

# STORMING OF SEBASTOPOL

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On 9 September Sebastopol was in flames! The fleet, the object of so much diplomatic controversy, and of so many bloody struggles, had disappeared in the deep! One more great act of carnage was added to the tremendous but glorious tragedy, of which the whole world, from the most civilized nations down to the most barbarous hordes of the East, was the anxious and excited audience.

Amid shouts of victory and cries of despair—in frantic rejoicing and passionate sorrow—a pall of black smoke, streaked by the fiery flashings of exploding fortresses, descended upon the stage, on which had been depicted so many varied traits of human misery and of human greatness, such high endurance and calm courage, such littleness and weakness.

A dull, strange silence, broken at distant intervals by the crash of citadels and palaces as they were blown into dust, succeeded to the incessant dialogue of the cannon which had spoken so loudly and so angrily throughout an entire year. Tired armies, separated from each other by a sea of fires, rested on their arms, and gazed with varied emotions on all that remained of the object of their conflict.

The last and decisive cannonade had been commenced on the morning of Wednesday, September 5, by the French; it was continued with great vigor and effect, and was followed at night by a devastating bombardment, in which all the allied batteries joined. On the morning of the 6<sup>th</sup> the English and French together opened the cannonade, beneath which the Russian batteries were almost broken to pieces, and to which they could not answer. In the evening the bombardment was renewed, and kept up all night; a fire appeared behind the Redan, and the enemy seemed, by their constant signaling, to be in much uneasiness. On the 7<sup>th</sup> the cannonade was continued in salvos, as before, and it was remarked that the town began to present, in a most unmistakable manner, traces of the terrible effects of the nightly bombardment. Nearly every house within range was split or in ruins. The bridge between the north and south side was much crowded all day with men and carts passing to and fro, and large convoys were seen leaving the town.

In the middle of the day there was a council of the allied generals, and at two o'clock it became generally known that the allies would assault the place at noon on the 8<sup>th</sup>, after a vigorous cannonade and bombardment. The hour was well selected, as it had been ascertained that the Russians were accustomed to indulge in a siesta about that time.

The weather changed suddenly on the 7<sup>th</sup> September, and on the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup> it became bitterly cold. A biting wind right from the north side of Sebastopol blew intolerable clouds of harsh dust into our faces. The sun was obscured, and the sky became of a leaden, wintry gray.

The French were reinforced by five thousand Sardinians, who marched up from the Tchernaya. It was arranged that the French should attack the Malakoff at noon, and, as soon as their attack succeeded, we were to assault the Redan. At five minutes before twelve o'clock, the French, like a swarm of bees, issued forth from their trenches close to the Malakoff, scrambled up its face, and were through the embrasures in the twinkling of an eye. They crossed the seven meters of ground which separated them from the enemy at a few bounds; they drifted as lightly and quickly as autumn leaves before the wind, battalion after battalion, into the embrasures, and in a minute or two after the head of their column issued from the ditch the tricolor was floating over the Korniloff Bastion. The musketry was very feeble at first,—indeed, our allies took the Russians by surprise, and very few of the latter were in the Malakoff; but they soon recovered themselves, and from twelve o'clock till past seven in the evening the French had to meet and repulse the repeated attempts of the enemy to regain the work, when, weary of the fearful slaughter of his men, who lay in thousands over the exterior of the works, and despairing of success, the Muscovite general withdrew his exhausted legions, and prepared, with admirable skill, to evacuate the place.

As the alarm of the English assault on the Redan circulated, the enemy came rushing up from the barracks in the rear of the Redan, increasing the force and intensity of their fire, while our soldiers dropped fast. The Russians were encouraged to maintain their ground by the immobility of our soldiers and the weakness of a fusillade, from the effects of which the enemy were well protected. In vain the officers, by voice and act, by example and daring valor, tried to urge our soldiers on to clear the works. The men, most of whom belonged to regiments which had suffered in the trenches and were acquainted with the traditions of June 18, had an impression that the Redan was extensively mined, and that if they advanced they would all be blown up; yet, to their honor be it recorded, many of them acted a

became the men of Alma and Inkermann, and, rushing confusedly to the front, were swept down by the enemy's fire.

Every moment our men were diminishing in numbers, while the Russians were arriving in swarms from the town, and rushing down from the Malakoff, which had been occupied by the French. The struggle that ensued was short, desperate, and bloody. Our soldiers, taken at every disadvantage, met the enemy with the bayonet too, and isolated combats occurred, in which the brave fellows who stood their ground had to defend themselves against three or four adversaries at once. In this mêlée the officers, armed only with their swords, had but little chance; nor had those who carried pistols much opportunity of using them in such a close and sudden contest. They fell like heroes, and many a gallant soldier with them. The bodies of English and Russians inside the Redan, locked in an embrace which death could not relax, but had rather cemented all the closer, were found next day as evidences of the terrible animosity of the struggle.

The scene in the ditch was appalling, although some of the officers have assured me that they and the men were laughing at the precipitation with which many brave and gallant fellows did not hesitate to plunge headlong upon the mass of bayonets, muskets, and sprawling soldiers,—the ladders were all knocked down or broken, so that it was difficult for the men to scale the other side, and the dead, the dying, the wounded, and the uninjured were all lying in piles together....

James Harvey Robinson and Charles A. Beard, *Readings in Modern European History*, (New York: 1909), II:391–394.