



The French Army and British Army Crimean War Reforms

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Traditional English-language historiography of the Crimean War suggests that the French army, particularly in its logistics, was superior to that of the British army, especially during the winter of 1854 and 1855. This article will analyse the perception of French army logistics during the Crimean War and the effect they had on British army reforms during the same period.

This favourable perception of French Crimean logistics is primarily drawn from press reports by W. H. Russell, Thomas Chenery, or Lawrence Godkin (and other 'Special Correspondents') and from letters home, which combined to give the common soldier a voice on a hitherto unprecedented scale, revealing his daily life, treatment, and living conditions. A 'media war' ensued, and the perception of French army logistics became important not only for its (implicit) criticisms of British logistics, but also because the French soldier appeared to be better fed, clothed, and cared for. The perceived failure of the British army and success of the French resulted in a public outcry, demanding army reform. The apparent success of the French was all the more galling as they were the traditional enemy.¹

The French army had long been viewed by the reform-minded elements of the British army as the measure of the supposed inefficiency of the latter; the French being generally considered professional compared with the 'amateurishness' of the British.² The admiration of the French military system derived from the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, but there had not been direct emulation of the French at that time, other than a short dalliance with French-inspired uniforms for some units. Many reformers believed the French army to be better organized than the British, especially regarding logistics, officer training, and medical services; while the Austrians were considered to have the 'best cavalry in Europe' and the Prussians, the best infantry.³ French writers, such as Paul Thiébault, were considered

¹ Miles Hudson and John Stainer, *War and the Media* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999), pp. 1–21; Heather Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 23–24.

² Richard Glover, *Peninsular Preparation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), p. 27.

³ 'The French and German Armies at the Commencement of the Revolution War and at the Present Moment', *United Service Journal and Naval and Military Magazine*, part 3 (1832), 435–41; 'Sketch of the Military and Statistical Position of Prussia',

‘authorities’ on staff duties, and Baron Dominique Larrey, and later, his son Félix, were considered pre-eminent in battlefield medicine.⁴ While the *Dispatches of the Duke of Wellington* were considered to contain much of what British officers were expected to learn (and to provide guidance on how to behave), the thoughts of Napoleon I were arguably more influential, especially in the theory and management of war.⁵

Supply and demand: the *intendance militaire*

The *intendance militaire* was a highly centralized, bureaucratic organization created by maréchal Saint-Cyr as part of his far-reaching French army reforms of 1817 and 1818. It was a prime example of the earlier nineteenth-century trend towards increasing centralization. The *intendance* was responsible for the entire support infrastructure of the French army, providing the medical service (*Service de santé militaire*), veterinary services (*Corps de vétérinaires*), military justice (*Justice militaire*), and for moving the army’s baggage and sick (via the *train des équipages*).⁶

Napoleon III reorganized and enlarged the *intendance* and associated administrative troops between 1852 and 1856, effectively doubling their size.⁷ In 1855 the *intendance militaire* consisted of 32 *intendants* (who held the equivalent rank of *général de brigade*), 165 *sous-intendants* (with the equivalent rank of *colonel* (1^{ère} classe) or *lieutenant-colonel* (2^{ème} classe)), and 103 *adjoints* (1^{ère} classe adjoints ranking as *chef d’escadron*, 2^{ème} classe as *capitaines*).⁸

United Service Journal and Naval and Military Magazine for 1832, part 3 (1832), 442–48; ‘Sketches of the Austrian Cavalry Service by a çï-devant Huszar Officer’, *United Service Magazine and Naval and Military Journal*, part 1 (1842), 495–508.

⁴ ‘An Explanation of the Duties of the Several Etats-Majors in the French Army’, *Monthly Review*, May 1802, pp. 104–05 (p. 104); ‘Sales by Auction’, *Morning Chronicle*, 25 February 1820, [p. 4]; ‘Baron Larrey’, *Morning Post*, 9 August 1842, p. 4; ‘The Introduction of the Battle-Field Ambulance’, *Manchester Examiner and Times*, 10 March 1855, p. 12; ‘Baron Larrey’, *Colburn’s United Service Magazine, and Naval and Military Journal*, part 3 (1861), 559–66.

⁵ Hew Strachan, *Wellington’s Legacy: Reform of the British Army 1830–1854* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 16, 269–70; Hew Strachan, *From Waterloo to Balaklava: Tactics, Technology and the British Army 1815–1854* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 1–8.

⁶ Henri Ortholan, *L’Armée du Second Empire* (Saint Cloud: Editions du Napoleon III, 2010), p. 181; Paddy Griffith, *Military Thought in the French Army 1815–1851* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), p. 153.

⁷ Ortholan, pp. 183–88; Lieutenant-Colonel Belhomme, *Histoire de l’infanterie en France*, 5 vols (Paris: Lavauzelle, 1892), v, 324; *Lettres de maréchal de Saint-Arnaud* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1855), pp. 547–49.

⁸ ‘The French Commissariat or Intendance Militaire and the Choice Corps or Companies’, *Colburn’s United Service Magazine, and Naval and Military Journal*, part 2 (1855), 385–87.

The Imperial Guard had its own parallel organization: it had an *intendant*, a *sous-intendant 1^{ère} classe* and two (later six) *sous-intendants 2^{ème} classe* and a veterinary.⁹

In addition to these were the Administration Officers (*officiers d'administration*). By the decree of 9 January 1852 they were organized into three 'sections': the first responsible for managing the military hospitals (300-strong), the second for clothing (70), and the third for food (300). A fourth section (400) was added in 1853 responsible for the administration of the *intendance* itself, with Military Justice forming the fifth section in 1854 (Ortholan, pp. 182–83). The *officiers d'administration* were supported by the Administrative Battalion (*bataillon d'administration*), formed in 1824 from the merger and centralization of the civil and military branches of the army's administration. It only became fully military in 1851, and was allowed to employ civilian auxiliaries when required to boost numbers. This battalion provided all the bakers, butchers, carpenters, cooks, and nurses that the army needed (Belhomme, v, 111–12). In 1853 the unwieldy *bataillon d'administration* was broken up into seven self-contained *compagnies d'administration*, which confirmed the existing organizational deployments. A year later, the administration troops were reorganized into some fourteen *sections d'administration*: sections 1 to 12 were responsible for food and rations, the 13th for clothing, and the 14th contained workmen and artisans (Richard, pp. 324–25).

To mid-nineteenth-century military and domestic reformers, which included the Administrative Reform Association (ARA), the idea of centralization was linked to perceptions of efficiency, the simplification of structure, and economies eliminating costly duplication. It therefore appealed to many Members of Parliament.¹⁰ Centralization was the dominant principle of French civil and military management and therefore appeared as a better working model than the British system because it fulfilled the ideal of mid-nineteenth-century reformers.¹¹ Furthermore, the emphasis placed by British reformers upon the education, competitive examinations, and professionalism of the French army (especially for officers) was part of the burgeoning mid-nineteenth-century demand for reform of the government upon business lines as propounded by the likes of the ARA and kindred associations, as well as by reformers such as Sir Charles Trevelyan who proposed open, public examinations for civil service positions.¹² To reformers, the army was the last 'bastion' of the 'inefficient' and 'jobbing'

⁹ Capitaine A. J. C. Richard, *La Garde (1854–1870)* (Paris: Furne, 1898), pp. 7, 84.

¹⁰ John Sweetman, *War and Administration: The Significance of the Crimean War for the British Army* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1984), pp. 13, 35–36.

¹¹ 'Abuses in the Government of the Army', *Spectator*, 28 January 1837, p. 80.

