

**Heroes, Cowards, & Traitors:  
The Crimean War & its Challenge  
to Russian Autocracy**

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*Abstract:* Russia's defeat in the Crimean War cast new doubt upon the fundamental political traditions, social structures, national myths of the Nikolaevan era. It precipitated wide-ranging reforms, including military reforms, which were predicated on a shift in mentality. This essay examines the new notions of heroism that circulated among Russia's emerging public sphere during and after the war. It analyzes the types of heroes that were celebrated as reflections of critical changes in attitude and mindset, which prefigured the liberalizing era of Alexander II.



The Crimean War was a devastating event for Russia. Among its cultural casualties were the empire's traditional models of heroism and, by extension, some of the core values and tenets of Russian autocracy. The 1856 defeat cast new doubt upon the fundamental political traditions, social structures, national myths of the Nikolaevan era. It precipitated wide-ranging reforms, including military reforms, which, I argue, were predicated on a shift in mentality.<sup>1</sup> In this essay I examine heroism as a reflection of the changes in attitude and mindset that prefigured the liberalizing era of Alexander II.

During and after the war, the crown and the rank-and-file celebrated two distinct types of heroes. The autocrat chose its heroes from the elite commanding corps, and it honored them for offensive feats in battle and individual prowess. In direct opposition to these official heroes, soldiers and observers of the war (who were collectively referred to as *sevastopol'tsy*) rallied around those individuals who displayed a deep concern for the welfare of the troops and developed close personal ties to them. Tales of these unofficial heroes circulated verbally, in letters, and in the expanding Russian press, which meant that the personal experiences of individual soldiers and their criticisms of the military leadership became shared. The emerging Russian public, voicing its views in the press, chose to support the soldiers' heroes instead of the official ones, and in so doing, it posed a strong symbolic challenge to the values of autocracy—namely, the strict obedience and deference to authority prescribed by Official Nationality. At the

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<sup>1</sup> It is still widely maintained that the Crimean conflict was the key event that precipitated Russia's era of Great Reforms. Classic formulations of this argument appear in Alfred J. Rieber's *The Politics of Autocracy*, John Shelton Curtiss' *Russia's Crimean War*, and Albert Seaton's *The Crimean War: A Russian Chronicle*. Of the many Russian-language histories, two landmark works are E.V. Tarle's *Krymskaia Voina* and A. M. Zaionchkovsky's *Vostochnaia Voina 1853-1856*.

This essay does not treat the military reforms as such nor does it claim that heroism itself caused the reforms. Rather, it explores heroism as an important conceptual precursor to the reforms. To fully discuss the causality of the reforms, one must consider numerous sociopolitical and economic factors of the 1840s-1850s, including a number of agricultural crises, several cholera epidemics, serfdom's declining viability as an economic system, and a growing dissatisfaction with state and military service among educated elites. The war also brought greater social unrest among the lower classes especially in response to price and tax increases, military conscription, and labor shortages. See: Curtiss, *Russia's Crimean War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1979), 531-4.

same time, the public also mobilized certain traditional values—including paternalism, commitment to duty, and love of the motherland—to challenge the autocracy as an inadequate representation of these ideals. Moreover, the heated conversations about Russia’s military leadership fostered a new sense of political cohesion—a public opinion—between soldiers and civilians, between low-ranking troops and elite intellectuals. As a result, the notion that Russia’s developing public sphere could act as a check on the existing order emerged from the war with new force. In short, I argue that the new model of heroism and the public sphere developed in tandem and flourished in the reformist era that followed the war.

The Crimean War was fought on the Danube, in the Caucasus, in the Baltic Sea and in the Crimea, and it involved a host of players including Prussia, Austria, Sweden, and Sardinia as well as the main combatants France, Britain, the Ottoman Empire, and Russia. This study focuses on the main theater of war, Sevastopol, and is generally restricted to the years 1854-1858. It draws upon the writings of the *sevastopol'tsy* (including rank-and-file soldiers, officers, elite commanders, and army doctors), the military press, and a variety of civilian voices. Russia did not have official war correspondents, but I examine the writings of “unofficial” ones including Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy, Ivan Sergeevich Aksakov, Nikolai Ivanovich Pirogov, and Franz Edouard Ivanovich Totleben.<sup>2</sup> Their presence on the scene as eyewitnesses made them authority figures in the eyes of their readers, who entrusted them with task of identifying Russia’s true war heroes.

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<sup>2</sup> Tolstoy, then a budding writer and an artillery officer, served in the Crimea and even bunked with Aksakov in Sevastopol. Aksakov was in southern Russia researching for the Imperial Geographic Society. Nudged by his family, Aksakov eventually joined the militia, but the war ended before he saw combat. His letters home complain about sharing a desk with the moody, messy Tolstoy. After the war, Aksakov also was part of the committee to investigate abuses in the military (See: Aksakov’s letters of May 1854, July 1855 and 1 August 1855 in: *Pisma k Rodnym* (T. F. Pirozhkov, Izd.) (Moskva: Nauka, 1994), 263, 356-8). Nikolai Pirogov, an army surgeon stationed in the Crimea, was officially celebrated as a hero after the war. Both Pirogov and Aksakov kept detailed correspondences of their experiences at the front and their letters were circulated among friends and relatives. Totleben, the officer in charge of Sevastopol’s fortifications, penned five-volume history of the war based on his logs he kept during the siege. The history was published between 1861 and 1874 in French, Russian, and German and read widely throughout Europe.



## Sevastopol: A Microcosm

For Russia, Sevastopol was militarily and symbolically the most important theater of war, and it opened the door into a general discussion of Russia's social order and authoritarian state. How was it that this city, far from the nation's political and cultural centers, came to be regarded as the sacred ground, where Russia's strength would be tested and her fate revealed? This idea was supplied to many civilians by their main entrée into the war, Tolstoy's enormously popular stories, *The Sevastopol Sketches*, which present the city as a microcosm of Russian society.<sup>3</sup> The first sketch, "Sevastopol in December," identifies the reader as the hero of the story and of the city. In this way, it compels the reader not only to identify with the world of Sevastopol, but to belong to it and bear some responsibility for it.<sup>4</sup>

Just as the story erases the divide between the world of the novel and the world of the reader, it also undermines several social boundaries that structured Russian society. Tolstoy's Sevastopol is as an uncomfortable zone that mixes town and country, land and sea, civilian and military life into "an abominable state of chaos." The narrator is well aware that this place defies the reader's expectations and assumptions, and it warns him: "Your first impression is bound to be a most disagreeable one." The text not only blends civilian and military, it offers a new perspective on the hierarchies that structure each domain by deemphasizing class and rank distinctions: "you will see the same expression written on the face of this immaculately white-gloved officer [...] of that sailor smoking his pipe [...] of each of those men from the work party who are waiting with a stretcher [...] of that young unmarried girl who, afraid of muddying her

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<sup>3</sup> "Sevastopol in December" was published in 1855 in *Russkii Invalid*, and *Sovremennik*. Because of its critical content, "Sevastopol in May" was so altered by imperial censors that Panaev removed Tolstoy's initials when he published it in *Sovremennik* in 1855. "Sevastopol in August" was published under more liberal conditions in 1856. See: Charles A. Ruud, *Fighting Words: Imperial Censorship and the Russian Press, 1804-1906* (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 94.

<sup>4</sup> Lev Tolstoy, "Sevastopol in December," *Sevastopol Sketches* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 42.

dress, is hopping from one stone to another as she crosses the street.” In this world, mothers, children, young women, and even abandoned buildings—“old veterans who have experienced every kind of woe and affliction”—are all cast as heroic defenders of Sevastopol.<sup>5</sup>

While “Sevastopol in December” presents a socially integrated community where all people can be heroic, the next story, “Sevastopol in May” uses the war-torn city to situate its critique of the class divisions familiar to all Russian readers. It directs its criticism at the elite officers in particular. “Since there are a great many people in the besieged town of Sevastopol,” the narrator explains, “there is also a great deal of vanity to be found; there are, in other words, aristocrats, even though death hangs above the heads of aristocrat and non-aristocrat alike, ready to strike at any moment.”<sup>6</sup> The story suggests that these social divisions are as unnatural as they are enduring if death—that great equalizer—fails to put all men on level footing. In short, Tolstoy’s stories stress this theme of social mixing in order to at once hint at an ideal world without such rigid stratification and to criticize the social prejudices that endured even in the extreme conditions of war. As I will demonstrate, many soldiers and civilians came to share this notion that the city—its desperate predicament, its social stratification, its heroic people—was not only centerpiece of the war; it was an emblem of Russian society.

### **Official Nationality**

Under Nicholas I, the military was regarded as a sacred institution, the bulwark of Russia’s great power status, and a model for how Russian society should operate. It was an ideal world characterized by perfect order, unwavering discipline, and total obedience to one’s superiors. As Nicholas Riasanovsky has shown, the tsar had been obsessed with army affairs since childhood,

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<sup>5</sup> “Sevastopol in December,” 43-4.

<sup>6</sup> “Sevastopol in May,” 65.

and as emperor Nicholas did his best to infuse Russia's state and society with a military spirit and decorum. "I will always call myself a soldier," he declared, and long after taking the throne Nicholas maintained the duties that he had as an inspector general, devoting his time to drills, regimentation, uniform inspection, and other minutiae. He required all officials and school children to wear special military uniforms, which classified them by division and rank. Moreover, Nicholas demanded from his subjects absolute obedience and a devotion to duty to match their militaristic appearance. In his imperial manifesto of March 1848, the tsar called on soldiers and civilians alike, "every loyal subject" to "respond gladly to the call of his monarch" and the "ancient battle cry: 'for faith, tsar, and fatherland.'"<sup>7</sup>

These three components—orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality—comprised the sacred trinity at the heart of Official Nationality and served as the imperial motto before and during the Crimean War. The crown heralded this doctrine as the foundation of Russia's national glory and strength. The three elements were linked together by virtue of the fact that the tsar himself embodied each one totally and absolutely, making him at once a divinely appointed infallible autocrat, a father to his childlike subjects, and the ultimate embodiment of Russianness.

This study takes Official Nationality—especially the principles of obedience, paternalism, and authoritarianism—seriously as the ideological foundation of Russia's social hierarchy, system of governance, and national character under Nicholas I. The new model of heroism that emerged from the war pitted itself directly against these values and the type of leadership they espoused.

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<sup>7</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 8-10, 1, 5.

