the opportunity to harass virtually unimpeded Russia's lines of communication in either ocean. Thus, in the Black Sea, a squadron under Dundas' second-in-command, Sir Edmund Lyons, was despatched in May 1854 to the Circassian and Georgian coasts to encourage local rebellions against Russian overrule in the region and to drive the Tsar's troops from the eastern shores of the Black Sea. The port of Odessa was attacked to loosen Russia's grip on the western shore. Aside from maintaining a constant watch on Sevastopol, Dundas was ordered to hang on the flank of the Turkish army which was poised in Bulgaria to repel a Russian crossing of the Danube.³ This arrangement tied the fleet's operations directly into those of the Allied armies. Dundas' movements at sea would soon largely parallel those of Britain's expeditionary forces on land. Hence, when Lord Raglan, the commander of the force, shifted his troops to Varna in June, Dundas anchored his fleet within ready distance in neighbouring Balchik Bay.

The same arrangement held in mid-September when, prompted by their governments, the Allied armies invaded the Crimea. Dundas' ships provided a screen of security for the armies as they were convoyed to their landing zone at Kalamita Bay. Given the lack of intelligence respecting Russian troop movements, the fleet prudently shadowed the armies' advance along the coast on to Sevastopol. This close support proved most beneficial on 20 September when the Russians attacked the Anglo-French armies at the Alma River. Caught in unfavourable terrain by enfilading fire, the Allies suffered heavy casualties. Dundas volunteered the services of the fleet's surgeons to assist the army's medical staff and drafts of seamen were used to carry large numbers of sick and wounded soldiers from the battlefield to the hospital ships thereby saving many lives. Unfortunately, this achievement was overshadowed by the decision of Prince Menshikov, the Russian commander, to sink seven of his own warships across the mouth of Sevastopol harbour to deny access to the Allied fleets. The Russian admirals had preferred to attack the Allied fleets directly but their protests had been overruled. Their ships sank as Dundas' fleet appeared off Sevastopol on 23 September.⁴

Menshikov's decision, though seemingly irrational to naval observers at the time, completely changed the nature of the war in the Black Sea. The ships in the Allied fleet were now useless as far as the reduction of Sevastopol was concerned for there could be no major naval engagements nor any attempt to dash quickly into the harbour to help take the fortress by storm. Combined with his earlier opposition to launching the invasion on such short notice and with insufficient intelligence, the incident all but sealed Dundas' fate as commander of the fleet. An irate Graham officially reprimanded him for having spent too much time at the Alma thereby allowing Menshikov the freedom to sink his own ships!⁵ However unfair these charges may appear, Menshikov's

decision did confine the Allied line-of-battle ships to their anchorages for the duration of the war. Moreover, the naval guns and crews from the sunken warships were added to Sevastopol's already formidable batteries. As a result, while there was a perennial shortage of gunpowder throughout the siege, Sevastopol's defence did not suffer from a want of large guns and skilled crews to operate them. A long siege now seemed inevitable.

The fleet settled down to its new role as auxiliary to the army's operations. A squadron under Lyons was assigned to Balaklava harbour to provide immediate security and support for Raglan's army which was encamped on the surrounding hillsides and plains. The bulk of the fleet lay anchored in nearby Kazatch Bay, a natural but undeveloped harbour. In addition to reconnaissance patrols, the fleet assumed management of the harbours in Balaklava and Constantinople and thereby controlled the logistical arrangements between the Crimea and Britain.

The first opportunity for the Anglo-French fleet to engage in a more active role came on 17 October. In conjunction with the armies' simultaneous bombardment of the Russian defence works, the fleets launched an attack on Sevastopol's seaward batteries. While the pace of the firing was furious, the bombardment achieved little and the heavy damages suffered by the fleet confirmed Dundas' view that ships' guns were no match for the massive stone-encased walls of the fortress.⁶ The fleet now turned its attention more closely to helping the land attack succeed; Dundas authorized the disembarkation of ships' guns and crews as well as Marines—the so-called 'Naval Brigade'—to bolster Raglan's understrength forces.