¹² Olive Anderson, *A Liberal State at War: English Politics and Economy during the Crimean War* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 102–10; Edward Spiers, *The Army and Society 1815–1914* (London: Longman, 1980), pp. 110–11.

aristocracy: the appointments made in 1854 upon the outbreak of the Crimean War and the composition of Lord Raglan's personal staff being prime examples of this. In this way, the supposed egalitarian, meritocratic French system fulfilled many of the expectations of the reformers and professional classes. Furthermore, because the French army promoted from the ranks, the French officer summed up the mid-century middle-class image of the 'self made man' (Anderson, pp. 103–16).

While it united the civil branches of the army into one organization, the *intendance* was far too large and unwieldy and controlled areas such as the Medical Services in which many French officers — and the Medical Service itself — thought it had no business (Anderson, p. 95). Its personnel were hated by officers serving in the line because they were 'civilians in uniform [...] who undermined [...] military professionalism' yet all the same were to be accorded the same respect and privilege as a 'real' officer.¹³ Despite this, British reformers such as Sir Charles Trevelyan or Edward de Fonblanque believed that the *intendance* was superior to the British commissariat because it was centralized and, from experiences in the Crimea, was perceived to work.¹⁴ De Fonblanque dubbed centralization 'sound common sense' and argued for consolidating the British commissariat and train to a greater degree than the French.¹⁵ Calls for the British commissariat to be transferred from the Treasury to the War Department, and to take control of the military train, were part of this trend towards centralization, the militarization of the commissariat being initially proposed early in 1854. The fact that the commissariat's transfer to the War Department was completed by December 1854 meant it did not, in the end, derive from the 'emotional outburst' that characterized the first nine months of the Crimean War and the ensuing clamour for reform (Sweetman, *War and Administration*, pp. 50–51). Instead, the perceived failure of the British commissariat and transport arrangements compared with the apparent success of the French early in the war encouraged study of continental practices. Commissary General George Maclean studied the Austrian commissariat system and a commission was sent to France to study the *intendance* under Major General Knollys early in 1855. Although the commission had no direct effect on the reorganization of the commissariat or the formation of the Land Transport Corps (LTC), it did, however, influence the reorganization of the LTC on French lines in 1856 under Lieutenant Colonel Wetherall. The exhaustive

¹³ Griffith, pp. 153–54; Richard Holmes, *The Road to Sedan* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1984), pp. 73–75; Pierre Chalmin, *L'Officier français de 1815 à 1870* (Paris: Rivière, 1956), pp. 44–45.

¹⁴ 'Army Intendance', *Saturday Review*, 9 February 1867, pp. 167–69; 'The Administration of the Army', *Quarterly Review*, July 1870, pp. 146–49.

¹⁵ 'Military Organisation', *Saturday Review*, 29 January 1859, pp. 130–31; 'Our Military Reforms of Late Years and What They Have Done for Us', *Colburn's United Service Magazine, and Naval and Military Journal*, part 3 (1860), 475–87 (pp. 476–77).

study of French military administration by Captain Thomas Thackeray, meanwhile, was published too late (1856), and considered too impenetrable and Francophile to have much immediate impact on the post-Crimean reform debate.¹⁶ The French practice of appointing commissariat officers from serving army officers, nevertheless, was adopted in Britain in 1858, but whereas in France captains who had served in the line and showed aptitude as an *intendant* were appointed, British commissariat officers were chosen from among younger, less experienced subalterns (Sweetman, *War and Administration*, p. 132).

Another misapprehension of the British was that the *intendance* was a 'wholly military' organization, whereas officers of the *intendance* were technically civilians in uniform. In other words, they were employees of the War Ministry, and while entitled to wear a military uniform only held rank within the *intendance* and, in theory at least, were not entitled to marks of respect of an officer of the line.¹⁷ General J. B. B. Estcourt, writing to Sidney Herbert, Secretary at War, was one of many who believed that

their Commissary-General is a *Military Man*. His department is a military organised department. He can build magazines, ovens, workshops etc etc. He can repair as well as fabricate. He can bake all the bread for the troops, and does so. He has a train of wagons [...] and mules [...] all moving with regularity, and supplying the wants of the Army without doubt or uncertainty.¹⁸

Sir Charles Trevelyan too, in his evidence before a Select Committee, asserted that the *intendance* was superior in every respect to the British commissariat because it was a wholly military organization rather than a mix of civilian and military under several different department heads.¹⁹ Many other commissariat officers, including Commissary Generals Smith and Adams, were of the same opinion: the British commissariat should be organized like the French *intendance*, a single wholly military organization

¹⁶ Captain Thomas James Thackeray, *The Military Organization and Administration of France* (London: Newby, 1856); Sweetman, *War and Administration*, pp. 52–53; 'The Military Organisation and Administration of France by Captain Thomas Thackeray', *Spectator*, 22 March 1856, p. 322.

¹⁷ Griffith, pp. 163–64; 'The French Army As It Is', *Colburn's United Service Magazine*, part 3 (1850), 99–101; 'The French Commissariat', pp. 385–87.

¹⁸ Quoted in Lord Panmure, *Sidney Herbert, Lord of Lea: A Memoire* (London: Murray, 1906), p. 287 (8 December 1854), emphasis added.

¹⁹ *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the System of Purchase and Sale of Commissions in the Army* (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1857), p. 123.

with a fixed establishment in both peace and wartime, under the jurisdiction of the commander-in-chief rather than the civilian treasury.²⁰

The British commissariat was even thought by its own officers to be ‘an extraneous branch’ of the army rather than an ‘integral and vital part [...] in immediate and close connection’ (Royal Warrant, p. 9). The operational organization of the *intendance* was considered superior to the British system as it was simpler and did not involve as much ‘red tape’ at all levels; ‘red-tapism’ was thought to not only hamper the British army but to be responsible for countless deaths.²¹ To requisition stores, a French officer was simply thought to take a form to a single officer at the *intendance* whereas in Britain his request had to be passed between several officers from different departments, causing considerable delay.²² Compared with the French *intendance*, the British army was thought by some reform-minded officers not to possess an organized commissariat (Fonblanque, pp. 90–94).

The overall impression created from official reports into the commissariat and transport arrangements, combined with a rose-tinted perception of the French system, was one of French success and professionalism compared to the incompetence of the British system, a belief that would endure until the collapse of the French military machine in 1870 and 1871.

The French viewpoint

Yet French officers did not share this admiration of the *intendance*. Général Pierre Bosquet remarked to général Canrobert, the then French commander-in-chief in the Crimea, that ‘nothing will go well here until you have two gallows set up to the left and right of your tent, one bearing an *intendant*, and the other an *officier d’administration*’.²³ To many French officers, the *intendance* was obsessed with paperwork and red tape and was obstructive not only in the War Ministry but in the field as well (Griffith, pp. 163–65). The future général Charles-Antoine Thoumas who

²⁰ Royal Warrant, dated 28 October 1858, and Report of the Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Existing Organization of Commissariat Dept. (HC Command Papers (1859 session 1) C. (1st series), 2462, pp. 3, 10–11, 12–13.)

²¹ Brian Stuart, *Soldier’s Glory, being ‘Rough notes of an old soldier’* (Tunbridge Wells: Spellmount, 1991), pp. 199–200; ‘Pictures of the War’, *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, 2 July 1854, p. 5.

²² *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the System of Purchase and Sale of Commissions in the Army*, p. 123; Deputy Commissary General E. B. de Fonblanque, ‘Reforms in Army Administration’, *Journal of the United Services Institute for Defence Studies*, 13 (1870), 90–94.