## I. Questioning the Regime's Chosen Heroes

### Medals and Decorations

Almost from the start, the war cast doubt upon official heroes by raising questions about methods of promotion and military decoration. Medals and citations were not only symbolic markers of military status; they could mean ennoblement, an improved position in the table of ranks, and benefits such as monetary awards and freedom from corporal punishment. Because of this, decorations had the potential to be social equalizers, but as the siege revealed, they rarely had this effect in practice. The overextended military administration seldom made good on these promises; what's more, honors did not have to be earned; elites could buy or curry them through other means.<sup>8</sup> Because they could be easily manipulated, the *sevastopol'tsy* frequently complained that military decorations were not always bestowed on those who deserved them. In a tell-all memoir, Robert Adolf Chodaisewicz bitterly relayed how a fellow captain, who deserted his troops during the battle of Inkerman, was decorated because he was the son of the former colonel of the regiment.<sup>9</sup> Official citations were not only unreliable markers of valor; they stood as reminders of the corruption and favoritism that pervaded the armed forces.

According to Tolstoy and Chodaisewicz, most nobles volunteered for military service precisely because they coveted medals, especially the St. George's Cross. As the narrator of "Sevastopol in May" observes, even on the "brink of the grave," when some men "are ready to die for the sake of lofty convictions," the nobility were generally motivated by the chance to win this medal. "Vanity, vanity, all is vanity [...] Vanity! It must be the distinguishing characteristic and special malady of our age."<sup>10</sup> The system of military decoration was just the tip of the iceberg,

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<sup>8</sup> For example, Ivan Turgenev used his connections to arrange the decoration (and ennoblement) of his friends at the front, the Belenkovskys. See letters to P.V. Annenkov on 2 and 15 June 1855, Turgenev, *Pis'ma v vosemnadtsatikh tomakh II* (Moskva: Nauka, 1987) 427-8, note 32).

<sup>9</sup> R.A. Hodasevich, *A Voice from Within the Walls of Sebastopol* (London: John Murray, 1856), 155, 244. This source is hereafter referred to as "Hodaisewich." Chodaisewicz was a Polish officer who deserted to the British side in 1855. Not only was he incredibly dissatisfied with Russia's war effort, he deeply resented the troops' anti-Polish attitudes. In 1856, he published a fiery account of the war, where he explained his criticisms of the Russian military to his British readers.

<sup>10</sup> "Sevastopol in May," 66-7. Tolstoy's diary shows he was reading *Vanity Fair* at the time.

pointing to the bankruptcy of traditional values, such as self-sacrifice and patriotism in all of Russian society.

Early on, troops were awarded for their offensive feats in battle, such as successful assaults, taking prisoners, and breaking enemy lines.<sup>11</sup> Such feats of conquest, however, became increasingly rare under siege, which was mostly defensive and which often consisted of waiting around rather than fighting. This inactivity not only demoralized the ranks, it also made heroes based on traditional criteria harder to find.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, on a visit to the Crimea in 1854, the tsarevichs awarded the St. George's Cross to several soldiers and thanked them for their efforts. "I could not help reflecting," Chodaisewicz commented, "that we had done little to be thanked for, save losing our men."<sup>13</sup> The very nature of the Crimean conflict confounded traditional methods for awarding heroes. Only those inside Sevastopol who understood the peculiarities of this war could properly identify the deserving troops and honor them in a way that disassociated heroism from victory.

This notion is echoed in "Sevastopol in August," when the protagonist Volodya notices two peasant conscripts passing the time by fashioning a cross from a stray bullet, which they then award to Melnikov, a wounded comrade of theirs. Although this is done half in jest, the men recognize that those who suffer (but are not necessarily victorious) in battle deserve to be honored as heroes. In this way, they eclipse the power of the authorities by creating their own system of decoration. In sum, the war exposed several flaws in the crown's system of decorations, giving

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<sup>11</sup> This older model of heroism based on conquest can be seen in Kornilov's "Instruction" of 3 Oct. 1854 celebrating the heroes of Sevastopol. Although the document calls the men "defenders of Sevastopol," they are all honored for offensive feats (Novikov, N. V. i P. G. Sofinov, *Vitse-Admiral Kornilov* (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo Ministerstva Vooruzhennykh Sil Soiuz SSR, 1947), 266. This source is hereafter referred to as "Kornilov").

<sup>12</sup> 22 July 1855 memorandum of General-Adjutant Osten-Saken in: Franz E.I. Totleben, *Défense de Sebastopol II* (St. Peterbourg, 1863-1874), appendix, 18. This source is hereafter referred to as "Totleben."

<sup>13</sup> Hodasievich, 211.

potency to the idea that popularly honored figures were more genuinely heroic than those who received official recognition.

### **Contested Displays of Autocratic Prowess: Ceremonies and Celebrations**

In addition to formal decorations, Russia's military glory was also hailed in official ceremonies. Richard Wortman has argued that, under Nicholas, official celebrations functioned as "metonyms for the political structure as a whole" and thus they were one of the most important ways for the emperor to legitimize his authority and improve his popularity.<sup>14</sup> Although early celebrations of the war were popular with the Petersburg public, they soon became sites of veiled opposition to autocratic despotism.<sup>15</sup> The same was true of some apolitical events, which took place during the war, such as the 1855 banquet honoring Malyi Theater actor M.S. Shchepkin. At the end of the night, when the master of ceremonies Konstantin Aksakov was toasted by the participants, he thanked them, exclaiming: "I cannot better answer your toast, so precious for me, than by proposing a toast in honor of public opinion." This political gesture alarmed conservatives and all publications of the toast were banned.<sup>16</sup> Clearly, the imperial censor viewed public opinion as a rising opponent to the existing order, a rival to the tsar's authority.

Naturally, military ceremonies sparked more direct challenges to Russia's military might. Alexander Druzhinin even claimed, far from awing and inspiring the public, the hollowness of "celebratory observations" of military life was responsible for keeping most civilians ignorant of and uninterested in army affairs.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, a series of dinners honoring the heroes of Sevastopol

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<sup>14</sup> Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, I (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 303-4.

<sup>15</sup> One example of a successful official celebration was in honor of the destruction of the Turkish fleet on 3 Nov. 1853. (Trevor Royle, *Crimea: The Great Crimean War, 1854-1856* (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 2000), 95.

<sup>16</sup> Curtiss, *Russia's Crimean War*, 554-5 (this source is hereafter referred to as "Curtiss;," A.V. Druzhinin, *Povesti, dnevniki* (Mosvka: Nauka, 1986), 53-4.

<sup>17</sup> "Sevastopol in December," 48; A.V. Druzhinin, *Literaturnaia Kritika* (Moskva: Sovetskaia Rossia, 1983), 181.

quickly became important sites of contestation, a virtual “banquet campaign” of oppositional politics. This hidden agenda was evident even in the planning process: while arranging the dinner for General N.N. Muraviev (a hero of Russia’s 1854 victory at Kars), Konstantin Aksakov wrote to Mikhail Pogodin that the general deserved only modest recognition, not a banquet, because he had been a big supporter of Nicholas I. More overt displays of opposition typically emerged during the after-dinner toasts. At the banquet honoring General-Adjutant D.E. Osten-Sacken, for instance, Pogodin gave a speech, which emphasized the general’s concern for the wellbeing of his troops as a rarity among Russian commanders. Pogodin also validated the care-giving aspects of paternalism without mentioning its authoritarian and disciplinarian components. Minister of War V.A. Dolgorukov seemed to interpret this “omission” as an attack on traditional military values when he wrote to the historian some days later: “You really stung us with Sacken.” In this way, both imperial officials and reformist intellectuals understood that the celebrations were honoring certain individuals *in opposition* to imperial authorities.<sup>18</sup>

The hero’s welcome for famed engineering officer General Totleben produced the biggest scandal. As Turgenev described in a letter to the Tolstoys, at the end of the dinner, chemist Boris Semenovich Yakobi “gave a drunken and insolent speech,” where he railed against the ignorance and indolence of Russia’s war commanders and high bureaucrats. According to Druzhinin, Yakobi’s directed his outrage at the other attendees including Totleben himself, and the chemist almost came to blows with members of the crowd.<sup>19</sup> A.A. Kraevsky interpreted this scandal as emblematic of the strife that riddled Russian society, and he wrote to Druzhinin the next day: “Too

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<sup>18</sup> Curtiss, 557, 470-517, 534-42. Russian paternalism held that strong leaders should be both concerned caregivers and severe disciplinarians to their childlike subordinates. They had to strike an uneasy between “affection and condescension.” See: Wirschafter, “The Idea of Paternalism in the Pre-Reform Army,” *Imperial Russia 1700-1917: State, Society, Opposition* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1988), 94-8.

<sup>19</sup>Diary entry for 6 Dec. 1855, Druzhinin, *Povesti, dnevnik*, 359-360; Turgenev’s letter of 8 Dec. 1855 to M.N. and V. P. Tolstoy, Turgenev, *Pis’ma*, 455-6, note 7. Yakobi’s lost his position and lab facilities; his inventions (an underwater mine and a telegraph), which could have aided Russia at the front, were not utilized.

bad that it is impossible to describe in a tourist guidebook last night's presentation of Russian scholars and Russian civilization."<sup>20</sup> For Kraevsky, Yakobi's outburst was a landmark of Russian society, a site so typical that it should have been on display for visitors. For him, the 1856 defeat did not create new sociopolitical tensions, it exposed the problems that already resided at the heart of her "civilization." It reinforced the notion that Russia's sociopolitical system, especially its militaristic autocracy, had to be reformed.

Other critics were subtler in their calls for reform. Pogodin, the keynote speaker at many heroes' welcomes, mobilized the language of Official Nationality against the crown in his suggestion that the war had prepared the Russian people for participation in a more liberal, reformed political system as citizens. At the banquet honoring Lieutenant-General S.A. Khrulev, Pogodin explained how the siege had "renewed and refreshed" the Russian people, elevating their souls to a new level of earthly purity and grace, which they could bring to politics.<sup>21</sup> In another speech, Pogodin's made gestures at anti-authoritarianism by emphasizing the tsar's munificence. Pointing to a picture of the tsar, he proclaimed: "We are one family. Here is our father, kind, gracious, benevolent."<sup>22</sup> Pogodin's call for the tsar to be a loving protector (not a severe disciplinarian), points to how the war exacerbated the tensions between these two components of paternalism. More liberal critics, however, were repulsed by Pogodin's appropriation of official rhetoric, suspecting that his monarchist overtures were not just empty gestures. In his diary, Tolstoy reacted in this way to one of Pogodin's patriotic articles in *Voennyi Sbornik*: "I could have slapped Pogodin's face with pleasure. Base flattery seasoned with Slavophilism. A new trick."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> A.A. Kraevsky's letter to Druzhinin, 6 Dec. 1855, *Pisma k A.V. Druzhininu*, IX (Moskva: Gosudarstvennyi Literaturnyi Muzei, 1948), 163.