The landing was timely for, on 25 October, Menshikov launched a surprise attack on Balaklava which, in spite of the confusion reigning in the British camp, was repulsed bravely by Raglan's troops. Nevertheless, the heavy losses considerably weakened Raglan's already overstretched forces. Eleven days later (5 October), Menshikov launched a second massive attack against the British lines at the Inkerman ridge. This attack was also repulsed but with such heavy losses that the Allied commanders were forced to reassess their position and decided to cancel their own attack scheduled for 8 October.

The grim prospect of a long winter siege now became reality. Locked in by inclement weather, the fleet confined its activities to sorting out the chaotic and congested conditions in Balaklava harbour, to conveying the sick and wounded to hospitals in Constantinople, and to reinforcing the activities of the Naval Brigade onshore. Fortunately, because of its self-contained logistics system, the fleet avoided the tragedy and suffering that plagued Raglan's forces encamped only a few miles from its anchorage. Indeed, were it not for the fleet's efforts to restore order in the army's chaotic logistical system, Raglan's forces probably would have suffered even greater losses by winter's end. Nevertheless, the fleet's efforts were overlooked because of the sensationalistic press coverage given to the army's plight during the harsh winter of 1854–55. Moreover, the navy's operations in the Baltic did little to divert attention from

the debacle in the Crimea.

The Admiralty's operations in the Baltic were governed by a much higher sense of public expectation. Indeed, Sir Charles Napier had been selected to command the fleet by Graham on the basis that he possessed the 'Nelson Touch'. Unfortunately, Sir Charles was also known to be difficult, self-promoting and 'too fond of demonstrations on shore, of Dinners and Speechifying'—Sir James decided to take his chances.⁷ The fleet sailed for the Baltic on 11 March amidst high hopes and great public fanfare. Alarmed somewhat by these exaggerated expectations, Sir Charles warned his well-wishers that they should 'not expect too much'. Nevertheless, en route to the Baltic, he raised both fear and hope within the fleet with strongly worded signals implying that battle, gore and death awaited it. He drilled his gun crews excessively to the point that the Admiralty had to caution him against running his stocks of shot and powder too low. These antics reinforced his image as a swashbuckling seadog amongst his subordinates; their expectations for action rose accordingly.⁸

These high hopes proved shortlived. It soon became apparent that Napier had little faith in his crews—his reports home were filled with complaints about the shortage of seamen or their inexperience and the inefficiency of his officers. These diatribes seemed to mask another problem. Having rushed into the Baltic, Napier now seemed reluctant to proceed to the Gulf of Finland where the Tsar's premier fleet lay anchored. Rumours alleging that the Russian fleet was divided between its bases at Helsingfors and Kronshtadt merely accentuated the crews' bloodlust and Sir Charles' apparent unwillingness to unleash it. Whilst he had entered the Baltic on 21 March, Napier anchored off Hangö, at the mouth of the Gulf of Finland, only on 20 May – a fortnight after it had been free of ice. Sir Charles blamed the delays on the presence of bad weather.⁹

Earlier in mid-April, Napier had despatched a squadron of steamers to patrol the Gulf of Riga and the Estonian and Latvian coasts. He now directed another squadron to blockade the towns along the Finnish coast up to the Ålands archipelago. Frustrated by the long delays and anxious to cut their mark, the officers involved in this operation performed their duties with excessive zeal. In the first week alone, forty-six vessels and large amounts of shipbuilding material were destroyed. The landing parties also antagonized the local Finnish population by indiscriminately confiscating or destroying property. This led to an ambush and firefight at Gamla Carleby on 7 June in which several seamen were killed and injured. A fortnight later, the same ships' companies launched an unauthorized attack on the Russian fortress at Bomarsund.¹⁰ While these actions were undertaken for self-promotional reasons, they illustrate clearly the growing frustration in the fleet with Napier's reluctance to undertake attacks against Russian targets.