²³ ‘Rien ne va bien ici jusqu’à ce que vous avez deux gibets mis en place pour la gauche et à droite de votre tente, l’une portant un *intendant*, et l’autre un *officier d’administration*’ (Chalmin, p. 282).

was serving in the Crimea as a *capitaine* in 7^e *Artillerie* suggested bitterly: ‘Oh! Saint Paperwork! Patron of the French Army, welfare of the *intendants*, foster mother of accountants, the despair of real soldiers!’²⁴ Other French soldiers agreed that the *intendance* had ‘many serious defects’ which were well known but never discussed. It was thought to work moderately well in peacetime but certainly not under the pressures of active service.²⁵ Maréchal de logis Charles Mismér (6^e *Dragons*) wrote:

During the entire campaign, the *intendance* continued to place importance on paperwork and accounting, as meticulous as in garrison. For a trifle of no value, such as a pistol ramrod, or replacing a stirrup leather, I do not know how many statements, covered with several individual signatures, all controlling each other!²⁶

The friction created was often compounded by many *intendants* growing a moustache — the mark of a soldier — and demanding the same marks of respect as an officer in the line (Griffith, pp. 153–154; Holmes, pp. 73–75; Chalmin, pp. 44–45). And, despite the assertions of British newspapers to the contrary, French soldiers in the Crimea were without tents, without winter clothing, and without food.²⁷ The entire stock of bread and biscuits had been destroyed by fire at Varna in August 1854 along with the mobile bread ovens.²⁸ Maréchal Saint-Arnaud only had stores of biscuits for ten days instead of three months or more, and, despite requesting three million rations, only received one million.²⁹ During the autumn and winter of 1854,

²⁴ ‘Oh! sainte paperesse! patronne de l’armée française, providence des intendants, mère nourricière des comptables, désespoir de vrais soldats!’. C-A Thoumas, *Mes souvenirs de Crimée* (Paris: La Librairie illustrée, 1892), pp. 14–15.

²⁵ Général J. B. A. Montaudon, *Souvenirs militaires: Afrique, Crimée, Italie* (Paris: Delagrave, 1898), pp. 224, 221–39; Général Félix de Wimpffen, *La Situation de France et les réformes nécessaires* (Paris: Le Chevalier, 1873), p. 90; Colonel Denfert Rocherou: *Lettres d’un officier républicain (1842–1871)*, ed. by William Serman (Vincennes: Service historique de l’armée de terre, 1990), p. 205.

²⁶ ‘Pendant toute la campagne, l’intendance continua à percevoir son impôt de papier, et la comptabilité fut aussi méticuleuse qu’en garnison. Pour un bagatelle de nulle valeur, telle qu’une baguette de pistolet, ou un passant d’éterivière, je ne sais combien d’états revetus de plusieurs signatures se contrôlant les uns les autres!’. C. Mismér, *Souvenirs d’un dragon en Crimée: avril 1854–juillet 1856* (Paris: Hachette, 1887), p. 118.

²⁷ Commandant Devanlay, ‘Lettres de Crimée du général Breton (2^{ème} partie)’, *Carnet de la Sabretache*, 18 (1909), p. 96; Paul de Molènes, *Commentaires d’un soldat* (Paris: Librairie de Bibliophiles, 1876), pp. 133–34; Commandant E. Boppe, *Crimée, Italie, Mexique: lettres de campagne du général Vanson 1854–1867* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1894), pp. 173–74; Montaudon, p. 227; ‘Lettres de Saint-Cyr et de campagne: lettres de Crimée du capitaine A. Sauret’, *Carnet de la Sabretache*, 20 (1911), p. 287.

²⁸ F. de Marcy, ‘Lettres de campagne du général de division Henrie de Bouillé’, *Carnet de la Sabretache*, 11 (1912), pp. 16, 81; Molènes, pp. 53–55.

²⁹ Camille Rousset, *Histoire de la guerre de Crimée*, 2 vols (Paris: Hachette, 1877), 1, 83–85.

French regiments lost between forty and fifty men per week from starvation and exposure, an unsustainable level of attrition.³⁰ When rations did appear, moreover, they were ‘detestable’ and vegetables were conspicuous by their absence.³¹ This low-quality meat, combined with the lack of fresh vegetables, led to a mass outbreak of scurvy in the French ranks.³² Some regiments, such as the 2^e *Zouaves*, did manage to purchase vegetables at very inflated prices but they were insufficient to stop the scurvy, so the regiment’s *cantinière*, Madame Dumont, in order to feed her regiment, hired at her personal cost a steamer to Constantinople, which she loaded with food and supplies for the officers and men because the *intendance* was unable to feed them.³³ In true Gallic fashion the supply of wine did not appear to be affected by the breakdown in the *intendance*, but officers were made to pay for their own ration.³⁴

The fact that the failure of the French *intendance* went largely unreported in British and French newspapers was because the French army was able to control the supply of information to the media. On 29 May 1854, maréchal Saint Arnaud wrote to Napoleon III that

we are neither constituted, nor in a state to make war [...]. We cannot make war without bread, without shoes, without camp kettles, without mess-tins [...]. I beg Your Majesty’s pardon for these details, but they prove to the Emperor the difficulties which besiege an army thrown six hundred leagues from its resources.³⁵

This was after weeks of repeated letters to the French War Ministry who merely wrote back to the maréchal telling him he must have been ‘wrongly informed’; any deficiencies at the front were strenuously denied in the national media.³⁶ The British praise of all things French was, in fact, simply naive. The wooden barrack huts used by the French army and made

³⁰ Devanlay, p. 96; Molènes, pp. 133–34; *Campagnes de Crimée, d’Italie, d’Afrique, de Chine et de Syrie 1849–1862* (Paris: Plon, Nourrit, 1898), p. 149.

³¹ Capitaine Minart, ‘Lettres écrites pendant la campagne de Crimée par les frères Charles, Alfred et Édouard Minart’, *Carnet de la Sabretache*, 8 (1909), p. 361; *Campagne de Crimée: Lettres écrites par le capitaine d’état-major Henri Loizillon à sa famille*, ed. by H. G. Gilbert (Paris: Flammarion, [n.d.]), pp. 245–46.

³² Général Lebrun, *Souvenirs des guerres de Crimée et d’Italie* (Paris: Dentu, 1889), pp. 205–06; *Campagne de Crimée*, ed. by Gilbert, p. 261.

³³ Général J. J. G. Cler, *Souvenirs d’un officier du 2^{ème} des Zouaves* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1859), pp. 131–32; Lieutenant Joseph Spitz, *Histoire du 2^{ème} Régiment de Zouaves* (Oran: Perrier, 1901), p. 177.

³⁴ Devanlay, p. 199; *Campagnes de Crimée*, p. 160.

³⁵ ‘Nous ne somme pas constitué ni en état de faire de la guerre [...]. On ne fait pas la guerre sans pain, sans souliers, sans marmites et bidons. Je demande pardon à Votre Majesté de ce détails; mais ils prouvent à l’Empereur les difficultés qui assiègent une armée jetée à six cents lieues de ses ressources positives’ (Rousset, 1, 83).

³⁶ ‘La situation de notre armée en orient’, *Moniteur de l’armée*, 15 September 1854, p. 3; ‘L’Intendance militaire de l’armée d’orient’, *Moniteur de l’armée*, 5 October 1854, p. 1.

by Potter & Price of Gloucester were considered by British soldiers to be superior to their own despite them both coming from the same contractor, to the same design.³⁷ The same was true with Northampton-made boots. General Estcourt thought the French boots better than the British because they didn't fall apart and were large enough to wear with a thick pair of socks, whereas the French found them far from waterproof, often coming off in the sticky mud and falling apart.³⁸

Not all British officers commended the *intendance*, Generals Airey and Estcourt refusing to believe that it lived up to the hyperbole of the British press.³⁹ Many other conservative officers shared this view.⁴⁰ General Sir George Brown refused to believe that the British commissariat was a failure and considered that at no point in military history had a commissary general ever 'given unqualified satisfaction'.⁴¹ He thought that the French were certainly no better, and the attacks upon the commissariat were totally unfounded because they were based on unrealistic expectations and that press reports pandered to popular opinion rather than reflecting reality.⁴²

Wagons roll: the *train des équipages*

The French *train des équipages* (equipment train) became important in Britain during the Crimean War because of the criticism of the British army's own lack of transport. So superior was the French system believed to be that the French *train* was considered the ideal working model upon which to base British army reforms of its own land transport. Furthermore, the French loaned mules and drivers to help transport British wounded and supplies. The *train* was created in 1807 by Napoleon I as part of his ongoing militarization of the French army; prior to that date civilian contractors had moved the baggage and rations. Although the *train* was initially part of the artillery, it was transferred to the *intendance* in 1842 at the suggestion of

³⁷ 'Letter from the Camp', *Leeds Mercury*, 3 March 1855, p. 10; 'The winter quarters of the Allies', *Bentley's Miscellany*, July 1855, pp. 574–83 (pp. 578–79).