<sup>21</sup> Curtiss, 556; Pogodin, *Zhizn' i Trudy*, XIV, 448-53; Aksakov's letter of 21 Aug. 1854, *Pisma k Rodnym*, 298.

<sup>22</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 2, 119. On Pogodin's veiled reformism, see: Curtiss, 555.

<sup>23</sup> Diary entry for: 13 May 1856 in: R.F. Christian, Ed. *Tolstoy's Diaries* (London: Athlone Press, 1984), 113. This is in reaction to Pogodin's article on a naval celebration in the May issue of *Morskoi Sbornik* (Ibid, 356).



For Tolstoy, the war changed not only who should be honored, but also how they should be honored. A new type of language was needed to articulate these new notions of heroism.

From her position at court, Anna Fedorovna Tiutcheva also saw official celebrations as occasions to critique the autocracy. In her diary, She described Alexander II's coronation ceremony as deeply hypocritical exercise steeped in false symbolism. During the moments that were meant to display the spiritual bond between the new tsar and the people, Tiutcheva "cried bitterly:" "my heart, inexpressibly sad, unintentionally began to pray for them." For her, this event displayed the "vanity" and "flimsiness" of autocratic power.<sup>24</sup> Faith in the crown eroded even among the imperial court family. It marks an interesting inversion of familial authority, where the childlike subjects no longer considered the tsar-father omnipotent or omniscient.

The ceremonial presentation of the Alexander's peace manifesto only strengthened Tiutcheva's conviction that the emperor and empress were weak, misguided rulers—most uncharacteristic of Russian autocrats: "they do not understand what they are doing and how they are undermining the ability to rule when they expose Russia's honor to a (drawing and) quartering. I love them so and at the same time am indignant at them. [...] They are not deceiving anyone and whom are they trying to fool?" She offered her own, alternative battle cry: "To truth, the whole truth, the one truth!"<sup>25</sup> Tiutcheva not only stressed the hollowness of official rhetoric, she also highlighted the growing opposition between imperial and public opinion, between official versions of the truth and actual truths. For her, the tsar no longer embodied Russia's glory, he compromised it. No more was he divine and infallible; the truth now resided in public opinion.

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<sup>24</sup> Diary entry for 26 August 1856, Anna F. Tiutcheva, *Pri Dvukh Imeratorov: Vospominaniia i fragmenty dnevnikov freileny dvora* (Moskva: Mysl', 1990), 146-8. This source is hereafter referred to as "Tiutcheva." Tiutcheva was a lady-in-waiting under Nicholas I and Alexander II and daughter of famed poet Fedor Ivanovich Tiutchev.

<sup>25</sup> Diary entries for 8 Jan. and 19 March 1856, Tiutcheva, 141-2, 144. Tolstoy declared that truth was the hero of "Sevastopol in May."

## II. Villains, Cowards, and Traitors: Heroism as an Avenue into Critique

### The Tsar-Commander and his Ministers of War

The search for war heroes, already strained by the lack of victories in the Crimea, suffered a huge setback when Russia lost its supreme commander in the middle of the siege. Nicholas I's untimely death not only broke the chain of command that drove state and military operations, to many observers, it signaled that the autocracy itself had been defeated; those closest to Nicholas suspected that he had in fact died of a broken heart: the war itself killed him.<sup>26</sup> Based on the same conclusion, critics of the war hailed Nicholas' death as a moral victory, which promised to end the fiasco in the Crimea. Druzhinin, for instance, toasted the new emperor, praying that his reign usher in an era of "mercy and humanity, and kindness of spirit." Even Tiutcheva, who was a personal friend of the tsar, prayed that his successor could "do what Nicholas could not," to end the war and "give the people their due."<sup>27</sup> To their great disappointment, the new emperor managed the war in a nearly identical way as his predecessor. He immediately announced his decision to follow "the intentions of his August forebears," and he wore the braid of his father's suite for the first year of his reign.<sup>28</sup> Alexander was also mostly concerned with military minutiae: "everything is just great for parades, and completely unsuited for war," Count Dmitrii Alekseevich Miliutin despaired.<sup>29</sup>

Nicholas had notoriously regarded his officials as symbolic extensions of his own will and persona, and he chose representatives for their loyal and obedient character, not for the originality

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<sup>26</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 7; diary entry for 21 Feb. 1855, Tiutcheva, 95.

<sup>27</sup> Diary entry for 28 Nov. 1855, Druzhinin, *Povesti, dnevnik*, 357; diary entries for 21, 23 Feb. 1855, Tiutcheva, 95-7.

<sup>28</sup> Alexander's accession manifesto quoted in: Wortman, *Scenarios II*, 21-2.

<sup>29</sup> Miliutin quoted in: A. Ia. Paneva, *Vospominaniia, 1824-1870* (Moskva: Zakharov, 2002), 245. Miliutin deplored the Russian military's emphasis on forms and drills. As an officer and professor at the War Academy, he educated incoming cadets at the War Academy and published widely on both military science and literary criticism. For details, see: Forrest A. Miller, *Dmitrii Miliutin and the Reform Era in Russia* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), 11-2. On the continuities between Nicholas' and Alexander's management of the war, see also: Miliutin, *Vospominaniia (kniga V-VI)*, 331-3.

of their ideas.<sup>30</sup> If the tsar was credited for the achievements of his appointees, their failures and mistakes cast doubt upon his abilities as a statesman. It is no wonder then that the abysmal performances of the ministers of war during the Crimean conflict damaged the autocrat's image as a military expert. Both tsars showed their ignorance of military affairs through the ministers of war that they chose. In his memoir, Miliutin recalled how Nicholas's Minister of War, Prince A. I. Chernyshev, managed to convince the tsar that a big army (regardless of weaponry or training) was a strong army. A professor at the War Academy, Miliutin warned Nicholas that the huge Russian army was actually ill-prepared for war, but to no avail.<sup>31</sup> Alexander II shocked military observers he retained his father's aging, inactive Minister of War V.A. Dolgorukov.<sup>32</sup> Worse still, even after losing the war, the tsar appointed the equally inept N.O. Sukhozanet as his replacement. Sukhozanet was semi-literate and unversed in military science, but he was subservient and loyal to the autocrat.<sup>33</sup> In her diary, Tiutcheva repeatedly observed that the Russian public held the tsar accountable for the mistakes of his military officials. She relayed this conversation with Elena Pavlovna's lady-in-waiting, Mademoiselle Paden:

She told me what I had heard from many sources, that society is greatly dissatisfied with the course of events under the new tsar [...] When the emperor took the throne, they expected the quick retirement of Dolgorukov and Kleimikhel'; the terrible results of the war for Russia have revealed the minister of war's inabilities. They are surprised that his majesty deems it necessary to spare such blameworthy people who have brought such evil to Russia and who were well known to him when he was the heir and when truth was easier for him to reach.<sup>34</sup>

Beyond vilifying the ministers as "evil" and "blameworthy," Tiutcheva made several striking assertions. She juxtaposed Russian society to the autocracy, casting public opinion as a critic and

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<sup>30</sup> Riasanovsky, *A Parting of Ways: Government and the Educated Public in Russia, 1801-1855* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 135.

<sup>31</sup> Forrest A. Miller, *Dmitrii Miliutin and the Reform Era in Russia* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), 11-2; Miliutin, *Vospominaniia* V-IV, 331-3.

<sup>32</sup> E. Willis Brooks, "Reform in the Russian Army, 1856-1861," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (Spring, 1984), 65.

<sup>33</sup> Brooks, "Reform," 67.

<sup>34</sup> Diary entry for 11 June 1855, Tiutcheva, 120-1.

rival to the crown. She also suggested that it was the position of tsar in particular that impaired Alexander's judgment. In this way, her statement harbors implicit criticisms of autocracy as an infallible system of governance.

### **Commanders in Chief**

The emerging public also challenged the autocracy by criticizing the commanders-in-chief who, like the ministers of war, were personally selected by the emperor and thus reflections of his judgment. In two years of fighting, Russia had three different commanders-in-chief. After the siege of Silistria (before the war shifted to Sevastopol), Commander-in-chief Prince Ivan Fyodorovich Paskevich exaggerated (or simply invented) an injury in order to hasten his retirement. Prince Alexander Sergeevich Menshikov replaced him, but retired shortly after the disastrous battle of the Alma. Prince Mikhail Dmitrievich Gorchakov, a veteran of the Napoleonic, Turkish, Persian, and Polish wars, took over for Menshikov and remained commander-in-chief until the Peace of Paris in 1856.<sup>35</sup>

At the beginning of the siege, opinions of Menshikov were fairly positive. Aksakov, Pirogov, and Tolstoy were among his supporters.<sup>36</sup> Even after the troops had suffered defeat under his leadership, Pirogov wrote to his wife that many soldiers saw the prince as a "good and honorable guy;" they had faith in Menshikov's "great human heart." After the battle of Inkerman, however, Menshikov became a veritable traitor in the eyes of Russian soldiers and civilians, not

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<sup>35</sup> Royle, *The Crimean War*, 148. As one of his last decrees, Nicholas forced Menshikov to retire.

<sup>36</sup> Letter of 29 April 1854: Aksakov, *Pisma k Rodnym*, 252. Judging from his letters, his opinion soured by October 1854 (Ibid, 320).

because they lost the battle (though many commented on his strategic blunders), but because, in their view, his good intentions had vanished.<sup>37</sup>

In their letters, diaries, and remembrances, the *sevastopol'tsy* attacked Menshikov—or “*Izmeshchikov*” as he came to be called—for what they considered despotic and autocratic qualities. Of course, Official Nationality instructed the commander-in-chief to model himself after the tsar as symbolic extensions of the emperor’s will and persona.<sup>38</sup> The *sevastopol'tsy* vilified Menshikov precisely because, to them, he was tsar-incarnate *par excellence*. Their criticisms of the Prince stemmed from more basic complaints about the principles of autocracy in general. The *sevastopol'tsy* viewed the over-centralization of the military as authority as a sign of Menshikov’s despotism; he forbade anyone from giving orders without his permission. In Totleben’s view, many battles were lost because officers were denied the freedom to respond quickly and advantageously to military situations as they arose. Like the Russian state, military authority was overly centralized and even autocratic. Pirogov compared the Prince to a tyrannical autocrat by calling him “a bad Caesar.”<sup>39</sup> According to Vice-Admiral Kornilov, the Prince rarely sought military advice, and even when he did, he often disregarded this counsel.<sup>40</sup> In light of the problems caused by this overly centralized chain of command, immediately after the war, General-Adjutant F.V. Ridiger proposed giving some of the commander-in-chief’s authority to the corps of elite commanders, but Alexander II rejected this outright.<sup>41</sup> In short, Menshikov’s authoritarianism was not touted as a source of military strength, but lamented as the cause of his miscalculations.