Under mounting pressure from Graham, Sir Charles drew up on 20 June a list of options which outlined the fleet's prospects of attacking Russia's fortresses at Bomarsund, Sweaborg and Kronshtadt. He actively discouraged the

idea of attacking the latter two naval bases, particularly Kronshtadt, which he felt presented too formidable a challenge given his limited resources. A close-in survey of the fortress a week later confirmed this view.¹¹ This report cleared the way for an attack on the only feasible option—Bomarsund. Between 8 and 16 August, Napier, in conjunction with his French counterpart, Admiral Parseval, launched a combined assault and bombardment of the fortress. The fortress was captured on 15 August with minimal Allied losses. News of the assault was welcomed in Britain for it amounted to the Allies' first major success against Russia—a good prelude to the much expected attack on Sevastopol. Indeed, many in the Cabinet believed that the operation proved that Russian troops and fortresses could not withstand a concentrated naval attack.¹² Immediately, Graham renewed his pressure on Napier to reconsider the possibility of attacking Sweaborg. To placate the First Lord, Napier, in conjunction with Parseval and Generals Neil and Jones, two engineering liaison officers attached to the combined fleets, conducted a second reconnaissance of Sweaborg. The engineers reported very favourably on the prospects of attack thereby raising expectations in London for an assault on the fortress. Sir Charles was forced to dampen this enthusiasm on the grounds that it was too late in the season, and that the engineers' views represented military rather than naval considerations.¹³ Indeed, a joint naval council held on 12 September readily supported this assessment. In any case, Parseval, who shared Napier's views, had ordered some of his ships home and detached yet another squadron five days later. The possibility of launching the attack was a moot point. Following his original instructions, Napier ordered his sail-of-line ships to proceed to Kiel as the weather began to change.¹⁴

The news of these withdrawals, combined with Napier's harsh criticism of the engineers' reports, convinced Graham that Sir Charles was deliberately abandoning his command to forestall the possibility of launching any late operations. Correspondence between the two men deteriorated into a series of reprimands and acrimonious responses. Napier became convinced that he was being made a scapegoat by the Admiralty, and particularly by Graham, to assuage the public's outcry for victories. His communiqués became high-strung and accusatory if not altogether threatening. Finally, on 22 December, the Admiralty ordered Sir Charles to strike his flag—the naval lords had had enough of Napier's 'indiscreet letter writing'.¹⁵

The Admiralty had no intention of repeating the mistakes it made in the Baltic in the forthcoming season. While censuring Napier for his unacceptable behaviour, the naval lords were fully aware that his criticism of the fleet's material shortcomings were justified and that they had limited its offensive capabilities. Accordingly, Graham enacted an emergency construction programme, the 'October Plan', to rectify most of the obvious shortages. Provision was made for the construction of forty gunboats, twenty mortar vessels and five armoured floating batteries. While these vessels alone would not make up all of the fleet's needs for blockading purposes, the Admiralty hoped

that, coupled with a number of similar ships promised by the French Government, the flotilla would allow the fleet to attack, and possibly demolish, Kronshtadt.¹⁶

British production, however, was unequal to the set quotas. As the Admiralty's shipyards were already overburdened with refitting and repair work as well as normal construction, the new projects had to be farmed out to private builders ensuring further delays. The shortage of steam plants in Britain hamstrung the construction programme as the Admiralty was competing directly with the private sector. In addition, a good number of vessels and equipment originally destined for Baltic service were channelled off to the Black Sea. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that at the start of the summer campaign season of 1855, the Baltic fleet had received only fifteen gunboats and a similar number of mortar vessels, together with the promise of two floating batteries—a far cry from Graham's original estimates.¹⁷

