

ALMA, INKERMAN, AND SEVASTOPOL

The Crimean War lasted from 1854 to 1856. It was a useless war fought between Britain, France and Turkey as Allies, against Russia. Its causes have long been forgotten as well as its results. All that remains is the record of the gallant men who fought there.

The first landing was made in Bulgaria where cholera was the only enemy met. The scene now changed to the Crimea, the strange peninsula, which juts out from the South of Russia into the Black Sea.

On 14th September 1854 the British landed in the Crimea. Bad weather was at once met with, which laid the seeds of fresh cholera. On the 20th September the Russians were seen for the first time in force posted on the heights on the other side of the River Alma. The Alma was crossed and the heights stormed, the Russians retiring towards Sevastopol. The 41st on this day were not engaged very heavily.

After this victory the Army marched round Sevastopol and took up its position on the high ground facing the eastern face of the fortress. On this high ground all the future fighting was to take place.

The Russians made no movement until 26th October, when the well-known battle of Balaclava was fought. On the same day took place an action known as 'Little Inkerman,' in which the 41st was engaged and in which Sergeant Ambrose Madden was awarded the first Victoria Cross for the 41st Foot.

On 5th November the Russians made a determined effort to drive the British from the high ground on the right of the Allied Line (the French were on the left nearest the sea). The Battle of Inkerman, 'the Soldiers' Battle,' opened shrouded in mist with the advance of strong Russian columns to the front and up the slopes to the right. With the mist everywhere there could be no direction. Regiments fought where they stood against the grey masses of the Russians, which came time after time surging through the mist. It was hand to hand fighting of the fiercest sort, but the stubbornness of the British and the hard hitting of their Minie rifles won in the end. The masses of the Russians were forced to retire down the slopes they had so gallantly attacked.

During this day many acts of bravery were done. Captain Hugh Rowlands of the 41st, was awarded the Victoria Cross for gallantry on picquet when the Russian attack started and for rescuing the Commanding Officer of the 47th Foot. The Colours were the scene of a fierce struggle. The officer carrying the Regimental Colour was shot dead. A Russian seized one end of the pole and Sergeant-Major Ford the other. A tug-of-war started, but the Sergeant-Major bayoneted the Russian, and saved the Colour. For this act he received the Distinguished Conduct Medal. This episode is commemorated by the silver centrepiece in the Officers' Mess. Three drums captured that day from the 41st Russian Regiment, and now in the Regimental Museum, attest the individual nature of the fighting.

The siege of Sevastopol now started. The winter of 1854/55 was a terrible one on that cold and bleak upland. Proper food and clothing were lacking, whilst disease stalked through the wretched camp, which was either one frozen mass or else a sea of mud. Not until the Great War were such conditions to be met again, but even in this there were no such privations as were suffered by those gallant 'scarecrows' in that Crimean winter.

With spring came hope, reinforcements, and proper supplies. Still the siege went on with constant attack and counter-attack in the trenches. The end came in September. A gallant attempt was made to storm a strong earthwork known as the Redan, on the 8th September. In this the 41st took part and suffered heavily. The Commanding Officer was killed at the head of his men, and of these 162 out of 300 had fallen. The next day the Russians abandoned the remains of Sevastopol. The war was not finished but dragged on into the next year, but there was little activity, both sides being tired of it.

This was the last time in which the 41st was to fight under its old number, though the 69th, when in Canada in 1870, did so in the small Fenian Raid of that year. In 1881 they became the 1st and 2nd Battalions The Welsh Regiment.