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<sup>37</sup> Letter of 24 Oct, 1854, Pirogov, *Sevastopolskie pisma* (Sankt-Peterburg, Tipografiia M. Merkusheva, 1907), 73-4. This source is hereafter referred to as “Pirogov;” Curtiss, 329.

<sup>38</sup> Even in emigration, cut off from these debates, Herzen called Menshikov “the buffoon of the tsar” (Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 289).

<sup>39</sup> Russell, *General Todleben’s History*, 65; letter of 24 Oct. 1854, Pirogov, 74-5.

<sup>40</sup> See: Kornilov’s diary entries for 15 & 19 Sept 1854, Kornilov, 274-5, 277.

<sup>41</sup> Brooks, “Reform,” 66-7.

Many hoped that Menshikov's replacement, Prince Gorchakov, would be a more benevolent and skilled commander, who could improve Russia's performance at the front. Tolstoy expressed his confidence in Gorchakov to T.A. Yergolskaia, explaining how he served under him in Silistria and called him "a great, capable man." He even hoped to become one of Gorchakov's aides.<sup>42</sup> Just a few months later, however, Tolstoy declared that the Prince had "lost [his] sense," and was placing Russia in a dire situation: "I am more convinced than before that Russia must either fall or be completely transformed."<sup>43</sup> Pirogov had a similar change of heart. An army surgeon, Pirogov's chief complaints about Menshikov pertained to the lack of supplies for the wounded and sick. Although Gorchakov had not yet corrected these problems, Pirogov observed: "he, at least is a person with a soul, not that kind of preserved mummy, like Menshikov, and he is well-meaning—this is already a lot."<sup>44</sup> When conditions had not improved a month later, Pirogov recanted, claiming that Gorchakov avoiding his requests for supplies like he dodged enemy shells. "These days," the doctor wrote in September 1855, "I see ruins, meaning two things: Sevastopol and Gorchakov. The bay distinguishes one from the other."<sup>45</sup> In the end, the *sevastopol'tsy* presented both Menshikov and Gorchakov as villains of the siege.

The fact that the *sevastopol'tsy* tended to offer the same specific criticisms of Menshikov and Gorchakov suggests that they shared a general vision of how a commander-in-chief ought to act. In addition to a despotic style, both men were ridiculed for their absence from the front and their disregard for the troops' wellbeing. Ironically, it was the over-centralization of military that burdened the commander-in-chief with numerous bureaucratic duties and called him away from the front, which made it seem—to the *sevastopol'tsy*—that Menshivkov and Gorchakov were

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<sup>42</sup> Letter of 5 July 1854 to T.A. Yergolskaia, *Tolstoy's Letters*, 40, 50.

<sup>43</sup> Diary entry for 23 Nov. 1854, *Tolstoy's Diaries*, 97, 146.

<sup>44</sup> Letters of 25 Feb. and 25 March 1855, Pirogov, 114.

<sup>45</sup> Letter of 8 Sept, 1855, *Ibid*, 149. See also Pirogov's letter of 29 April 1855, *Ibid*, 133-5.

neglecting their troops. “Prince Menshikov lives” Pirogov noted in January 1855, “as if he did not exist.” In Kornilov’s diary, the phrase “I have seen neither hide nor hair of the Prince” is repeated like a mantra.<sup>46</sup> Complaints about Gorchakov’s inactivity mark Totleben’s history and Ivan Aksakov’s letters, where both men juxtaposed his inactivity to the “heroic bravery” of the troops.<sup>47</sup> Whether or not they understood the reason behind the absences, these criticisms suggest that they favored a different type of a commander-in-chief—not an administrator, but a leader who interacted with the troops and fought alongside with them at the front.

Along with this, the *sevastopol’sty* were demanding from the commanders-in-chief a new kind of paternalism as well, and they accused Menshikov and Gorchakov of neglecting the soldiers’ health and wellbeing. In fact, many observers claimed that this lack of concern was the main reason that Russia lost Sevastopol. Chodaisewicz, who was hungry during much of his service, argued that Menshikov “never once showed the slightest interest as to the manner in which the men were fed, nor did he ever inspect the cook-houses, which he ought to have done.”<sup>48</sup> The problem was not negligence, but deliberate cruelty. A similar attack was levied against Gorchakov in *Russkii Arkhiv*, where an artillery officer accused the Prince of ringing the alarm at dinnertime so that the soldiers would not have the chance to eat.<sup>49</sup> When Gorchakov failed to deliver the provisions he promised, Chodaisewicz underscored how the Prince evoked the rhetoric of Official Nationality, asking the troops to “cheerfully endure [these] hardships” because “they were fighting for their faith and their emperor.”<sup>50</sup> In relaying this episode, Chodaisewicz

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<sup>46</sup> Letter of Jan. 13 1855, *Pirogov*, 98; “*O kniaze ni slukhu ni dukhu.*” For two examples, see: his diary entries for 15 and 17 Sept. 1854, Kornilov, 273, 275.

<sup>47</sup> Totleben, I, 661, 713; letter of 29 May 1855, Aksakov, *Pisma k Rodnym*, 351; Hodaisewich, 241.

<sup>48</sup> Hodaisewich, 20, 176.

<sup>49</sup> *RA*, 1870, no. 11. See: Seaton, *The Crimean War: A Russian Chronicle*. London: B.T. Batsford Ltd, 1977. 178. This source is hereafter referred to as “Seaton.”

<sup>50</sup> Hodaisewich, 241. One of Tolstoy’s characters offers a more playful “rebuttal” to Gorchakov’s appeal, asking: “What sort of honor is it when there’s nothing to eat?” (“Sevastopol in May,” 136).

highlighted how the Prince failed to fulfill his paternalistic duty to care for the troops by wielding the crown's own values against it. Pirogov made a similar accusation against Menshikov regarding the wounded and sick: "Is it possible that the commander-in-chief has not once come to the soldiers in the hospital? Not once said inspiring (*radushnogo*) words to those who have reached death. [...] Time will show what kind of a military leader Menshikov is; but even if he successfully defends Sevastopol, I never will attribute any of the accomplishments to him. He cannot or he does not want to sympathize with the soldiers."<sup>51</sup>

These criticisms spread throughout society and eventually reached the imperial court. Nicholas became concerned that Menshikov was compromising both Russia's chances for victory and the autocracy's military reputation. So in the winter of 1854, Nicholas sent his sons to Sevastopol to inspect the war effort and to report back on Menshikov.<sup>52</sup> Nicholas died before a formal inquiry could occur, but under Alexander II an investigation of the war administration and of Gorchakov, did take place. These proceedings had few results. Totleben even remarked that, if anything, the investigation uncovered the lack of solidarity between the ranks.<sup>53</sup> Even though the *sevastopol'tsy* held them personally responsible, the leadership problem was systemic and could not be pinned on the commander-in-chief alone.

### **The Commanding Officer Corps**

The *Sevastopol'tsy* identified the same unheroic qualities in the commanding officers as they did in Menshikov and Gorchakov. When these criticisms were lodged against the commanders-in-chief, they raised questions about the crown's military expertise. In the case of

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<sup>51</sup> Letter of 24 October, 1854, Pirogov, 74-5; also see: Hodaisewich, 96-7.

<sup>52</sup> Seaton, 183.

<sup>53</sup> Totleben I, 721; Seaton, 208; Curtiss, 443-4.



these (non-appointed) officers, the soldiers' accusations implicated military education and the social hierarchy, which structured Russian society in general.

Officers themselves, Tolstoy, Totleben, and Chodaisewicz explained that the chaos and devastation inside Sevastopol stemmed from the fact that their superiors simply did not know what to do.<sup>54</sup> Rumors of their incompetence spread through civilian society and again reached the imperial court. "Despite the miracles of bravery on the part of the soldiers," Tiutcheva noted, "we see nothing in the leaders taking up of their job except hesitancy and groping for the right operations."<sup>55</sup> The officers' incompetence reflected the poor quality of the cadet schools, which only twenty-five percent of Russian officers attended; most had even less training. As an 1858 article in *Voennyi Sbornik* noted, "truly in our army one rarely meets an officer who could carry out an assignment requiring familiarity with military science." Worse still, the most talented graduates were typically assigned to the guards' regiments and used for parade units, while those less qualified were put in combat. Chodaisewicz blamed the battle of the Alma squarely on the commanding officers: "During the five hours that the battle went on," he explained, "we did not during the whole time receive any orders from them either to advance or to retire; and when we retired, nobody knew whether we ought to go to the right or left."<sup>56</sup> Ironically, the authoritarian Russian military in fact sorely lacked authoritative leaders.

Russian military education did a double disservice to the officer corps: not only did it give them inadequate training, it also instilled in them the values of total obedience and deference to authority. "In the Russian service," Chodaisewicz explained, "it is impossible for a General to be [at] fault when only a captain of a company is in question."<sup>57</sup> Even when the officers had been

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<sup>54</sup> "Sevastopol in August," 120, 134; Hodaisewich, 69; Totleben, I, 721.

<sup>55</sup> Entry for 2 June 1855, Tiutcheva, 116.

<sup>56</sup> "Vzgliad na stepen' obrazovaniia Russkikh ofitserov v armii," *VS*, no. 1, 1858, 147; Hodaisewich, 87.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 173-4, 44.

well educated in military science, they still maintained the values of obedience and authoritarianism against their better judgment. “All their reasoning faculties are kept down by subordination.” Because of this autocratic culture, the commanders lacked both the authority and the inclination to make spontaneous decisions in battle. In this way, strict discipline and total obedience, upheld as virtues by Official Nationality, were root causes of the poor quality of officers and the failure of Russia’s armed forces more generally.

While incompetence could be blamed on poor training or forced obedience, the commanding officers had no excuse for shirking duty and neglecting their troops’ wellbeing. In fictional and in documentary accounts of the siege, commanders were accused of using their men as cannon fodder or, like Paskevich, feigning injuries to avoid combat. In “Sevastopol in December” one doctor warns a colleague that officers often fake illnesses by making pockmarks on their bodies “with a dinner fork” and then claiming to have the measles. Chodaisewicz highlighted how empty the rhetoric of Official Nationality had become for some officers. After making a grand speech about “defending his country” and “laying down [his] life for the czar (sic),” one regimental commander, Captain Volkov, reported himself wounded to avoid fighting at the Alma. An 1858 article in *Artilleriiskii Zhurnal* attacked Volkov for this cowardly act. Other officers did not bother to fake illness, but simply avoided combat. Colonel V.F. Vunsh wrote into *Voennyi Sbornik*, accusing Lieutenant-General V.Ia. Kir’iakov of running away during the Alma, leaving his men behind.<sup>58</sup> These accusations of abuse and neglect clearly echo those levied against the commanders-in-chief. Taken together, they reveal the negative model of heroism that was developing and in circulation during the war.