The construction problems at home were compounded by the fact that the French Government back-pedalled on a number of its commitments. The quotas set in the October Plan had been premised on the assumption that France would provide twenty steam gunboats and ten mortar vessels for Baltic operations.¹⁸ Once these arrangements had been concluded, however, it became apparent that the French Government began to waver on its commitments. Depressed by the news emanating from the Crimea, Napoleon III expressed a strong desire to withdraw his naval forces from the Baltic altogether and to use them instead in the Black Sea. As the new year progressed, it became obvious that he considered the Baltic a mere sideshow to Crimean operations and had no intention of providing gunboats for the Baltic. The protests of Sir Charles Wood, Graham's successor at the Admiralty, fell on deaf ears. As Lord Cowley, the British Ambassador in Paris confirmed, 'The fact is the Emperor's thoughts are all concentrated upon the Black Sea; the North interests him very little.' To all intents and purposes, an assault on Kronshtadt in 1855 was a dead issue.¹⁹

This provided little consolation for the Baltic Fleet's new commander, Rear-Admiral Richard Dundas, who was very conscious of the high expectations and pressure under which Napier had operated and which, ultimately, ruined his career. As *The Times* warned ominously, 'no doubt he (Dundas) knows that he has to do more than Napier. If he does not accomplish more, he will certainly find himself next November under orders to lower his flag...'.²⁰ A dark cloud hung over Dundas' flagship, the *Duke of Wellington*, as it sailed from Spithead bound for the Baltic on 20 March.

Upon his arrival at Faro Sound on 8 May, Dundas immediately organized surveys of Riga and the Helsingfors–Sweaborg complex. Formidable new batteries had been constructed at both sites and on the islands surrounding the latter fortress. A fortnight later, Dundas surveyed Kronshtadt where his observations confirmed Napier's assessment that it was impregnable. The channels leading into the fortress had been mined with 'infernal machines' and its land-

ward defences had been considerably strengthened against a land-based attack. All incoming ships would be heavily exposed to enfilading fire, making a close-inshore attack extremely risky. As Sullivan observed, 'the more we see of this place, the less likely it is that we can do or even attempt anything'.²¹

Dundas also informed the Admiralty that he could not mount effective blockades of the major ports and coastline in the Gulfs of Bothnia, Finland and Riga without more ships, preferably steam-powered cruisers. His means were enhanced somewhat by the arrival of the French squadron under Rear-Admiral Penaud on 1 June. The French commander quickly pointed out, however, that he expected no reinforcements by way of gunboats or floating batteries.²² Thus, in spite of the fact that a small flotilla of block-ships, gunboats, and mortar vessels was then en route to the fleet's anchorage at Nargen, it was apparent once again that the season's operations were going to be governed by material constraints. As if to emphasize this point, eight of the fourteen gunboats which Graham had allocated specifically for Baltic service were making their way at that moment to the Crimea in support of combined operations in the Sea of Azov.²³

In reality, the situation was hardly better in the Black Sea where the fleet, now under Lyons' control, would soon find its operations dominated by French operational priorities. In mid-February, the Admiralty ordered Sir Edmund to occupy the Sea of Azov once the ice broke up and before Russia had an opportunity to resupply the Crimea from that source. The success of the operation would hinge on the Allies' ability to overcome the strategic fortress at Kerch which controlled access into the sea. Lyons requested the army commanders to lend him 10–12,000 troops for a fortnight to take Kerch and other Azov fortified towns. Canrobert refused and Raglan was unable to spare sufficient troops to make up the difference. Under orders from Paris, Canrobert also refused several requests by Raglan to launch immediate assaults on Sevastopol's outlying defences.²⁴

It took another three months of endless haggling and several false starts before Lyons was finally able to sail for Kerch on 22 May. The breakthrough came when Canrobert was replaced by General Pelissier who, defying Napoleon III's direct orders, loaned Sir Edmund the required troops. The expedition which swept the Azov in search of supplies that could bolster Russian resistance in the Crimea was immensely successful. In just four days, the Azov squadron destroyed 246 vessels and at least 5 million rations of corn and flour. These results were enhanced further by raids against Taganrog, Ghiesk and Marienpol. After the gloom of winter, the news from the Azov created an air of renewed faith and exhilaration in official circles in London. Even the Queen could 'really think of *nothing* else'.²⁵