³⁸ General J. B. B. Estcourt, letter to Wetherall, 8 January 1855, London, National Army Museum (NAM), General G. A. Wetherall MSS, 1962-10-95; *Campagnes de Crimée*, p. 154.

³⁹ General R. Airey, letter to Wetherall, 14 April 1855, NAM, Wetherall MSS, 1962-10-94; Estcourt, letters to Wetherall, 10 and 15 June 1854, NAM, Wetherall MSS, 1962-10-95.

⁴⁰ N. Kingscote, letter to his father, 15 June 1854, NAM, N. Kingscote MSS, 1973-11-170; Col. J. B. Patullo, letter to his wife, 5 July 1854, Queen's Lancashire Regiment Museum (QLR), Colonel J. B. Patullo MSS.

⁴¹ General Sir G. Brown, letter to Wetherall, 7 May 1856, NAM, Wetherall MSS, 1962-10-94.

⁴² *Ibid.* See also, Capt. A. J. Layard, letter to A. H. Layard MP, 29 May 1854, NAM, Captain A. J. Layard MSS, 1959-03-128.

maréchal Soult so that supply and transport for the army could be centralized under a single organization (Ortholan, pp. 153, 204). Siege artillery pieces, vehicles, and ammunition (artillery and infantry) were moved by a separate organization, the *train d'artillerie*. The drivers and horses that pulled the field artillery (horse and mounted) guns and vehicles were an integral part of the battery they served, an arrangement that was considered 'admirable' and superior to the British system, especially as the drivers were also trained gunners who could serve the guns in an emergency.⁴³ The engineers (*génie*) also had a separate *train* to move their vehicles and stores (*train du parc du génie*), which Sir John Burgoyne described as being 'most efficient' and that the French Engineers 'would as soon be without them, probably, as without artillery'.⁴⁴ He so admired the *train du génie* that he suggested its emulation by the British Royal Engineers, which at the time was reliant upon the commissariat for transport, following the disbanding of the Field Train Department of the Board of Ordnance in 1852 (Wrottesley, II, 194). Lord Raglan agreed with Sir John, ordering the creation of 'an establishment for the custody of the Engineer stores'.⁴⁵

From 29 February 1852, the *train des équipages* was five squadrons strong, each squadron being composed of four companies of which three were 'war' companies and the fourth was the depot. A sixth squadron was raised for service in the Crimea in 1855 and 1856.⁴⁶ The first company was responsible for wheeled vehicles while the other two were responsible for packhorses and ambulance mules.⁴⁷ One squadron was to be attached to each division and in war the *train* could be rapidly and easily increased in strength: each of the twenty companies was to be 'doubled'; each company providing the cadre for the basis of a '*compagnie bis*' (Vauchelle, III, 54–56; Ortholan, pp. 204–05). Where even these '*bis*' companies proved insufficient, regulations allowed for the formation of a *train auxiliaire* formed from civilian drivers and vehicles, fed and paid by the army and commanded by regular army officers and NCOs or by hiring in contractors put under military discipline (*Étude sur l'administration militaire*, pp. 36–50). The *train* was backed up by four companies of *ouvriers-constructeurs*, which

⁴³ 'The Emperor Louis Napoleon's New System of Field Artillery', *Colburn's United Service Magazine*, part 1 (1855), 429–46 (p. 440).

⁴⁴ Lieutenant Colonel G. Wrottesley, *The Life and Correspondence of Field Marshal Sir John Fox Burgoyne Bart*, 2 vols (London: Bentley, 1873), II, 153.

⁴⁵ John Sweetman, *Raglan: From the Peninsula to the Crimea* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2010), p. 307.

⁴⁶ *Étude sur l'administration militaire en campagne* (Grenoble: Allier, 1861), pp. 32–35; L. Guillot, *Législation et administration militaires* (Paris: Militaire Dumaine, 1855), pp. 375–87.

⁴⁷ A.-J. Vauchelle, *Cours d'administration militaire*, 4^{ème} edn, 4 vols (Paris: Militaire Dumaine, 1861), III, 501–04; A. Brière, 'De l'organisation du Service de Santé dans les armées françaises et autrichiennes', *Revue Militaire Suisse*, 4 April 1860, pp. 97–108 (p. 98).

were responsible for building and maintaining the wheeled vehicles. In war these companies were to be ‘doubled’ as well (Vauchelle, III, 54–56; Ortholan, pp. 204–05).

The Imperial Guard had its own parallel organization, the *train des équipages de la garde impériale* (Imperial Guard equipment train). The single squadron included two mounted companies (*compagnies montées*) for wheeled transport and the third, termed *compagnie légère* (light company), for packhorses and ambulance mules. As in the line, the Guard *train* companies were to be ‘doubled’ in war.⁴⁸

To army reformers in Britain, the French *train* was described as ‘the most perfect baggage train’, which carried ‘off all their stores and baggage to their camps’.⁴⁹ Military transport was ‘absolutely essential’ for an army on campaign, and, in the opinion of Lord Raglan and Generals Estcourt, Airey, and Brown, was the only area in which the British commissariat failed.⁵⁰ It was this lack of transport that crippled the British army and, by comparison with the French, the British army was ‘perfectly helpless’ because it was ‘incapable of moving’.⁵¹ Many British officers believed the lack of a British supply train was due to frugality on the part of the House of Commons, a situation made worse by the government refusing to buy replacement horses (or similar draught animals) to serve the army in the Crimea and help alleviate the transport crisis.⁵² One British officer seconded to the French staff contrasted the French and British transport by describing the British system as a ‘farce’; the French had transport not only for the baggage but also for the sick, the wounded, and the reserve ammunition while the British did not.⁵³ Similarly, General Estcourt described the French *train* as ‘working like clockwork’.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Louis Delpérier and Bertrand Malvaux, *La Garde impériale du Napoléon III* (Nantes: Cannonier, 2000), pp. 315–19; Richard, pp. 21–23.

⁴⁹ ‘Our Troops at Gallipoli’, *Bury and Norwich Post*, 3 May 1854, [p. 4].

⁵⁰ Panmure, pp. 286–88; Airey, letter to Wetherall, 29 December 1854, NAM, Wetherall MSS, 1962-10-94; Estcourt, letter to Wetherall, 28 November 1854, NAM, Wetherall MSS, 1962-10-95; Brown, letter to Wetherall [n.d.], NAM, Wetherall MSS, 1962-10-94.

⁵¹ Estcourt, letter to Wetherall, 13 December 1854, NAM, Wetherall MSS, 1962-10-95; Lieut. T. Bell, letter to his father, 15 May 1854, NAM, Lieut. T. Bell MSS, 2002-05-2; Patullo, letter to his wife, 23 June 1854, QLR, Patullo MSS; General Sir C. P. Beauchamp Walker, *Days of a Soldier’s Life* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1894), p. 47.