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<sup>58</sup> “Sevastopol in May,” 99; Chodaisewicz, 92-4, 171; Seaton, 58-9, 10.

Some *sevastopol'tsy* explained their commanders' cowardly behavior by implicating the class system that structured Russian society. In his letters and in "Sevastopol in May" Tolstoy suggested that the gentry's aristocratic lifestyle was to blame. The story portrays elite officers lounging around and playing cards while battle rages outside.<sup>59</sup> From their relatively privileged position, gentry officers did not truly comprehend the experience of war and thus, they could not recognize true heroism. "I have to confess," says one officer, "I really don't understand how men in dirty underwear, suffering from lice and not even able to wash their hands can possibly be capable of bravery."<sup>60</sup> The sketch mocks the officers' assumption that military glory was still the property of the upper classes, and it highlights the heroic self-sacrifice of its low-ranking characters, not their aristocratic superiors.<sup>61</sup>

Chodaisewicz also faulted Russia's rigid social hierarchy, describing military service as a type of second serfdom for the peasant conscripts. The soldiers "[we]re oppressed with blows and ill treatment; their understanding [wa]s kept down by their servitude and the severe laws to which they are subjected." Treated like "mindless brutes," he continued, soldiers were beaten for "educational" purposes or even for entertainment. Chodaisewicz told one story about a Captain Gorieff, who struck his men just to make himself laugh. "After all this," Gorieff ordered the tortured man to laugh, "and if he does not obey, is punished!" Elise Kimmerling Wirtschafter has argued that the personalization of the officer-soldier relationship as father and son was often a recipe for arbitrary violence. It encouraged the idea that, like a child, the soldier had to be controlled through physical means. As I discuss below, the type of paternalism associated with the

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<sup>59</sup> Letter to Nekrasov, 20 March 1855, *Tolstoy's Letters*, 102.

<sup>60</sup> "Sevastopol in December," 49; "Sevastopol in May," 72-4.

<sup>61</sup> "Sevastopol in May," 65; "Sevastopol in August," 119-20.

popular heroes of the siege was quite different. It stressed the commanders' obligations to protect and provide for the troops, rather than to dominate them.<sup>62</sup>

In sum, the *sevastopol'tsy* criticized the officer corps on the same grounds as they did the commanders-in-chief. Together, these critiques suggest a negative model of heroism. Moreover, because these men were privileged members of society, these criticisms spoke to fundamental problems of Russia's sociopolitical order. Certainly, Russia's rigid social hierarchy and the gentry's abuse of the peasantry had been attacked in the past, but the war, which allowed the rank-and-file to evaluate its superiors' behavior at the front, fanned these flames of social critique. Through the Russian press, these sentiments spread through the reading public like wildfire.

### **The Press Debate**

The discontentment engendered by the war became a unifying point for the coalescence of public opinion. And, as the controversy surrounding banquets and celebrations attests, Russia's emerging *publika* was generally regarded as a critical space, which—although not exempt from state control—struggled to give voice to independent and critical perspectives on the war.<sup>63</sup> Although Alexander II did not initiate major military reforms until 1860, he did liberalize the Russian press by allowing more journals to enter circulation and by loosening the bonds of censorship.<sup>64</sup> Several scholars have argued that Russia did not really develop a critical public

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<sup>62</sup> Hodaisewich, 50-3, 7, 23; Wirtschafter, "The Idea of Paternalism," 99-100.

<sup>63</sup> Public opinion was a political tool wielded both against the crown and by it. Nicholas used newspapers to give the impression of his omnipresence and personal connection to the people. Even though the Prince was against attacking at Chernaya Rechka, Alexander II warned Gorchakov that an offensive was needed "to satisfy public opinion, which was dominant in Russia." See: Wortman *Scenarios*, I, 303-4; Totleben, II, 115.

<sup>64</sup> Ruud, *Fighting Words*, 98. Public opinion was a political force that could be wielded not only against the crown, but by it as well. For example, even though he was against mounting an offensive at Chernaya Rechka, the tsar pushed Gorchakov to order the attack by sending constant telegrams, letters, and even an imperial envoy, General-Adjutant Baron P.A. Vrensky to Sevastopol. According to Lieutenant G.G. Krasovsky, Vrensky told the Prince that an offensive was necessary "to satisfy public opinion, which was dominant in Russia, in the same way (*par le même motif*) that Kutuzov initiated the battle of Borodino before evacuating Moscow" (Totleben, II, 115). Alexander pushed

sphere until the 1860s, but in several respects, the war years marked a clear shift in reading habits, and the development of a critical public opinion.<sup>65</sup> First, the demand for reading material sharply increased in 1855—ten years before the press reforms of 1865. Between 1855-1860, the number of periodicals in circulation doubled from 104 to 230, and these new journals represented various political persuasions including Mikhail Katkov's *Russkii Vestnik* and the Slavophilic *Russkaia Beseda*. In the countryside *lubki* and book peddlers experienced a huge increase in demand for reading materials when the war erupted.<sup>66</sup> Under Nicholas, subscriptions to the military journals *Russkii Invalid (RI)* and *Morskoi Sborniki (MS)* swelled, because they were the only periodicals with access to official dispatches from the front and with permission to report on the war.<sup>67</sup> Russia's first popular daily newspaper, *Severnaia Pchela*, could only reprint their articles. Nevertheless, during the war, *Severnaia Pchela's* subscriptions doubled (from 5,000 to 10,000), and N.A. Nekrasov, editor of *Sovremennik*, claimed to have lost 600 subscribers because he was unable to print anything on the war.<sup>68</sup> To meet the demand for war news, Russia's public sphere expanded to include new journals and more military men as readers and contributing writers.

The war also prompted unofficial attempts to expand the number of readers and reading materials. For instance, the defeat added fuel to Russia's underground press, and new agitators,

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for the battle not because he thought the war could be won, but so he would have a victory to bring to the peace negotiations (see: Seaton, 207).

<sup>65</sup> Here I take a different position than Louise McReynolds, Jeffrey Brooks, and Charles Ruud, who have suggested that Russia's public sphere developed in the 1860s partly "in response" to the great reforms. McReynolds argued that the 1875 war with Turkey was the "first issue of national consequence that the reformed press could partake in," but I suggest that this began at least ten years earlier (McReynolds, *The News under Russia's Old Regime* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 4, 18, 282, 284-5).

<sup>66</sup> Ruud, *Fighting Words*, 99; Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russians Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 96.

<sup>67</sup> Ruud, *Fighting Words*, 278, note 29. The Ministry of War founded *RI* after 1815 as a way to raise money for veterans and their families, while the Naval Ministry operated *MS*. *MS* was allowed to publish monthly lists of casualties, which other periodicals could not reprint.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 65, 94. In the summer of 1856, *Sovremennik* and *Otechestvennye Zapiski* received permission to cover the war; this was short-lived because Sevastopol fell that fall.

such as reformists B. N. Chicherin and N.A. Mel'gunov, cultivated reputations as pamphleteers.<sup>69</sup> The war pushed both Tolstoy and Miliutin to propose the development of new journals. Tolstoy wanted to establish a military periodical that would be written for, about, and by common soldiers. He hoped to improve literacy among the rank-and-file by encouraging them to read and write about themselves in the trenches. Tolstoy's plan was more ambitious politically than pedagogically. The artillery officer made no effort to hide his dissatisfaction with the officially sanctioned news in *RI*, arguing that his journal, by contrast, would inform the soldiers about their own heroism, and it would publish their personal accounts so that soldiers' experiences and perspectives could finally be shared with the civilian public. Such unofficial war stories, Tolstoy contended, would reveal truths that had been hitherto been unknown. In this way, he aimed to both expand the public sphere and shape public opinion of the armed forces.<sup>70</sup>

Around the same time, Miliutin submitted a proposal to establish the journal *Voennyi Sbornik (VS)*. Like Tolstoy, Miliutin was immediately concerned with raising the literacy rates of the troops, and he viewed this journal as a first step toward reforming military education. If Miliutin's plans were less overtly political than Tolstoy's, he still hoped that *VS* (which became a journal in 1858) would drum up support for reform politics, and he recruited editors with oppositionist politics, such as N. G. Chernyshevsky and N.N. Obruchev.<sup>71</sup> Miliutin's and Tolstoy's proposals were clear attempts to expand the public sphere and shape public opinion by introducing new voices into the established core of Russian writers, editors, and readers, who would be critical of the existing order.

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<sup>69</sup> For example, in 1855, Chicherin illegally circulated a number of pamphlets, calling for freedom of speech, end to serfdom, and other reforms. His pieces were later smuggled out to Herzen in London, and in 1857 they were published in his journal *Golos iz Rossii* (see: Chicherin, *Vospominaniia*, 127-9; Curtiss, 559-560).

<sup>70</sup> Letter to Nicholas I on 11 Jan. 1855, Tolstoy, *Perepiska s ruskimi pisateliami* (Moskva: Izd. Khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1962), 20-1; letters to T.A. Yergolskaya on 17-8 Oct. 1854 and 6 Jan. 1855, and letter to N.A. Nekrasov on 11 Jan. 1855, *Tolstoy's Letters*, 42-3, 47-9. His proposal was never approved.

<sup>71</sup> Miliutin, *Vospominaniia VII-VIII*, 275-6; Miller, *Dmitrii Miliutin*, 21-3; Ruud, *Fighting Words*, 98-9.

Despite Tolstoy's suspicion that the official military press agitated for the crown, by 1856, it had become a virtual battleground between soldiers and their superiors. The *sevastopol'tsy* flouted military conventions of obedience, if not at the front, then in print. Because these discussions were published, civilian readers could now see and decide for themselves the extent to which the imperial leadership was qualified or of effective at the front. In this way, the complaints, experiences, and perspectives of individual soldiers became shared. Here is a sample of the press debate surrounding an early battle, the Alma, and Russia's last offensive at Chernaya Rechka.

In *RI* and *VS*, officers bickered for years over who was responsible for Russia's defeat at the Alma. In an 1856 letter to *RI*, Lieutenant-General V.Ia. Kir'iakov blamed the commanding officers for foolishly followed Menshikov's orders. Only he, Kir'iakov claimed, foresaw the failure of the Prince's plans.<sup>72</sup> In a letter to *VS*, Menshikov's chief of staff Colonel V.F. Vunsh responded harshly to Kir'iakov, saying that, if he had felt this way, then he should have openly criticized these plans at the time. This is an important indication of how postwar military values regarding deference to authority had shifted, since the colonel—no longer loyal to the Prince—was actually encouraging Kir'iakov to disobey his superiors who, it was now admitted, were far from infallible.