The euphoria, however, proved short-lived. Inspired by the moment, the Admiralty ordered Lyons to extend his operations against Anapa and other Russian fortresses on the Circassian and Georgian coasts. Napoleon III, however, incensed by Pelissier's insubordination and consumed by the idea of

launching a major inland campaign to envelope Sevastopol, refused to sanction other diversionary raids. His recall of the French troops from the Azov seriously hampered the effectiveness of the squadron's operations.²⁶

For his part, Pelissier was now intent on demanding his pound of British flesh in return for his earlier co-operation. As the Cabinet would learn much to its despair, this meant that once again the fleet's operations would have to take a back seat to the land campaign. More important, it meant that the battlefield would be covered with blood and human debris as Pelissier stubbornly followed his single-minded dream of capturing Sevastopol and a field marshal's baton by launching a series of costly assaults on Sevastopol's external defences in late May and June. These failures, particularly the disastrous assault on the Malakoff and Redan batteries on 18 June, combined with Raglan's sudden death a week later, overshadowed whatever hope the easy gains made in the Sea of Azov had created. With operations in the Crimea so obviously dependent on French manpower and completely at the mercy of Napoleon III's or Pelissier's whims, the Cabinet's highest hopes remained focused in the Baltic where, despite material shortages, the Admiralty still retained the upper hand in the combined fleets' movements.

In the meantime, Dundas and his colleagues had chosen initially to limit their fleet's activities to manning a strict blockade of the Finnish and Russian coasts while searching for alternative targets to Kronshtadt. With this priority in mind, the fleet's surveyor, Captain Sullivan, performed another close survey of Sweaborg and its island defences. Although the fortress had been considerably strengthened since the first survey in May, Sullivan was convinced that it could be attacked successfully by prudent positioning of the ships. With so few options to consider, Dundas adopted the proposal. Admiral Penaud preferred to bombard the adjoining fortified town of Helsingfors instead but he was overruled by a joint council of the naval commanders.²⁷

The attack on Sweaborg, begun on 10 August, lasted two days, during which time the fleet's steamers and gunboats coupled with the mortar vessels concentrated their fire on Gustavfard and Vargon islands destroying most of the building complexes within the protective walls. On the second day, the British mortars failed, considerably reducing the effectiveness of the bombardment on Swarto island and the attack as a whole which was abandoned on 13 August. In addition to the damage inflicted on the islands, French intelligence reported that Sweaborg's dockyard and stores were destroyed, that all the powder magazines had been blown up, and that twenty-three vessels had been burnt with a similar number severely damaged.²⁸ The comparative ease with which the Allies had attacked the Tsar's second largest fortress in the Baltic dealt a significant blow to the prestige of the Russian Government.

Predictably, the early reports of the assault encouraged optimism in London that Sweaborg could be reduced completely. As a result, on 21 August, the Admiralty despatched sixteen mortars and a large supply of shells to the fleet. Dundas, however, had already sent the mortar vessels home believing that they

would no longer be useful. Consequently, he informed the Admiralty that no further major operations could be undertaken because of the lateness of the season. The arrival of the new equipment would cause embarrassment and rouse unjustified expectations at home. Accordingly, the Admiralty recalled the ships, thereby accepting that, aside from the continuation of the blockade and minor actions, the campaign in the Baltic was at an end. Once again the Cabinet switched its attention to the Black Sea.²⁹

In the interim, the Azov squadron, under Commander Sherard Osborn, had continued to wreak havoc in Sevastopol's lines of communication. The squadron destroyed stocks of dried fish and grain as well as bridges linking the region to the Crimean peninsula. On one particular raid against Taganrog on 6 August, a stack of forage and grain between 50 and 80 feet high and covering a square mile was destroyed.³⁰ These attacks were beginning to have a telling effect on Sevastopol's defence, particularly the growing shortage of powder and ammunition. Pellissier's strategy of attrition was also beginning to take its toll as the continuous bombardments of Sevastopol's outer trenches and batteries were exacting high Russian casualties.