⁵² Wrottesely, II, 154; Lieut.-Colonel Anthony Stirling [Sterling], *The Story of the Highland Brigade in the Crimea* (London: MacQueen, 1897), p. 132.

⁵³ Major Claremont, letter to Wetherall, 6 December 1854, NAM, Wetherall MSS, 1962-10-94; Estcourt, letter to Wetherall, 17 December 1854, NAM, Wetherall MSS, 1962-10-95.

⁵⁴ Estcourt, letter to Wetherall, 13 December 1854, NAM, Wetherall MSS, 1962-10-95.

Some British observers, including Commissary General Filder, exculpated themselves by claiming the French had requisitioned all the usable horses and wagons in Turkey and Bulgaria, ‘selfishly’ leaving none for the British.⁵⁵ It had also been expected by the British that the Turks would have helped them with their transport needs, rather like the Portuguese during the Peninsular War.⁵⁶ Sidney Herbert suggested that the lack of transport animals was due to the commissariat officers not having the common sense or the forethought to stable them properly or send them somewhere warmer when winter set in, as the French did. He also criticized the commissariat for not purchasing any remounts (Panmure, p. 311). General Estcourt bitterly remarked that the lack of transport was due to Commissary General Filder being incapable of organizing a military train, and refusing to buy remounts or fodder because of the cost.⁵⁷

Enter Colonel McMurdo and the LTC

In late 1854 the Duke of Newcastle announced the formation of a ‘land transport system quite new to the English service’, the Land Transport Corps receiving its Royal Warrant on 24 January 1855 (Sweetman, *War and Administration*, p. 55). Lord Palmerston stated that the LTC was to ‘undertake the whole of the transport for the Army, and will be carried out on a much greater scale than the Royal Waggon [*sic*] train was under the Duke of Wellington’.⁵⁸

In February 1855 Lord Panmure wrote that what was needed was ‘a proper system for the conveyance of material and baggage [and] the means of easy and immediate transport for sick and wounded’, citing the French example (*Panmure Papers*, ed. by Douglas and Ramsey, 1, 48). Commander-in-Chief Lord Hardinge wrote that ‘I cannot say I anticipate any improvements by the proposed changes unless Departments such as the Land Transport and Ambulances imitation [*sic*] the French’.⁵⁹ General Estcourt agreed: the British commissariat and transport should be modelled exactly on the French system. What was needed was a military system with ‘mules

⁵⁵ HC Select Committee on the Army before Sebastopol 3rd Report (HC Paper (1854–55) no. 218, pp. 17–23).

⁵⁶ ‘The Army before Sebastopol: Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry (Third Day)’, *Morning Chronicle*, 8 March 1855, p. 2; Frederick Wingfield, ‘Military Transport’, *Journal of the United Services Institute for Defence Studies*, 13 (1869), 263–86 (pp. 269–71).

⁵⁷ Estcourt, letters to Wetherall, 28 November 1854, and 8 and 20 January 1855, NAM, Wetherall MSS, 1962-10-95.

⁵⁸ *The Panmure Papers*, ed. by Sir George Douglas and Sir George Dalhousie Ramsey, 2 vols (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1908), 1, 53.

⁵⁹ Lord Hardinge, letter to General R. Airey, 4 May 1855, Herefordshire Record Office (HRO), Hereford, Airey MSS, E47/G/IV/A.

and waggons [*sic*] organized into companies with captains, subs and sous-officers'.⁶⁰

The LTC, commanded by the 'energetic & Intelligent' Colonel William McMurdo, was thought to be a step in the right direction, but it 'savoured too strongly of Cavalry', its officers were thought to be 'mon-eyed men' who were ignorant of their duties, and the other ranks inexperienced and untrained.⁶¹ General Simpson, in a confidential report to Lord Panmure in April 1855, described the French *train* as 'marvellous', whereas in contrast, while the LTC had 'every praise and encouragement [...] given to it', he doubted 'its ever working' because of its organization and heterogeneous personnel who were the 'worst race of men, and of all nations' (*Panmure Papers*, ed. by Douglas and Ramsey, I, 152).

The whole organization was described as 'chaotic', and there was a chronic shortage of trained personnel such as wheelwrights or carpenters, which accounted for a large number of the vehicles belonging to the LTC being out of commission.⁶² This contrasted with the French, who had four companies of *ouvriers de construction*, which maintained their wheeled vehicles (Ortholan, pp. 204–05). There was also friction between the members of the LTC and the regiments of the line due to the high pay of the LTC (Wetherall, TNA, WO33/2B). The LTC was also believed to 'give itself the airs of a combatant corps' which further widened the gap between them, the line, and the civilian commissariat.⁶³ Reactionary commentators considered the LTC a 'prominent and costly evil' that 'without detriment might be thrown on the heap', and probably better replaced by hiring Pickfords to move the armies' supplies.⁶⁴ It is unlikely, however, that the LTC could have lived up to the hyperbole lavished upon the French *train*.

Tending to the wounded: field ambulances

In French military terminology, *ambulance* refers not to a wheeled vehicle for the evacuation of the wounded but rather to a field hospital or dressing station. A vehicle, or mule, for the transportation of the sick and wounded is referred to as an *ambulance volante* (a mobile or fast field hospital) or

⁶⁰ Estcourt, letters to Wetherall, 17 December 1854, NAM, Wetherall MSS, 1962-10-95.

⁶¹ Lord Hardinge, letters to General R. Airey, 5 and 22 January 1855, HRO, Airey MSS, E47/G/IV/A; Wingfield, p. 274.

⁶² Wingfield, p. 274; 'Remarks on the Composition of the Staff', *Colburn's United Service Magazine*, part 1 (1855), 231–36 (p. 236); General G. A. Wetherall, comments on the Land Transport Corps, Kew, The National Archives (TNA), WO33/2B.

⁶³ John Fortescue, *The Royal Army Service Corps* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), p. 157.

⁶⁴ 'Our Military Reforms of Late Years', pp. 476–77; Brown, letter to Wetherall, 9 February 1856, NAM, Wetherall MSS, 1962-10-94.

ambulance roulante (literally, a wheeled field hospital). The use of the same word in French and in English but with different definitions has caused much confusion ever since. In this section, the English definition of ambulance — a means to transport the sick and wounded — will be used.

Général Larrey and Percy had first introduced ambulances in the French army in 1793 and it was the latter that created companies of military stretcher-bearers to evacuate the wounded from the battlefield in 1809.⁶⁵ Therefore, the French were considered far in advance of the British in terms of evacuation and treatment of the wounded on the battlefield: ambulances had only been ‘known theoretically to the British army, but practically to the French since 1792 [*sic*] [...]. But notwithstanding the French have used so long what we are only beginning to employ.’⁶⁶

The French system of ambulance mules was systematically and ‘universally admired’ by the British in the Crimea owing to their rapidity of deployment and the comfort they offered the wounded.⁶⁷ The French ambulance mules could carry two patients in an ‘iron chair, or litter [...] hooked to the packsaddle [...] hinged [...] to support the head, which could be fixed at any angle desired [...] and a foot-board’.⁶⁸ In addition to the patients, each mule carried medical supplies to treat the wounded, as well as the personal kit of the *infirmier* who attended each mule and its patients.⁶⁹ Unlike wheeled ambulances, these mules could cross a wide variety of terrain and also presented a smaller target than a wheeled ambulance.⁷⁰ British observers believed them to be able to clear a battlefield rapidly (‘in an afternoon’) of wounded, and such was the ‘humanity’ of the French that they evacuated French, British, and later Russian wounded, for treatment.⁷¹ The French also displayed ‘great kindness and gentleness’ to the wounded, in contrast to the British orderlies and bandsmen.⁷² British

⁶⁵ D-J Larrey, *Mémoires de chirurgie militaire et campagnes de D. J. Larrey*, 4 vols (Paris: Smith, 1812–1817), I, 65–66.