Even the events of the Alma were under dispute. In 1856, Kir'iakov submitted a full account of the Alma to *VS*, in which he defended himself from attacks published by Gorchakov and Lieutenant-General O.A. Kvitsinsky that the left flank (under Kir'iakov's control) withdrew its position too early and without permission. Vunsh chimed in, supporting Gorchakov and reiterating that Kir'iakov withdrew his troops first. Kir'iakov responded to Vunsh in *VS*, calling

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<sup>72</sup> Seaton, 73. I am indebted to Seaton's discussion of these press debates.

his accusations “inventions and insults.”<sup>73</sup> Meanwhile, in *RI*, Gorchakov and Kvitsinsky argued over who led the Vladimirsky battalions at the Alma. Kvitsinsky was well aware that, by engaging in this dispute, he was violating the conventions of deference to authority, but he maintained that the truth necessitated it: “I do not wish to detract from the part played by my superior Prince Gorchakov, and I write this not in any sense of self-esteem [...] but only in the interest of truth.”<sup>74</sup> By providing the opportunity for lower ranking officers to evaluate and publicly critique their superiors’ abilities and attitudes, the war cast doubt upon official authorities as bearers of the truth and facilitated the idea that truth resided in unofficial, critical circles. Honesty more than obedience was now touted as a military value.

Totleben deliberately chose to highlight these military squabbles as part of his history of the war. He ended his account with an appendix of letters and articles from officers bickering over Chernaya Rechka. The arguments began as soon as the smoke cleared, when Gorchakov (who was against the offensive from the start) hinted in his dispatches from the front that the tsar was to blame for this debacle. From his deathbed, former Commander-in-chief Paskevich penned an angry letter to Gorchakov, chastising him for trying to manipulate the truth with an “eye to future historians.”<sup>75</sup> Gorchakov’s battle plans at Chernaya Rechka called for several units to fire long-range artillery in order to provide a cover for infantry troops moving into position for the attack. N.V. Verg argued that, when General Read heard shoots being fired, he foolishly assumed that the battle had begun, and even though he had not been given an order to shoot (and he was out of range), he opened fire. Read died during the offensive, but his honor was defended by Gorchakov’s aide Lieutenant G.G. Krasovsky, who wrote to *VS* that Gorchakov was also to blame

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<sup>73</sup> *VS*, no. 136, 1856; *VS*, no. 3, 1858 (see: Seaton, 86-7).

<sup>74</sup> *RI*, no. 84, 1856; Seaton, 92-3.

<sup>75</sup> Paskevich quoted in: Seaton, 207.



for giving such vague commands.<sup>76</sup> Krasovsky claimed that, on the morning of the offensive, the Prince sent him to order all the commanders “to begin” (*nachinat*). Lieutenant-General P.P. Liprandi, who received this order first, opened fire, and upon hearing this, Read preemptively followed suit. Krasovsky then arrived and gave Read the one-word order, “begin.” Read did not understand—did this mean open fire or begin marching? Krasovsky only mechanically repeated this single word, either because he too did not know what the Prince had meant or because he was accustomed obeying blindly.

In his version of events, Krasovsky claimed to have prudently warned the commander-in-chief that Read was confused by the order, but that Gorchakov ignored him.<sup>77</sup> Here, Krasovsky lodged the same complaint about Gorchakov that others had at Menshikov: he refused to heed the council of others. Read, however reluctant to follow these ridiculous orders (why attack from so far away?), blindly obeyed and set the preemptive attack in motion. He passed on the order to attack and marched into battle before reinforcements or even the necessary equipment were in position.<sup>78</sup> Taken as a whole, these letters show the tragic consequences of giving vague orders, obeying blindly, and not waiting for clarification or for direction.

Krasovsky’s letter is remarkable because it presents a mere aide reprimanding the commander-in-chief of the entire army. The piece flouts traditional notions of power and rank by elevating critique and disobedience as new military virtues. These principles could have prevented the disaster at Chernaya Rechka. Moreover, Krasovsky also seized the opportunity to rebuff several other officers in his letter, like Kuzmin, who disagreed with his version of events.

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<sup>76</sup> Krasovsky’s account is in: *VS*, no. 2 1861; see: Totleben, II, appendix, 106.

<sup>77</sup> Seaton, 202; Totleben, II appendix, 107-8.

<sup>78</sup> Totleben, II, appendix, 111-3.

He attempted to delegitimize his competitors, accusing them of tweaking the events of the battle for the sake of self-promotion.<sup>79</sup> Of course, Krasovsky's own account did just that.

Russian readers must have been struck by the bitterness of these disputes, the leadership's incompetence, and the general confusion over the events of combat. Historians are likely to be more impressed by the fact that these letters and essays were all officially published with little regard as to whether they smeared commanders-in-chief, division commanders, or low-ranking officers. In short, these debates reveal how the war created new uncertainty about Russia's sociopolitical order, emblemized by the military, as well as how it facilitated the development of a critical public opinion.

### **The People's Heroes**

All the same, popular heroes did emerge from Sevastopol, suggesting that defeat alone did not elicit such attacks on the state and military leadership. The new type of heroism that surfaced from the city's ruins defied the notion that heroes were elite or extraordinary individuals, mighty and victorious. In light of the growing criticism of imperial decorations, ceremonies, and leadership, it should come as no surprise that these "true" heroes of Sevastopol were put forward by the soldiers themselves and often in conflict with official opinions. The four individuals who were the most revered by the troops and, subsequently, by the Russian public were: Vladimir Alekseevich Kornilov, Pavel Stepanovich Nakhimov, Vladimir Ivanovich Istomin, and Franz Eduard Ivanovich Totleben. These four men, immortalized in bronze, still watch over the port of Sevastopol today. The money for these statutes was donated by soldiers and sailors during the war

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 105.

and erected without government support.<sup>80</sup> Here again, the rank-and-file asserted themselves as authoritative interpreters of the siege's legacy. Alexander II did attempt to reassert his control over this process, sometimes by recognizing unofficial heroes, sometimes by trying to supplant them. Similarly, Alexander III and Nicholas II both tried to replace the statue of Nakhimov with one of Gorchakov, but to no avail.<sup>81</sup>

In some respects, it is surprising that the soldiers chose to honor these particular men. First, even though the siege was mostly fought on land (the Black Sea fleet lay at the bottom of the harbor), three of the four men were naval officers. Second, after the allied armies became entrenched around Sevastopol, these four figures did relatively little fighting—offensive or defensive. An engineering officer, Totleben directed the city's fortifications, while the three naval officers spent their time supervising this construction process as they were not fighting any sea battles. Third (and perhaps less surprising), three out of four were martyred during the siege—only Totleben returned to receive a hero's welcome. Kornilov actually died during the very first allied attack on the fortress in October 1854. Their deaths added to the popular belief that the fate of Sevastopol rested on their shoulders and fell in their absence. The fact that the Russian troops evacuated the city when the "Kornilov Bastion" was taken underscores this association.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Serhii Ploky, "The City of Glory: Sevastopol in Russian Historical Mythology," *Journal of Contemporary History*, (July 2000), 35, 3: 375-7; Iu. Davydov, *Nakhimov* (Moskva: Izd. Tsk. Vlksm. Molodaia Gvardiia, 1970), 168. In 1996 during a dispute between The Russian Federation and Ukraine, both claiming the Crimean War as part of their national myths, Russian newspapers published statements from A.P. Nakhimov, G.V. Kornilov, and A.P. Istomin, the heroes' descendants, urging that it remain Russian. This episode clearly demonstrates the durability of these heroic personas, and it underscores the extent to which heroism is intimately tied to the war's legacy.

<sup>81</sup> The tsars became involved in commemorations of Sevastopol during the 1877-8 war with Turkey, and Alexander III later claimed the statues as symbols of the strength of Official Nationality. In 1905, Nicholas II also commissioned a mural of the siege entitled "The Defense of Sevastopol, 1854-55" from which Nakhimov is conspicuously absent. By contrast, in the Soviet period, an additional statue of Nakhimov was erected and a naval school established in his name (Ivan Shevtsov, *Pamiatnik Admiralu Nakhimovu v Sevastopole* (Moskva: Akademii Khudozhestv SSSR, 1960; Ploky, "The City," 376-380).

<sup>82</sup> Nakhimov died on 28 June, Istomin on 7 March 1855. Totleben was wounded in June 1855 and taken out of city. See: 15 March 1855, Tiutcheva, 106; Aksakov's letter of 12 Oct. 1854, *Pisma k Rodnym*, 325.

There is remarkable consistency between how the soldiers heralded these men and how the four figures praised each other, which suggests that they conceived of heroism in a similar way. Even though most *sevastopol'tsy* probably met one or two of these men at most, they typically wrote intimately and affectionately about all four, attributing the characteristics of one to the others. Istomin especially was a “hero by association” and rarely discussed on his own. A typical example can be found in Captain-Lieutenant F. Narbut’s article valorizing Kornilov, which ends with: “the same is true for Istomin, Nakhimov, and Lazarev.”<sup>83</sup> The accounts left by *sevastopol'tsy* suggest a model of heroism rather than make specific observations about each man individually.

Linked to this assumption that the four men were alike was the greater supposition that they were great friends. Friendship was another way of uniting these men as four incarnations of the same heroic spirit. For instance, in describing the affect of Kornilov’s death on the troops, naval officer D.V. Il’insky surmised that, “more than anyone,” the news of Kornilov’s death “struck and made an impression on his partner in the defense Adm[iral] Nakhimov.” Nakhimov is often credited with fostering this sense of spiritual unity because he suggested that Lazarev, Kornilov, and Istomin be buried together.<sup>84</sup> Others, like Captain-Lieutenant A.A. Popov, insisted that Istomin, who kept at Kornilov’s bedside, was most touched by the vice-admiral’s death.<sup>85</sup> Together, these men represented a unique type of heroism that was not individualistic, but stressed camaraderie and unity.

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<sup>83</sup> Narbut’s article in *MS*, no. 4, 1868, 28-29; Kornilov, 306. Also see: *Tolstoy’s Diaries*, 97.

<sup>84</sup> When Nakhimov died, he was buried alongside these men. Il’insky quoted in: Kornilov, 293; Nakhimov’s letter to D.E. Osten-Saken, 9 March 1855, *P. S. Nakhimov: Dokumenty i Materialy*, II (Sankt- Peterburg: Peterburgskii Institut Pechati, 2003), 126. This source is hereafter referred to as “Nakhimov.”