To slow the Allies' advance, Prince Gorchakov, Sevastopol's new commander, launched an assault on 16 August across the Chernaiia River against the northernmost sector of the Allied lines. Alerted by the timely arrival of intelligence from London warning of the impending attack, the French and Sardinian troops defending the lines inflicted between eight and ten thousand losses on Gorchakov's troops.³¹ Coming as it did within a week of the Sweaborg bombardment, the Russian defeat greatly increased the Allies' enthusiasm for a general assault on Sevastopol. Napoleon III gave Pelissier a free hand to press on with his plans and the Allies maintained their steady bombardment of the Russian defences in preparation for the final assault set for 8 September.

It was the success of the French assault on the Malakoff battery on that day which convinced Gorchakov to withdraw from the beleaguered fortress. The simultaneous British attack on the Redan battery was decimated by Russian gunfire and failed. The outcome was greeted with dismay in London reinforcing as it did the image of French superiority and British incompetency. Fearing that the French would also take the Redan battery, Clarendon complained, 'Now I suppose the French . . . will have a double-crow over us and we may expect heartburnings and recriminations.'³²

The French success at the Malakoff also deprived Lyons of any hope he may have entertained for a final showdown with the remainder of the Russian Black Sea fleet, for Gorchakov ordered the sinking of the remaining warships and merchantmen in Sevastopol harbour. Thus, in spite of the continuing success of the raids in the Sea of Azov and a successful bombardment of and combined operation against the Russian fortress at Kinburn on 17 October, Sir Edmund never achieved the great naval victory that he believed destiny owed him. From this point onwards, the French showed great reluctance to proceed with further operations in the Black Sea and only lukewarm interest in a possible

attack against Kronshtadt in the coming season. Rather, Napoleon III's attention was now focused on the proceedings in Vienna where an end to the war was being negotiated.

In spite of the mistakes committed, the material shortages encountered and the French tendency to play down the value of naval operations and to resist Britain's requests for further combined operations, Britain's naval operational achievements were considerable. The Admiralty had been able to mount operations in four theatres of war separated by some 4500 miles at the greatest point. In addition to mounting blockades in these regions covering thousands of miles of coastline, the Navy launched, or aided in, successful attacks against two of Russia's three principal naval fortresses, kept her naval forces completely blocked in their ports and caused serious dislocation of the Russian economy. In addition, the navy helped to keep Raglan's army alive during the terrible winter of 1854–55. Though it did not deliver another grand victory like Trafalgar, the Royal Navy's achievements using an essentially peacetime establishment, were hardly inconsequential. Given this realization, one is inclined to ask why then were these achievements so casually overlooked during a war that received an enormous amount of coverage both in the press and in subsequent historiography?

PERCEPTION AND REALITY

The Royal Navy's actions were inclined to be overlooked for one essential reason—they lacked colour. As the press complained at the time, the fleet's activities were unattended by sufficient bloodletting and losses to be noteworthy or pleasing.³³ Groomed in the mythology of the last great war and of Nelson's legendary naval victories, the public had come to expect similar success from their naval contemporaries. Alas, the popular heroes of the day, the flamboyant Sir Charles Napier and Sir Edmund Lyons, failed to deliver. The public felt duped, and in its frustration turned on its heroes and then dismissed them from common memory. Thus superficially, the Royal Navy's essential problem was that it entered the war in the shadow of Nelson's legacy and, when the war ended in 1856, it left no legacy of its own.

In their search for an explanation of the fleets' seemingly lacklustre performance, critics overlooked the fact that human behaviour is governed as much by irrational as by rational motives. They were inclined to view the behaviour of individuals as either acceptable or unacceptable and judged accordingly. Thus, Napier was criticized for his 'inaction'; superficially, it seemed that he deliberately avoided undertaking any major assaults against the Russians. It was presumed that he did this consciously from choice, irrespective of the impact it would have on his career and those of his followers. As Delane, the editor of *The Times*, warned him, 'For your own sake then, and for that of your friends who have so long supported you and asserted your claims, do make an