⁶⁶ ‘Medical Attendants, &c., for the East’, *Standard*, 17 October 1854, [p. 4].

⁶⁷ Claremont, letter to Wetherall, 12 December 1854, NAM, Wetherall MSS, 1962-10-94; ‘The War’, *Lancet*, 65 (1855), 22–23 (p. 23); ‘The Surgery of the War’, *Lancet*, 65 (1855), 23–25 (p. 24); A. Money and G. H. Money, *Our Tent in the Crimea* (London: Bentley, 1856), p. 88; George Shuldham Peard, *Campaign in the Crimea: Recollections of an Officer of the 20th Regiment* (London: Bentley, 1855), pp. 91–92; ‘Camp above Sebastopol’, *Morning Post*, 5 December 1854, p. 5.

⁶⁸ *Have We the Best Ambulance System?* (Boston: Walker, Wise, 1864), p. 12.

⁶⁹ Statistical, Sanitary, and Medical Reports of Army Medical Dept.: 1865 (HC Command Papers (1867) C. (1st series), 3911, p. 445).

⁷⁰ Panmure, p. 286; *Have We the Best Ambulance System?*, p. 11; ‘The Surgery of the War’, *Lancet*, 64 (1854), 493–94 (p. 494).

⁷¹ Panmure, p. 286; ‘Heights above Sebastopol, November 6’, *Morning Post*, 24 November 1854, pp. 5–6.

⁷² ‘The French and English Ambulance Corps’, *Medical Times and Gazette*, n.s., 9 (1854), p. 655.

officers thought of the French that ‘if they had been women they could not have behaved more tenderly’.⁷³

British ambulances were manned not by specialist personnel as in the French system, but by a mix of the Hospital Conveyance Corps and men detailed from their regiments, usually the pioneers, bandsmen, and drummers. Each battalion also had a tented field hospital, which was carried on pack mules.⁷⁴ Many British medical officers could not understand why Britain could not organize an ambulance corps similar to that in France; Dr William Milligan had proposed one in 1819 but the proposal came to naught.⁷⁵ The lack of an effective British ambulance corps resulted in the French carrying British wounded down to Balaklava or to their hospitals.⁷⁶

Under the French system, wounded were organized into three classes (*triage*): ‘lightly’ wounded (i.e., walking wounded); ‘badly’ wounded, who required evacuation on mules carrying the *cacolets*; and the ‘gravely’ wounded who were carried on litters. Stretchers were used to carry the wounded over short distances, or to move the very badly wounded.⁷⁷ Unlike the British stretcher-bearers who were bandsmen and boys, French stretcher-bearers were trained.⁷⁸ A further advantage of the French stretcher over the British design was that it was collapsible, and had feet so it could be placed on the ground (Gordon, p. 149).

The high praise of the French ambulance mules was due to long-standing admiration of Baron Larrey but, more importantly, because the British army lacked any similar organization. Dr Andrew Smith had designed wheeled ambulances immediately before the outbreak of the war, and a Hospital Conveyance Corps had been raised by the British for service in the Crimea, commanded by Colonel Tulloch. Sadly, it was recruited from ‘superannuated Chelsea Pensioners’ who ‘killed themselves by drinking’ and thus proved an abject failure.⁷⁹ One British officer wrote after the Battle of Alma that the ambulance corps was ‘much talked of’ but had proved a complete failure for want of arrangement and forethought.⁸⁰

⁷³ Colin Frederick Campbell, *Letters from Camp to His Relatives During the Siege of Sebastopol* (London: Bentley, 1894), p. 295.

⁷⁴ Report on State of Hospitals of British Army in Crimea and Scutari (HC Command Papers (1854–55) C. (1st series), 1920, pp. 55–57).

⁷⁵ ‘The War’, *Lancet*, 65 (1855), 22–23; Sir Charles Alexander Gordon, *Army Hygiene* (London: Churchill, 1866), pp. 170–71.

⁷⁶ Surgeon C. Pine, journal, 3 and 4 January 1855, NAM, Pine MSS, 1968-07-262; ‘Official Documents from the Army in the Crimea’, *Daily News*, 29 December 1854, p. 6; ‘The Army Before Sebastopol’, *Daily News*, 29 December 1854, p. 5.

⁷⁷ L. Legouest, *Traité de chirurgie d’armée* (Paris: Ballière, 1863), pp. 965–73; ‘De l’organisation du Service de Santé’, pp. 99–100.

⁷⁸ *Have We the Best Ambulance System?*, p. 18; ‘The Supplies to the Sick and Wounded in Turkey’, *Examiner*, 21 October 1854, p. 673.

⁷⁹ ‘The War’, *Lancet*, 65 (1855), 112–13 (p. 112); ‘The War’, *Lancet*, 65 (1855), p. 22.

⁸⁰ ‘The Neglect of the Wounded at the Alma’, *Standard*, 17 October 1854, [pp. 3–4].

The Inspector General of Hospitals, Dr John Hall, argued for the establishment of an ambulance corps organized and equipped on French lines, and Dr John Wood, surgeon to the 42nd Highlanders, recommended its 'immediate' adoption in January 1855.⁸¹ Indeed, the British army attempted to have one thousand iron French-style *cacolets* made for ambulance purposes but could not find sufficiently strong mules or ponies to carry them (Panmure, pp. 290–91). Opinion was divided as to the efficacy of the ambulance mules: they were deemed either comfortable and 'excellent' or 'very distressing'.⁸² The French certainly agreed that the mules were uncomfortable but they were the most expedient way of evacuating the wounded (Minart, p. 3).

The French experience

The *train des équipages*, while well organized and efficient in peacetime, was very quickly found to be inadequate to supply the army on campaign in Turkey and Bulgaria, with a supplementary battalion recruited from local drivers being rapidly formed (Boppe, p. 17). There was, however, a lack of horses for the *train d'équipages* and *train d'artillerie*, due to a dearth of sufficient forage and also a shortage of horses of the required size and strength.⁸³ The principal concern of the remount expedition headed by général d'Allonville had been for riding rather than draught horses, and the remounts procured were far too small for draught purposes.⁸⁴ Another source of remount animals was the cast-offs purchased by the British cavalry but deemed too small and which were 'quietly purchased' by the French.⁸⁵ The situation was solved by using the cattle intended to feed the army as draught animals, with many soldiers complaining of getting 'pauvre mouton' instead of the regulation beef (Minart, p. 813). The bullocks were malnourished and did not like their new role, taking three hours to travel one French league (four kilometres). The slow speed of the bullocks meant that the already parlous roads in Bulgaria and the Crimea were clogged with vehicles, making the transport situation twice

⁸¹ Royal Com. to Inquire into Regulations Affecting Sanitary Condition of Army, Organization of Military Hospitals and Treatment of Sick and Wounded (HC Command Papers (1857–58) C. (1st series), 2379, pp. 23, 198).

⁸² 'The Army Before Sebastopol', p. 5; 'The Army in the Crimea', *Daily News*, 3 March 1855, p. 5; Estcourt, letter to Wetherall, 6 January 1855, NAM, Wetherall MSS, 1962-10-95.

⁸³ Commandant Joppé, 'La Campagne de Crimée d'après les lettres du commandant Adrien', *Carnet de la Sabretache*, 16 (1907), p. 158; Boppe, p. 31.

⁸⁴ 'Le 1^{er} régiment de chasseurs d'Afrique à Gallipoli mai 1854', *Carnet de la Sabretache*, 12 (1899), 118–122.