<sup>85</sup> A.A. Popov’s piece in *MS*, no.12, 1854 , 443-7, Kornilov, 292. Similarly, according to both Totleben and Kornilov, Nakhimov and Istomin were close comrades (see: Totleben, I, 517, 222; Kornilov’s diary entries for 5 and 24 Sept. 1854, Kornilov, 270, 277). Others, however, have suggested that these friendships have been largely mythologized. For examples, see the accounts of Captain-Lieutenant Afanas’ev (in *MS*, no. 2 1868, Kornilov, 305), or M.M. Kotsebu’s letter to M.F. Reineke of 24 Sept. 1854, Nakhimov, 70.

The *Sevastopol'tsy* identified the same “heroic” qualities in all four men. They all were described as having an inordinate amount of energy and—despite the fact that much of the siege was spent waiting around—they maintained a constant level of activity. While Menshikov was conspicuously absent from the city, “Korniloff seemed to have the power of multiplying himself,” Chodaisewicz explained, “for he was everywhere, encouraging those at work, and promising large rewards to all, if they could only keep the town.” The captain marveled at Totleben’s tireless efforts to improve fortifications, while Totleben himself stressed Istomin’s “extraordinary activity” and “energy.”<sup>86</sup> Ironically, because the admirals were not attending to their ships, they fewer duties and could spend more time among the troops at the bastions, while the overextended commanders-in-chief, who were away attending to administrative matters, developed reputations for being inactive and negligent. This misunderstanding underscores the extent to which the heroes of Sevastopol were identified by the soldiers at the front and not by officials at court or military experts. From the perspective of a soldier stationed at a bastion, the active, hardworking men were the ones that he saw all the time regardless of how much responsibility they actually had. In this respect, these four men were truly heroes in the popular imagination.

In addition to having superhuman energy, all four figures were regarded as deeply spiritual and godlike—a sharp contrast from their all-too-human commanders-in-chief. In the press, Totleben and Nakhimov were referred to as “saviors of Sevastopol” or “the souls of the defense.” Totleben himself called Nakhimov “a hero of antiquity.” Similarly, Tolstoy described Kornilov as a Greek hero, and Captain-Lieutenant I.F. Likhachev likened Kornilov’s relationship with his mentor Lazarev to Minerva being born from Zeus’ head. Because Lazarev was a hero of 1812, Likhachev provided a symbolic link between the mythologized heroes of these two wars—the

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<sup>86</sup> Hodaisewich, 101. See: “Memoirs of Captain-Lieutenant I.F. Likhachev” in *MS*, no. 7, 1856, Kornilov, 302; Totleben, I, 535-6; Nakhimov, 127.

great defenders of Borodino and Sevastopol.<sup>87</sup> These metaphors describe the four heroes as regal and godlike in a manner that would have only been befitting of the tsar. In this way, their heroic personas seem to rival the emperor as spiritual leaders of Russia.

At the same time, these four heroes were also reputed to be “simple” (*prostoi*), which the *sevastopol'tsy* associated with kindness and sincerity more than commonness. “Above all,” N.V. Verg wrote to Pogodin in June 1855, Nakhimov “was kind and simple.” Totleben made an identical observation about the admiral in his history, and at his celebration banquet, this fact was also pointed out by A.N. Maikov, who recited an ode to Nakhimov, declaring: “How simple, great, and holy he was.”<sup>88</sup> Even Dostoevsky, who was in exile during the war, wrote to A.E. Wrangel in 1856 that Totleben “is a plain, kind man with a generous heart (he’s proved it) a real hero of Sevastopol, the equal of Nakhimov and Kornilov.”<sup>89</sup> Dostoevsky clearly drew this characterization of Totleben from the press, which testifies to how widespread it had already become by 1856. In short, these four men’s majestic air and ethereal spirituality did not distance them from the troops because they had a plainness, which enabled them to bond with their soldiers and to inspire them.

Most of all, these four men were praised for their utmost devotion to the troops’ wellbeing. Kornilov’s diary is filled with daily reports on the health of his men, including their eating and drinking habits. The vice-admiral also arranged for a bathhouse to be built to improve hygiene and slow the rate of disease.<sup>90</sup> Nakhimov too was heralded as a tender caregiver and protector of

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<sup>87</sup> Hodaisewich, 158. On Nakhimov (an admiral!) as the “soul of the army,” see: M.F. Reineke’s diary entry for 19 October 1854, Nakhimov, 75; Totleben, II, 22; “Sebastopol in December,” 56-7; “Memoirs of Captain-Lieutenant I.F. Likhachev,” *MS*, no. 7, 1856, Kornilov, 301.

<sup>88</sup> N.V. Verg’s letter to M.P. Pogodin on 5 June 1855, *Admiral Nakhimov: Dokumenty i Ocherki* (Kaliningrad: Iantarii Skaz, 1997), 333; this source is hereafter referred to as “Admiral Nakhimov;” Totleben, II, 22. Turgenev quoted Maikov in his letter to the Tolstoys on 8 Dec. 1855, Turgenev, *Pisma*, 455-456.

<sup>89</sup> Dostoevsky’s letter to A.E. Wrangel of 23 March 1856 in: *Selected Letters of Fyodor Dostoevsky* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 93-4. Dostoevsky asked Totleben for help in ending his exile. Totleben got him a post as a second lieutenant in October 1856, but Dostoevsky hated army life and soon left (*Ibid*, 103).

<sup>90</sup> V. Kdt’s letter to V.G. Poltov and A.P. Zhander’s account of Kornilov’s death in *MS*, no. 12, Oct. 1854, Kornilov, 308, 289. Kornilov’s reports on the troops’ health in: *Ibid*, 243, 245, 279-80.

his men, even though in his youth he had been reprimanded for treating his sailors too harshly. By the 1850s, this had been collectively forgotten. An elated Lieutenant A.A. Butakov wrote to his mother that he chatted personally with Nakhimov, who asked about his health and addressed him as “sir.”<sup>91</sup> In this way, Kornilov and Nakhimov fulfilled their paternalistic duties prescribed by Official Nationality, but the premium they placed on providing for the men and (in the case of Butakov) addressing them as equals subverted the traditions of hierarchy and authoritarianism. Their brand of paternalism at once supported and undermined autocratic values and conventions.

This type of affectionate rather than stern paternalism echoed in the writings of the *sevastopol'tsy*. According to Verg, the men called Nakhimov the “father of the sailors,” and he in turn loved them “like children.”<sup>92</sup> Inter-Officer Egeriia reported that the soldiers considered Kornilov “not a [g]eneral,” but “a father,” and a “noble leader.” At his funeral, “not only officers of his rank cried,” but soldiers and even strangers “of unknown origins” wept.<sup>93</sup> In this way, Kornilov and Nakhimov were revered for upholding traditional values: like the tsar, they were regal, spiritual, paternalistic authority figures, yet they were more attuned to the people’s needs than the autocrat. After all, even civilian peasants who had never met Kornilov considered the vice-admiral a father.

Perhaps because they treated their men more like equals, these heroes surpassed the tsar-father in their ability to communicate and inspire the troops. I have mentioned that a common criticism of imperial celebrations was that official language was hollow and insincere. Because Pogodin was one of the men censured for appropriating the rhetoric of Official Nationality, it is particularly interesting that Verg reported to him how Nakhimov was celebrated for *not* wielding

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<sup>91</sup> Ploky, “The City,” 376. A.A. Butakov’s letter of 17 March 1855, Nakhimov, 133.

<sup>92</sup> Letter from N.V. Verg to Pogodin, 5 June 1855, *Admiral Nakhimov*, 333; see: Captain-Lieutenant F. Narbut’s article “From the Notes of a Noble Sevastopolian” *RA*, no. 12, 1867, Kornilov, 305.

<sup>93</sup> “The notes of Inter-Officer Egeriia,” Kornilov, 293.

this language. “With an open tone,” Verg wrote, Nakhimov “would come down from official speech and talk not like that, but somehow respectfully, so they listened and believed him.” The men in turn “voiced their thoughts to him, as if they had to join in.”<sup>94</sup> The admiral inspired his men and gained their trust precisely because he adopted a rhetoric style, which seemed accessible and genuine. This idea that official-sounding speech masked the truth echoes Tolstoy’s dissatisfaction with the military press and Tiutcheva’s criticisms of official celebrations at court.

Thanks to Tolstoy, Kornilov became famous for his inspirational speeches. Of the four men, only Kornilov is described in *The Sevastopol Sketches* and he is mentioned precisely in his capacity as an orator. “Sevastopol in December” describes “Kornilov’s greeting,” where he addressed his men with: ““We will die, men, rather than surrender Sebastopol,”” to which “our Russian soldiers, unversed in phrase mongering, would answer: ‘We will die! Hurrah!’”<sup>95</sup> As Inter-Officer Egeriia observed, Kornilov’s was particularly inclusive of the common man: “his soldiers deeply loved him for the greetings and kind words. His speech left an impression, each word was soldier-like (*soldatsko*), close to his mind and heart.”<sup>96</sup> Unlike the tsar and his commanders-in-chief, Kornilov and Nakhimov were able to establish a genuine connection with the people.

Moreover, their frequent disagreements with the commanders-in-chief only enhanced their prestige. Totleben proudly publicized his own disputes with Menshikov over the army’s expenditure and fortification schedules, while Nakhimov became quite famous for denouncing the commander-in-chief as a “cheapskate” (*skuperdai*). Kornilov was extremely suspicious of Gorchakov and Menshikov, and in each diary entry, he either evaluated their activities or

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<sup>94</sup> N.V. Verg’s letter to M.P. Pogodin on 5 June 1855, *Admiral Nakhimov*, 333-4.

<sup>95</sup> “Sevastopol in December,” 56-7. On Kornilov’s greeting see: Totleben, I, 257; Kornilov, 277.

<sup>96</sup> The notes of Inter-Officer Egeriia in: *VS*, no. 6, 1863, Kornilov, 293.



commented on their absence from the garrisons.<sup>97</sup> In short, these four men's disobedience and disdain for their superiors were perceived as virtues. This reiterates how they were heroes *in opposition* to traditional military elites, and it demonstrates the way in which the war forced traditional military values to shift.

### **The Russian People as Hero**

These men were not the only celebrated heroes of Sevastopol. In keeping with this popular and populist model of heroism, Tolstoy, Totleben, and others championed another collective, the Russian people, as heroes of the siege. By giving the common people the authority first to identify heroes and then by making them heroes themselves, the *sevastopol'tsy* wrenched control over the myth of the Sevastopol away from the tsar and rejected the notion that heroes are, by definition, uncommon. As the closing line of "Sevastopol in December" declares: "Long will Russia bear the imposing traces of this epic of Sevastopol, the hero of which was the Russian people."<sup>98</sup> Together, the sketches present the reader and the Russian peasantry as heroes of Sevastopol, uniting the common man and the discerning literate *publika* together under a banner of truth.