⁸⁵ 'English Dragoons and their Horses', *Temple Bar*, February 1865, pp. 391–405 (p. 395).

as bad. Furthermore, the hired Turkish drivers charged an extortionate rate and wanted a guard posting in case of bandits or Russians.⁸⁶ The lack of draught horses would dog the *intendance* in its ability to move supplies throughout the Siege of Sebastopol (Thoumas, p. 260). The LTC, too, was forced to use cattle instead of draught horses as it lacked sufficient animals.⁸⁷ Moreover, the *train* suffered from a lack of vehicles, the French army requisitioning any wheeled vehicle it found in Turkey and Bulgaria; it eventually had to send to Algeria and France for them.⁸⁸ Many British officers were unaware that the *train des équipages* was struggling from overwork and a lack of remounts.⁸⁹

The significance of the French army in British army reform

The admiration of the French military system derived from the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars; there had not been direct emulation of the French. Army reformers also commented on the education and staff work of the French and Prussians, and contrasted it negatively with the perceived lack thereof in Britain (Strachan, *Wellington's Legacy*, pp. 134–35). Furthermore, it was French writers who were considered ‘authorities’ on army management, logistics, and battlefield medicine.⁹⁰

This positive perception of the French army was generated through the thousands of letters home, which were often printed verbatim in local and national newspapers: they ‘confirmed and personalised to a high degree’ the despatches of Russell, Godkin, and others and thus formed the basis of parliamentary and press debates and among the intelligentsia.⁹¹ The interest in the human drama of the siege rose to an emotional climax in January 1855 leading to the collapse of the Aberdeen government and the appointment of the Roebuck Committee. Thereafter, with improved

⁸⁶ Boppe, pp. 31, 40–41; Paul Verdun and Adrien Morin, *Sous les drapeaux: Turquie, Crimée, Sébastopol* (Paris: Bibliothèque des Soirées en Famille, 1911), p. 39.

⁸⁷ Lieutenant H. Clark, letter to family, 27 December 1855, NAM, 1964-02-33.

⁸⁸ Boppe, p. 31; Maréchal Vaillant, ‘Le Ministère de guerre et l’armée de l’orient: rapport de M. le maréchal Vaillant’, *Spectateur militaire*, 16 (October – December 1856), 374–75.

⁸⁹ The British didn’t realize the French were having problems. Dr John Hall claimed the French system was working well (Royal Com. to Inquire into Regulations Affecting Sanitary Condition of Army, Organization of Military Hospitals and Treatment of Sick and Wounded, p. 23).

⁹⁰ ‘An Explanation of the Duties of the Several Etats-Majors in the French Army’, p. 104; ‘Sales by Auction’, [p. 4]; ‘Baron Larrey’, *Morning Post*, 9 August 1842, p. 4; ‘The Introduction of the Battle-Field Ambulance’, *Manchester Examiner and Times*, 10 March 1855, p. 12; ‘Baron Larrey’, *Colburn's United Service Magazine*, 559–66.

⁹¹ Stefanie Markovits, *The Crimean War in the British Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 19, 46.

conditions at the front and the monotony of a static siege, interest in the war waned in the domestic press, especially after repeated British failures compared with French successes.⁹² Mary Seacole even suggested that media interest in, and control of, the war was such that ‘nothing of consequence was done in the front for a few weeks, possibly because Mr Russell was taking holiday’ during July 1855 (Markovits, p. 14).

Quite simply, Lord Raglan lost the ‘media war’: the despatches of the various ‘Special Correspondents’ were openly hostile to him, and because they often arrived before the official version of events, the press was able to control the flow of information to the public. The newspapers, because of their focus on the winter of 1854 and 1855 and on the reporting of the various committees of inquiry (which also focused on this winter), created the erroneous impression — later to become the central theme or myth of the war — that the British army was in rags and disease-ridden for the duration of the two-year campaign, and certainly worse off than the French, which was not the case (Sweetman, *Raglan*, pp. 270–302).

The official British despatches and the lengthy articles by Russell were also printed in French newspapers, as were letters sent home by French soldiers. Despite French press censorship, Russell’s despatches were printed because of their unstinting praise of the French army and condemnation of the British army. Letters sent home by French troops were more closely scrutinized so as to portray the French army in a positive light, something noted by several British commentators.⁹³ As in Britain, these letters home, combined with the despatches of the various ‘Special Correspondents’, created an emotional response favourable to the plight of the ordinary soldier, with many major towns and cities in France establishing philanthropic committees to provide succour for the allied troops.⁹⁴ Acceptance of the truth of Russell’s despatches and letters home that often contrasted the French and British armies during the winter of 1854 and 1855, was a major contributing factor to the naive belief in the superiority of the French army. This belief was held by both the French public and the French army, and stifled any desire for reform; despite its failings the *intendance militaire* obviously

⁹² Lucy Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 235; Spiers, *Army and Society*, pp. 100–12.

⁹³ ‘Affaires d’orient’, *Journal de Toulouse*, 6 October 1854, p. 1; ‘Dépêche télégraphique électrique’, *Journal de Toulouse*, 15 November 1854, p. 1; ‘Affaires d’orient’, *Journal de Toulouse*, 15 November 1854, p. 1; ‘Affaires d’orient’, *Journal de Toulouse*, 2 February 1855, p. 1; Charles Dickens, ‘A Lesson Lost upon Us’, *Household Words*, 9 January 1858, pp. 73–80 (p. 74).

⁹⁴ Colonel Charles Duban, *Souvenirs militaires d’un officier français 1848–1887* (Paris: Plon, Nourrit, 1896), p. 124; ‘Souscription de la mairie de Toulouse en faveur de nos braves soldats de l’armée d’orient’, *Journal de Toulouse*, 30 December 1854, p. 2; ‘Souscription aux soldats des armées alliées en orient’, *Journal de Toulouse*, 30 December 1854, p. 2; ‘Affaires d’orient’, *Journal de Toulouse*, 3 February 1855, p. 1.

worked better than the British commissariat, because it was acclaimed in the British and French press.

Unlike Napoleon III, who banned newspaper correspondents from the front line and only fed them the official despatches and communiqués, the British press went uncensored, with Russell and Godkin having unprecedented access to officers, men, and military statistics (Brown, p. 158). French officers were amazed that the British domestic press was not censured in its discussion of the operations in the Crimea and thought *The Times* was a bigger enemy than the whole of the Russian army (Boppe, p. 93). The British army had originally welcomed Russell, much to the chagrin of Godkin, who felt that other journalists were a ‘sort of parias [*sic*], friendless individuals who might be pitched into with perfect impunity’ (Brown, pp. 234–35). The welcome afforded to Russell, however, was short-lived owing to his reporting of the shortcomings of the army in the Crimea and because he revealed supposedly sensitive military information (Spiers, *Army and Society*, pp. 100–07). Colonel Anthony Sterling believed that the press had been grossly mismanaged. He suggested that the French were better off because they were not under intense domestic scrutiny. Sterling considered also that Russell should have been ‘made use of’ so Raglan could regain the initiative from the press. If Russell had been brought into the confidence of Raglan and other senior officers (as later happened in India), this would have enabled a more favourable representation of the army to be manipulated.⁹⁵ Florence Nightingale was another who, unlike Raglan, recognized the importance of the media in generating public opinion, and in providing support for any military reforms in the battle against official inertia. In order to sustain public and therefore the government’s interest in army reform, she reasoned that the issue had to be taken up by the media through the use of her own ‘celebrity’ status, the press, and pamphleteering, such as during her sustained campaign for an Army Sanitary Commission. Without such support Nightingale believed ‘all the sufferings’ of the Crimean War would be forgotten and reform flounder due to post-war apathy.⁹⁶

The more media-savvy French did not air their washing in public and carefully controlled information revealed in official despatches. British officers simply did not trust the ‘official’ French casualty lists and found it almost ‘impossible’ to ascertain accurate figures.⁹⁷ Censorship by the

⁹⁵ Edward Spiers, *The Scottish Soldier and Empire, 1854–1902* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 13; Stirling, pp. 49–50, 178–79, 185.