Along with the peasant soldiers, Totleben and Chodaisewicz honored especially marginalized civilian groups, as heroes. Totleben hailed the old women, young children, and German colonists, who worked tirelessly on the city's fortifications, tended the wounded, or helped bury the dead: "the glory of this defense has become the honor and the property of the all the Russian people; it is from its breast that all of the defenders emerged."<sup>99</sup> Chodaisewicz celebrated such unlikely heroes such as the Cossacks who helped him desert to the British, local

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<sup>97</sup> Totleben, I, 122-3, 209-12, 154-5.

<sup>98</sup> "Sevastopol in December," 56-7. See also: Druzhinin, *Literaturnaia Kritika*, 188, 191.

<sup>99</sup> Totleben, I, ii-iii.

convicts who labored on the earthworks, and Crimean Tatars who, as he noted, did not particularly welcome the Russian troops, but kept them fed and housed.<sup>100</sup> By elevating low status groups to heroes, these accounts underscore how the war encouraged a symbolic reorganization of Russia's social hierarchy, which stressed greater unity (thus greater equality) between groups.

Above all, it was self-sacrifice that earned the peasantry the title “hero of Sevastopol.” Under the conditions of siege warfare, which put Russia continually on the defensive, bravery was not measured by offensive feats in battle, but by selflessness. Pirogov was shocked that the wounded were left lying for days in battlefields or hospitals without treatment: “without grumbling [they] endure that which seems unbearable.” Chodaisewicz agreed: “The poor fellows suffer in silence their hard fate, trusting in God, and saying that, if they are called upon to undergo hardships, they still form part of the Army of the Cross.”<sup>101</sup> The narrator of “Sevastopol in December” goes even farther, insisting that it is not until the reader visits the hospital and witnesses the tremendous suffering of the rank-and-file that “now you are beginning to see what the defenders of Sevastopol are really like.” The narrator applauds the bravery and “unselfconscious nobility” of the peasant army, would had a moral purity and a nobility that the gentry officers lacked.<sup>102</sup>

The *sevastopol'tsy* often linked the peasant conscript suffering on the battlefield to the serf suffering on gentry estates as victims of Russia's oppressive social socioeconomic structure. Tolstoy inverted the class hierarchy, by detaching “nobility” from the gentry officer, who abused his men or avoided the front, and attaching it to the common soldier. Of the “many political truths

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<sup>100</sup> Hodaisewich, 128, 6.

<sup>101</sup> Letter of 6 December 1855, Pirogov, 82; Hodaisewich, 24.

<sup>102</sup> “Sebastopol in December,” 45-6.

will emerge and evolve in the present difficult days for Russia,” Tolstoy wrote in his diary, was the realization that the peasant soldiers deserved to become citizens:

These people who are now sacrificing their lives will be citizens of Russia and will not forget their sacrifice. They will take part in public affairs with dignity and pride, and the enthusiasm aroused in them by the war will stamp on them forever the quality of self-sacrifice and nobility.<sup>103</sup>

The people’s heroic self-sacrifice stood out against the inept, idle, and ignoble commanding corps, proving that they were more fit for political participation than their aristocratic masters. Their commitment to their motherland—as evidenced by their self-sacrifice—was the ultimate display of service to the tsar and earned them the right of citizenship.

### **Russia as Hero**

Just as the 1856 defeat did not preclude the possibility of war heroes, it also did not instill anti-patriotic sentiment in Russian society. Along with the peasantry, Russia herself emerged as a hero of Sevastopol. For many observers, the siege exposed “those central characteristics that go to make up the Russian’s strength—his stubbornness and straightforwardness;” within the walls of Sevastopol Russia’s true national character was revealed.<sup>104</sup> Nationality was the most ambiguous component of the Official Nationality trinity, and the war only hastened the “growing divide” between two views of the nationality question. The Dynastic view, promoted by Nicholas I held that the tsar himself defined and embodied Russianness. The Romanovs were the true bearers of Russianness because they established the Russian order by wedding autocracy with orthodoxy.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Diary entry for 2 Nov. 1854, *Tolstoy’s Letters*, 95. Some soldiers believed they would be freed after their service, and their disappointment prompted numerous rebellions during and after the war (Curtiss, 533-5).

<sup>104</sup> “Sevastopol in December,” 54.

<sup>105</sup> Grech, Bulgarin, and Uvarov were proponents the dynastic view. Bulgarin even proposed calling Russia “Petrova” to emphasize the role of the Romanovs, especially Peter I. Riasanovsky explained that the war drew out the contrast between these two views: the Panslavists thought the war was necessary to defend to Christian Slavs in the Ottoman Empire, while supporters of the dynastic view were concerned with what would succeed the dying empire. It was intent on preventing revolution and securing Russia’s place in Europe (Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 139, 164, 2, 124).

The Panslavist view, upheld by Pogodin and others, argued that Russia's uniqueness resided more deeply and diffusely in its climate, its landscape, and above all, in the temperament, character, physiognomy of its people.<sup>106</sup> While both schools celebrated the sacred bond between the tsar and the people as fundamental to the Russian order, the Dynastics stressed the people's obligations to the autocrat, while the Panslavists emphasized the emperor's duty to protect and provide for the people. Based on this idea, the Panslavists argued for reforms, such as education and emancipation, that would uplift the peasantry. The tensions between these two perspectives overlap with the tensions at the heart of Russian paternalism between the authoritarianism and benevolence.

The early writings of the *sevastopol'tsy* reflect both the Dynastic and Panslavist schools. The Dynastic view was evoked in official speeches made by Menshikov, Gorchakov, but also Kornilov and Nakhimov. As the war droned on, however, many observers began to question whether the political and military leaders really epitomized Russianness. Kornilov clearly disassociated the two when he insisted that, even if defeated, Russia "will emerge more glorious and stronger,"<sup>107</sup> And after the war, Tiutcheva hailed Russia's national glory by severing it from the autocracy: "I am not weeping for Russia. I know, that Russia will emerge victorious and for this reason, she cannot be humiliated. I weep for the emperor and empress: they cannot withstand these events, they are becoming weak in their faith..."<sup>108</sup> For Tiutcheva, Russianness was eternal and pure and the autocracy fallible and transient. Russianness no longer relied on the tsar for definition.

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Riasanovsky explained that the war widened the gap between these two views: the Panslavists thought the war necessary to defend to Christian Slavs in the Ottoman Empire, while the Dynastics were intent on securing Russia's place in Europe (Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, 2, 124, 139, 164).

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 137; Pogodin, *Istoriko-Kriticheskie Otryvki* (Moskva: V. Tipografii A. Semena, 1846), 254.

<sup>107</sup> Letter to A.A. Kornilov, 1 Sept. 1854, Kornilov, 253, 266. Kornilov's "Instruction" of 3 Oct. 1854 supports a dynastic view of Russianness.

<sup>108</sup> Diary entries for: 19 Aug. 1855 and 9 Jan. 1865, Tiutcheva, 124, 142.

In his memoir, Herzen also juxtaposed Russia and the crown, casting them in the roles of master and serf. While not referring to the war exclusively, he characterized the second half of Nicholas' reign (1848-1855) as a time when "Russia lay speechless, as though dead, covered with bruises like an unfortunate peasant-women at the feet of her master, beaten by heavy fists." Herzen not only personified Russia as a peasant, he echoed the people's heroism resided in their status as victims. Chodaisewicz also heralded the Russian people as innocents in a despotic and misguided political system. "The Russian people I like," he wrote, "they are in general simple, kind, and open-hearted, hospitable to a fault [...] but the government under which they live is detestable and detested by Russians themselves."<sup>109</sup> For him, simplicity and kindness (also characteristics of the four heroes of the siege), was distinctly Russian. Both Tolstoy and Pirogov condemned ostentatious displays of imperial prowess and superiority inside Sebastopol as decidedly "un-Russian."<sup>110</sup> At the same time that the *publika* celebrated its popular heroes, a populist and Panslavist vision of Russianness gained strength.

This shift was reflected in the reign of Alexander II who, after finally emerging from the shadow of his father's rule, adopted a more benevolent leadership style.<sup>111</sup> The emperor's softer paternalism and his reformist impulses are illustrative of how war altered ideas about what constituted effective leadership. Russia and her peasants emerged from the siege triumphant, pure, and morally exempt from the mistakes of the official leadership, while Sevastopol emerged a sacred site of Russia's glory, if not of victory.

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<sup>109</sup> Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts*, 347; Hodaisewich, 242-3.

<sup>110</sup> See: "Sebastopol in August," 114; In his diary, Tolstoy remarked: "all these Moscow celebrations—what an un-Russian feature" (Diary entry for 13 May 1856, in: Christian, *Tolstoy's Diaries*, 113). Similarly, Pirogov described how on New Year's Eve in Sevastopol all the soldiers and civilians celebrated together except Menshikov, who locked himself in his room and received no visitors. Pirogov condemned this as "un-Russian (*ne po-russkii*)" (Letter of 3 Jan. 1855, *Pirogov*, 93-5).

<sup>111</sup> Riasanovsky, *A Parting*, 130, 254-6; Wortman, *Scenarios*, II, 27, 71.

The Crimean War was a war of firsts. It was the first war to use railroads, electric telegraph, trench warfare, and photojournalism, which forever altered the way war was waged by soldiers and viewed by civilians. It was also a war of fiascoes and mismanagement all around, which damaged the reputations of the French and British leaders as well as Russian ones. While the French commanders-in-chief worked under constant threats of dismissal, the British Prime Minister faced impeachment and state investigations in parliament. For Russia, the war was the crucible of the Great Reforms. It added a sense of urgency to existing questions and concerns regarding her sociopolitical structure and national strength based on autocracy. According to soldiers and civilians, civil servants and intellectuals, the war exposed Russia's weaknesses as well as the cowards and traitors among her ranks. Only by transforming Russian society and governance could the nation become strong again. Importantly, this desire for reform did not involve a total rejection of traditional values. While notions of obedience, authoritarianism, paternalism, and national character shifted, the *sevastopol'tsy* by and large championed official ideals in order to critique the existing order. In other words, the values of Official Nationality became disassociated from the political authorities and relocated in the heroes of the siege, including the Russian peasantry.

In addition to hastening the Great Reforms, the war furthered the development of Russia's nascent public sphere by allowing low ranking soldiers to publicly evaluate and criticize their superiors. Because of the war, public opinion emerged more forcefully in opposition to the autocracy. As a result, Sevastopol encouraged new visions of the peasantry and of public opinion. They became two new pillars of Russia's moral and national strength. Most of all, the 1856 defeat encouraged a new model of heroism, one that allowed for retreats, reversals and defeats, one that

encouraged its leaders to be humble and benevolent, and one that left clear traces on the reign of Alexander II.

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