⁹⁶ Spiers, *Army and Society*, pp. 156–62; Sweetman, *War and Administration*, p. 130; Markovits, pp. 54–55.

⁹⁷ John Martineau, *The Life of Henry Pelham, Fifth Duke of Newcastle 1811–1864* (London: Murray, 1898), p. 203; Stirling, p. 216; Patullo, letter to his wife, 23 July 1855, QLR, Patullo MSS; A. M. Earle, letter to his father, 4 May 1855, NAM, A. M. Earle MSS, 1994-03-153.

French was described as being ‘common sense’, because the army was not left to the ‘mercy of the domestic press’. Furthermore, while the French army and press were more likely to ‘proclaim’ British failings and reverses than any French shortcomings, the British press was more likely to highlight ‘any little Peccadilloes of our men’ in order to criticize.⁹⁸ Even British soldiers believed in the ‘gullibility of John Bull’, in accepting as fact the newspaper reports and the opinions of ‘experts’.⁹⁹ In contrast to their allies, French soldiers were considered not to grumble and complain as much as the British.¹⁰⁰ This was either because they did not complain or perhaps were unable to complain, as a result of the high level of press censorship in the French army. Such rigorous censorship led to many British officers mistrusting French casualty returns, thinking them falsified.¹⁰¹ Lieutenant Arthur Griffiths (63rd Regiment) witnessed the ‘great scarcity in the French camp’, but crucially noted that it was not ‘mentioned in any contemporary memoirs’.¹⁰² Overall, this affected the morale of the two armies; the press repeatedly informed the British army that it was a shambles in comparison with the French, while French morale was boosted owing to the praise it received in the British and French press.

The influence of this often naive positive perception of the French army in the Crimea and the contrast it presented with the British system gave added impetus to the pre-existing British army reform debate. Perception of the competency of the French and the emotional fervour created in favour of the ordinary soldier reinforced the existing notion of the relative inferiority of the British. However, as John Sweetman has indicated, the most significant reforms, including the militarization of the commissariat and break-up of the Board of Ordnance were pre-Crimean War in origin and thus ultimately little affected by the perception or official study of the French army in the war (*War and Administration*, pp. 128–32). While producing very little in the way of long-term reform of the British army other than a variety of French-style ephemeral ‘Corps’ units (the LTC, for example), these units were the first reflection of direct emulation of the French army in Britain. General Simpson was appointed as ‘Chief of Staff’, a position created in emulation of the French. Further emulation

⁹⁸ Stirling, p. 216; Dickens, p. 74; Kingscote, letters to his father, 9 August 1854 and 18 November 1854, NAM, Kingscote MSS, 1973-11-170; General Sir George Higginson, *Seventy-One Years of a Guardsman's Life* (London: Smith, Elder, 1916), pp. 241–42.

⁹⁹ Thomas Morris, William Morris, and William Morris, jun., *The Three Serjeants; or, Phases of the Soldier's Life* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1858), p. 205.

¹⁰⁰ *Eyewitness in the Crimea: The Crimean War Letters of Lieutenant Colonel George Frederick Dallas*, ed. by Michael Hargreave Mawson (London: Greenhill Books, 2001), p. 226.

¹⁰¹ Martineau, p. 203; Stirling, p. 216; Patullo, letter to his wife, 23 July 1855, QLR, Patullo MSS; Earle, letter to his father, 4 May 1855, NAM, Earle MSS, 1994-03-153.

¹⁰² Arthur Griffiths, *Fifty Years of Public Service* (London: Cassell, 1904), p. 31.

was manifest in new dress regulations of 1856, which introduced a single-breasted tunic, a French-inspired shako (a version of the *képi*), and even an elaborate *Zouave*-style uniform for the Royal West Indian Regiment in 1858, at the behest of Queen Victoria.

Contrasted by the reform-minded press with the apparently successful French *intendance*, the British commissariat and transport establishments were perceived to be a failure. This favourable perception of French methods encouraged the study of the French and other continental armies' commissariat arrangements: Commissary General George Maclean examined the Austrian system, while a commission, under Major General Knollys, was sent to Paris to learn from the *intendance*. This report, however, had little effect on British reforms, such as the LTC. Similarly, the report of Captain Thomas Thackeray (published 1856) came too late and was considered too Francophile to influence the post-Crimean reform debate.¹⁰³

Improved conditions, or at least fewer complaints, during the winter of 1855 and 1856, the apparent reversal in fortunes of the British and French armies, combined with the signing of the Treaty of Paris and the ensuing reduction of the army, were enough to curb the enthusiasm and potential for reform.¹⁰⁴ Despite the emotional outburst following the reports of the 'Special Correspondents', the clamour for reform did not last, as evidenced by the ephemeral nature of the ARA.¹⁰⁵ In truth, the ARA and other reformers failed to identify any serious defects in army management other than the amorphous notion of 'the system' (Anderson, p. 278). Much of the emotional outrage was dissipated by the work of the Roebuck Committee and various Parliamentary Select Committees in the summer of 1855, by which time public interest in the war had waned (Spiers, *Army and Society*, pp. 111–17; Sweetman, *War and Administration*, pp. 128–32). Despite the apparent success of the railway built by Peto, Brassey, and Betts and the endeavours of Sir Joseph Paxton's Army Work Corps, the reports of bursting mortars, unfulfilled contracts, and leaking boots revealed the folly of relying solely on businessmen and commercial methods for managing the army; business, it transpired, was just as prone to 'jobbing', cost-cutting, and failure as the army (Anderson, pp. 116–18, 122–23, 278). The onset of the Indian Mutiny (1857–59) distracted from the misery of the Crimea and any ensuing reform, and the domestic press heaped unstinting and lavish

¹⁰³ Sweetman, *War and Administration*, pp. 52–53; 'The Military Organisation and Administration of France by Captain Thomas Thackeray', p. 322.

¹⁰⁴ 'Military Organisation and Administration of France by Captain Thomas Thackeray', p. 322.

¹⁰⁵ Lawrence Goldman, *Science, Reform and Politics in Victorian Britain: The Social Science Association, 1857–1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 55–57.

praise upon the army, focusing on the ‘exaggerated comparisons between the army’s exploits in India and the Crimea’.¹⁰⁶

Conclusion

In conclusion, admiration for and, more importantly, emulation of the French army support services during and after the Crimean War were short-lived, and based upon a skewed perception of its relative effectiveness compared with the British army. Furthermore, naive praise of the French, and the condemnation of supposed British mishandling of reforms inspired by the French, such as the LTC, were misplaced; the British could not get their version of the French *train* to work because neither could the French, especially under such conditions as the Siege of Sebastopol. Comparison of the French and British armies came to centre on the period from autumn 1854 to spring 1855 rather than producing a sustained and critical examination of the performance of the French army during the entire war. Moreover, the warped perception fed into an emotional response towards the apparently differing fates of the ordinary British and French soldier, eliciting unwarranted praise for a French army which proved able to deflect claims that its performance in the Crimea was less than satisfactory. The outrage at the conditions suffered by the British army and the apparent success of the old enemy, the French, descended into vituperative and personal attacks which were easily refuted. Ultimately, the sense of outrage and resulting demands for reform were defused by the establishment of the Roebuck Committee, losing all momentum in the process and ensuring that they would have little long-term effect on British army reform.

¹⁰⁶ Sweetman, *War and Administration*, pp. 128–32; Peter Burroughs, ‘An Unreformed Army?’, in *Oxford History of the British Army*, ed. by David G. Chandler and Ian Beckett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 184–86.